
JOHN: THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

DISCIPLES ABIDE AND REJOICE IN CHRIST

A message presented by Pastor Marc Minter
to First Baptist Church of Diana, TX on July 22, 2018

INTRODUCTION

The Christian life is a paradoxical combination of simultaneous striving and resting. Anyone who has ever set out to live in light of Christ's commands can testify to this enigmatic and exhausting and enlivening experience. While the Bible never explains the mechanics of this relationship, the Bible commonly implores sinners everywhere to rest in the joy-filled promises of God in Christ and to strive to abide in this marvelous Savior. In this message, we shall consider the command, the warning, and the promise of Christ in John 15:1-11.

MESSAGE MADE SIMPLE

“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples... These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (Jn. 15:8, 11).

The Christian life is a paradoxical combination of simultaneous striving and resting. Anyone who has ever set out to live in light of Christ's commands can testify to this enigmatic and exhausting and enlivening experience. On the one hand, the Christian hears the warnings and calls to strive. We are to strive for holiness, for godliness, and for righteousness. In all these, we hear the ultimate call to abide or remain steadfastly in Christ.

On the other hand, the Christian hears the promises of God, in which the Christian may rest. God promises to give life, adopt as sons, lavishly bless all those from among the world. In all these, we hear the ultimate promise that God graciously unites believing sinners to Christ.

While the Bible never explains the mechanics of this relationship, the Bible commonly implores sinners everywhere to rest in the joy-filled promises of God in Christ and to strive to abide in this marvelous Savior. For, God the Father glorifies Himself in the fruit-bearing, in the joy-possessing, and in the persevering of true disciples.

JOHN 15:1-11 (ESV)

1 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.

2 Every branch **in me** that does not bear fruit **he takes away**, and every branch that does bear fruit **he prunes, that it may bear** more fruit.

3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.

5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

6 If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. 7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

8 **By this my Father is glorified**, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.

11 These things I have spoken to you, **that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.**

THE POINT I’M AIMING AT TODAY

God intends divine rewards and indestructible joy for all those in Christ, but only for those who abide, showing their real union with Christ.

MESSAGE OUTLINE

(1) THE METAPHOR (v1-2)

(2) DISCIPLES ABIDE AND BEAR FRUIT (3-6)

(3) DISCIPLES HAVE A GLORIOUS VINEDRESSER (v7-8)

(4) DISCIPLES SHARE IN CHRIST'S LOVE AND JOY (v9-11)

(5) APPLICATION

MESSAGE

(1) THE METAPHOR (v1-2)

1 **"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.** 2 Every branch **in me** that does not bear fruit **he takes away**, and every branch that does bear fruit **he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.**

- ***The Metaphor (speed through point 1)***
 - **Jesus (God the Son) is the Vine**
 - The uniting bond
 - For the branches, **"Christ is all, and in all"** (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11).
 - Christ is the one **"in whom"** the Father has **"chosen," "adopted,"** and **"blessed"** the branches (Eph. 1:4-6).
 - Christ is **"head"** of the **"whole body"** of branches, which are **"joined and held together"** in Christ (Eph. 4:15-16).
 - The source of life, growth, and nourishment
 - Jesus is **"the bread of life"** upon whom the branches eat and never **"hunger,"** drink and **"never thirst"** (Jn. 6:35).
 - Jesus is the one **"in whom"** the branches are **"joined"** and **"grow"** and **"are built together into a dwelling place for God by [His] Spirit"** (Eph. 2:21-22).

- **Christians** (disciples – Jesus-followers – saved-people) **are the branches**
 - “I am the vine; **you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit**” (v5).
 - Branches “**believe in Christ**” (Gal. 2:16).
 - Branches are “**justified by faith in Christ**” (Gal. 2:16).
 - Branches receive “**the blessing**” of God “**in Christ**” (Gal. 3:14; Eph. 1:3).
 - Branches are adopted “**sons of God**” “**in Christ**” (Gal. 3:26).

- **God the Father is the Vinedresser**
 - Choosing the size and shape of the vineyard (Eph. 1:4)
 - Pruning branches
 - “**every branch that does bear fruit he prunes**” (v2).
 - “**rooting**” the branches and “**building them up**” in Christ, who is the vine (Col. 2:7).
 - “**filling**” the branches with “**life**” and “**triumphal**” victory, as well as “**putting off**” what is fleshly and worldly in the branches (Col. 2:9-15).
 - “**working all things together for the [ultimate] good**” of the branches, which is their “**Christ-likeness**” and “**glorification**” (Rom. 8:28-30).
 - Cutting away dead branches
 - “**Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away**” (v2)
 - “**If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned**” (v6)

- **Can a live branch become dead and be cut away?**
 1. Metaphors are **not** theologically **precise** and **comprehensive**
 2. Metaphors are **helpful pictures** of a precise theological truth or truths
 - **Theological truths in view here:**
 1. **Union with Christ** is what it means to be a Christian
 - Friends, do you **imagine Christianity** to be some kind of **approach to life** that **fits comfortably** within the **normal American experience**?
 - Or do you understand that Christianity is a radical reorientation of all that you are?
 2. **God the Father brings** people into union with Christ, He **keeps** them there, and He **prunes** them for His glory and their joy.
 - Friends, do you **view God** as something like an **employee**?
 - Do you **expect** God to **await** your **instructions**, to add or adjust His **task-list** at your request, or to generally **work according to your schedule**?
 3. **Some people** will **think** themselves to be branches, some will **claim** to be branches, some will even **seem to be** branches, but these **fruitless branches will not abide** or stay or remain or **persevere**.
 - Friends, **do you have a category** for **unbelieving** or **non-practicing** or **unrepentant** or **non-growing** “Christians”?

Summary: So, this metaphor is both a warning and a promise, accompanied by a command...

Segue: **But, where is the command, the warning, and the promise?**

(2) DISCIPLES ABIDE AND BEAR FRUIT (3-6)

3 **Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.** 4 **Abide in me,** and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.

5 I am the vine; you are the branches. **Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.** 6 If anyone does **not abide** in me he is **thrown away** like a branch and **withers**; and the branches are **gathered**, thrown into the fire, and **burned**.

- **The Command**

- “Abide in me” (v4)... “Already you are clean because of the word” (v3)
 - The **imperative springs from the indicative**, it does not contradict it
 - Indicative: “Already you are clean” (v3)
 - Imperative: “Abide in me” (v4)
 - The **blessings of salvation... the divine rewards God intends to give** (i.e. fruit-bearing), are **only for those who abide**.
 - God has “**reconciled**” sinners to Himself through Christ’s death, and He will “**present [them] holy and blameless**” before the throne of God, “**if indeed [they] continue in the faith, stable and steadfast...**” (Col. 1:22-23).
 - Note the indicative and the imperative again.
 - God reconciled, and He will present them holy and blameless...
 - AND they must continue in the faith.
 - Friends, **which of these** are you **overemphasizing** right now?
 - **Are you lazy** in your active **abiding** because you think that the **prayer** you prayed... or the **baptism** you experienced... or the **church membership** you claim... or the **feeling** you have is **enough to keep you in Christ?**

- Or **are you legalistically** counting the ways in which **your abiding is better** than someone else's, and thereby arrogantly **presuming** that your **effort to abide** is what **keeps you joined to Christ?**
 - Or maybe you feel a **little of both** of these things at the moment.
- **Before we move away from the command...**
 - **Abiding and Cleansing** (i.e. pruning) are inextricably tied to Christ's word
 - "Already you are clean **because of the word** that I have spoken to you" (v3)
 - It is the word of Christ which cleans branches and grafts them into Christ as the Vine.
 - "If you **keep my commandments (i.e. my word)**, you will **abide in my love**" (v10)
 - It is the word of Christ which prunes branches and cultivates an abiding attachment to Christ as Vine.
 - Friends, **do you really believe** that **repeated** and **consistent exposure to God's word** is what will cause you to **abide** in Christ?
 - **If you do**, the what will the **repeated** and **consistent neglect of God's word** do in your life?
 - If God's word is what brings about real **love**, indestructible **joy**, unexplainable **peace**, and **the like**, then **who** in their right mind **would neglect** the regular **reading** and **contemplation** and **discussion** of it?

- **The Warning**

- “Whoever abides in me and I in him, **he it is that bears much fruit**” (v5)... “If anyone **does not abide** in me he is **thrown away... and burned**” (v6)
 - **The simple truth is:** Those that do not abide will not be saved.
 - **John comforted and warned** early Christians with the same words Jesus is using here. John said that some professing Christians “**went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us**” (1 Jn. 2:19).¹
 - So, how do we know if someone is “abiding” or “continuing”?
 - Is this about church attendance or membership?
 - Is this about claiming to believe in Jesus?

- **Fruit is evidence of Abiding**

- “As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it **abides in the vine**, neither can you, unless you **abide in me... Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing**” (v4-5)
 - **God intends divine rewards... (i.e. spiritual fruit) for all those in Christ, but only for those who abide...**
 - Fruit-bearing is A GOAL, but not THE ULTIMATE GOAL.
 - There is too much to say here...
 - Suffice it to say that **we ought not hear this command and warning**, and then assume that **Christ intends us to work harder to be better.**
 - **NO! Fruit-production is the supernatural effect of abiding in Christ.**

¹ The author of Hebrews warned his readers about those who had shared in so many of the blessings of Christian fellowship and life, but later “fell away.” He said, “**land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned**” (Heb. 6:7–8).

- Friends, do you trust that **God is at work** in you to bring about spiritual maturity... godliness... holiness... and things like these?
 - Do you **expect to see growth** in your life **over time**?
 - Do you **praise God** for any growth you've seen now?
 - Abide in Christ, and you will bear fruit!

- **BUT, the other side of this coin is where the warning is.**

- Friends, what do you do with **fruitless** (i.e. **non-practicing** or **unrepentant** or **non-growing**) and **non-abiding** "Christians"?
 - When you see your **friends** or **family members** or **neighbors** who **claim** to be Christians living **spiritually fruitless** lives, does it ever **occur** to you that **they may not be saved**?

 - Or what about those **friends** or **family members** or **neighbors** who **prayed a prayer** and got **baptized** and maybe even still have their names on a **church membership roster**, but they are **living their lives** in **pursuit of everything but Jesus** today?

 - **If true Christians** (those branches abiding in the Vine) **always bear fruit** (as Jesus clearly says here), **and fruitless branches** (those who merely profess to be Christians) **are cut away**, then **which is more loving**?
 - **Affirming everyone** who claims Christianity?
 - OR **warning fruitless Christians** that they may not actually be what they **claim or think** they are?
 - "Every branch **in me** that does not bear fruit **he [the Father] takes away**" (v2)

Summary: Christians are responsible to abide or persevere, and some will prove themselves to be false-branches or false-Christians...

Segue: **So, what is the promise, and how will it comfort and secure us?**

(3) DISCIPLES HAVE A GLORIOUS VINEDRESSER (V7-8)

7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, **ask whatever you wish**, and it will be done for you. 8 **By this my Father is glorified**, that you bear much fruit and **so prove to be my disciples**.

- ***THERE IS A VINEDRESSER who is glorifying Himself in fruit-bearing disciples!***
 - If you are a Christian (born-again, converted, spiritually alive), then God has made it His goal to shape you into a fruit-bearing branch!
 - The Father is glorified in your fruit-bearing.
 - That is, you glorify God by growing and producing fruit.
 - AND, God is bringing glory to His own name by pruning you, so that you bear more fruit.
 - Friends, don't you know that this is what the gospel calls sinners into?
 - Don't you know that **this is why the good news part** of the gospel **assumes** that sinners are wrecked and malfunctioning?
 - If **you are fulfilled** by your own pursuits... if **you are perfectly capable** of keeping it all together... if **you are winning** at this game of life and **have no need** of a vinedresser, then the gospel is **not for you!**
 - Ah, but if you realize that all worldly pursuits still **leave you hungry and thirsty**... if you don't have it all together... if you feel like the game of life has **impossible odds**... then the **gospel of Christ** offers you **hope!**
 - The **God of all creation** has set His **gracious attention** upon all those who love and trust and follow Jesus.
 - He has **made it His mission** that **Christ's disciples bear much fruit!**

- **Christ promises the Father's pruning and directs us to ask for it.**
 - “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, **ask whatever you wish**, and it will be done for you” (v7)
 - Jesus directs His disciples (Christians) to ask for things in keeping with fruit-bearing.
 - **How is it that you will bear more fruit?**
 - “every branch that does bear fruit **he [the Father] prunes, that it may bear more fruit**” (v2)
 - Ok, so **what is this “pruning” or cleaning or shaping work?**
 - It is the **cutting away** of things like **pride**, self-sufficiency, bitterness, hostility, **cynicism**, laziness, **prejudice**, anger, jealousy, **resentment**, the fear of man, and **the lack of fear for God**.
 - Oh, **how helpless we are to remove** these sinful patterns on our own!
 - “apart from [Christ] you can do nothing” (v5)
 - Oh, **how painfully these** deep-seated sinful patterns are removed from us!
 - Friends, have you ever **prayed for patience** and then experienced the most stressful week of your life?
 - Do you think your **lack of patience** is only a matter of **will-power** or **habit**?
 - Haven't you figured it out yet?!
 - Apart from Christ, **you are a SINNER!**
 - Sin is **not just what you do**, it's **who you are**... it's what **you love**... it's what you **eat, sleep, and breath!**

Summary: Christ directs us to ask the Father for His fruit-producing pruning...

Segue: **But, how shall we endure such a painful cutting away of so much of ourselves?**

(4) DISCIPLES SHARE IN CHRIST'S LOVE AND JOY (v9-11)

9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. **Abide in my love.** 10 **If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love,** just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

11 These things I have spoken to you, **that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.**

- ***Abiding disciples share in Christ's own love***
 - Jesus shares the love He has with the Father!
- ***Abiding disciples share in Christ's own joy***
 - Jesus shares His own joy with those who abide in Him!
 - **“let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross...”** (Heb. 12:1-2).
 - I think Jesus' logical argument in this passage goes like this:
 - Don't you worry. God the Father is producing a fruit-filled vine that will be glorious. Jesus is the core of this vine, and anyone who loves and follows Jesus is part of it too. Sometimes there will be people who pretend to be part of the vine, and sometimes people will mistakenly think they are part of the vine. When those people prove to be false and fall away, let it serve as a warning to you, but do not fear. This vine will be glorious, and everyone who loves and trusts Jesus will enjoy the full blessings of sharing in this vine. You can count on it.

Main point:

God intends divine rewards and indestructible joy for all those in Christ, but only for those who abide, showing their real union with Christ.

(5) APPLICATION

1. *Are you attached to the Vine?*

- a. This is the most important question you'll ask yourself today.
- b. If you think you are attached to the vine, how do you know?
 - i. Well, are you bearing fruit?
 - ii. Are you growing in spiritual maturity?
 - iii. Are you noticing an upward pattern in your desire to read the Bible, your longing for personal holiness, and your concern for fellow Christians?
- c. If you think you are not attached to the vine, then how is it that you ever expect to bear fruit like this?
 - i. I mean, you may not think you need to read the Bible more to be a better person... but how do you expect to be the man or woman you know you should be?
 - ii. Do you really think that your problem is that you just need the right 3-step-plan... or a better motivator... or a new experience?

2. *How have you been receiving the Father's pruning shears?*

- a. Oh, now this might be a comfort and a tough one...
- b. I am asking you to consider where God might be doing the painful work in you of cutting away your old, sinful, worldly, disgusting self.
 - i. If you feel the pain of the Father's pruning shears, then we may all praise God for that today!
 - ii. It means you are in the Vine, and God is shaping you to be the fruit-producing branch He intends you to be.
- c. I am also asking you to consider how you think and speak about God's painful pruning work in you.
 - i. When life is difficult, stressful, and painful, do assume that God is not behind such things?

- ii. What if God is painfully cutting away your self-reliance?
 - iii. What if God is painfully cutting away your love for this world?
 - iv. What if God is painfully cutting away your ability to continue in that sin you've been hiding by shining a light upon it for all to see?
- d. Do you see the Father's pruning shears at work in your life?
 - e. Do you ask that He graciously cut away more?

3. How are you striving to abide in Christ?

- a. For the sake of your soul, how are you really, practically, and actively obeying the clear command of Christ in this passage?
 - i. "Abide in Me... that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full"

Main point:

God intends divine rewards and indestructible joy for all those in Christ, but only for those who abide, showing their real union with Christ.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

John 15:1-6 and the Security of the Believer by Sam Storms

<http://www.samstorms.com/all-articles/post/john-15:1-6-and-the-security-of-the-believer>

What Does it mean to Abide in Christ? by Sinclair Ferguson

<https://www.ligonier.org/blog/what-does-it-mean-abide-christ/>

The Abiding Life by Jim Elliff

<https://www.cwtoday.org/1993/04/the-abiding-life/>

Abiding in Christ by Bob Deffinbaugh

<https://bible.org/seriespage/33-abiding-christ-john-15>

We Can Do Nothing by John Piper

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/we-can-do-nothing>

Glorifying God by Bearing Fruit in Union with Christ by John Piper

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/glorifying-god-by-bearing-fruit-in-union-with-christ>

If My Words Abide in You by John Piper

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/if-my-words-abide-in-you>