

The Benefits of Abiding in Christ, Part 3

Scripture: John 15:4–11

Code: 43-82

I have been really startled, I think, to see a strange paradox in our present time. Christianity is under assault; I think we all know that. Christians are being persecuted; the Bible is being marginalized, put out of the public square.

But at the same time that the church is being marginalized, the Bible being marginalized, Christians being persecuted, it is interesting that it's become popular among worldly and sinful people to claim to be Christians. It just amazes me – and even to claim to be evangelicals: athletes, actors, politicians, TV personalities, reality figures. All kinds of people that are very public claim to be Christians while their lives and conduct bear no resemblance to what is Christian. They seem to have little regard for God or Christ in terms of a dominating role in their lives, little regard for the Bible in terms of obeying its commands and living under its principles, and yet it's popular to say you're a follower of Jesus Christ.

I was reading last week an article by a man who said he was the pastor of Bruce Jenner, and so he wrote an article titled “I

went to church with Bruce Jenner; here's what he taught me about Jesus.” There are plenty of celebrity pseudo-pastors to accommodate the people who falsely claim to be Christians, especially prominent people. It's a very strange thing. It is actually dangerous to be a true Christian, but cool to be a false one. That thought takes us to our text in John 15.

John 15 is, of course, the teaching of the Lord Jesus. These are the very words of our Lord. And, of course, His words dominate chapters 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17. Those are all words from our Lord on Thursday night of Passion Week, the night before His crucifixion, His last night in the upper room, celebrating the Passover with His disciples. And during that time, He exposed Judas as the betrayer, and it says in chapter 13, verse 30, that Judas “went out immediately.” So from that point in chapter 13, verse 30 on, He's talking to the remaining eleven disciples who did not leave. That's in His mind on that final, final night.

The contrast between Judas – the false follower, the false disciple, the false apostle, the false Christian, if you will – and the eleven who were genuine: our Lord brings that distinction between Judas and the others into very bold and clear perspective in the opening 11 verses of chapter 15. Let me remind you of them by reading them.

He says, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.

“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.

“Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 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. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.”

Now the questions that are answered in this text are these: “What is the nature of true Christianity?” “What marks a true disciple?” “How do we distinguish true Christians from false Christians?” “How are we to understand and explain our actual relationship to God through Jesus Christ?” These are foundational questions, foundational, the most foundational questions of all questions.

There are, obviously, many who say they believe in Jesus, even call Him Lord, even go to church. They might like the Bible. But Jesus warned about superficial faith. In Matthew 7, He said, “Many will say to Me in the judgment day, ‘Lord, Lord, we did this and that in Your name,’ and I will say to them, ‘Depart from Me, I never knew you.’”

In chapter 13, He said there are people who give some sort of signal that there’s real life, but they never bear fruit because of the love of riches, or the cares of the world, or the persecution that being a Christian brings. They wither and die. Jesus said there are going to be false Christians growing alongside true Christians in that same 13th chapter of Matthew. They will not be able to be distinguished until the judgment when the angels make the separation.

Jesus pushed back people who came ostensibly to believe and follow Him. He did it in John 2, He did it in John 6, He did it in John 8, He did it again in John 12 as you remember. He did it with the rich young ruler who came asking the question: “What do I do to receive eternal life?” and the man went away sorrowful rather than saved. And when people wanted to follow Him like disciples, He said things to them like, “Unless you’re willing to leave father and mother, and hate mother and father, and hate your own life, and give up everything you have, and take up your cross and follow Me, you can’t be My disciple.”

He told people to count the cost and understand what they were really signing up for. And then He actually told His own disciples that it’s difficult to become a true follower. It’s difficult because it’s the end of you: “Deny yourself.” And it could cost you your life: “Take up your cross.” And it’s a life of obedience: “Follow Me.” But nonetheless, there were always, and still are, people who attach to Jesus in some superficial way.

Judas is their archetype. He’s sort of the principal figure, the principal model or example of a false believer. No one since then could be as close to Jesus as he was since He’s not here anymore. For three years, he followed Christ. And then, as I said from chapter 13, verse 30, he went away, he went out, and he went out to perpetrate the most heinous crime in human history, the betrayal of the Son of God, leading to his execution.

As we come to chapter 15, the Lord has been saying many things that night to His disciples, many things since Judas left, many wonderful promises He has given to them and to us, many warnings. He has told them about what will come. He has made pledges to them. He has described what they should expect of hostility and persecution in the future – and that goes for all of us after them. He said a lot. But here in chapter 15, we have this definitive statement about distinguishing a Judas branch from a true branch, a false disciple from a true disciple, a false Christian from a true Christian. He does it with this analogy of a vine and branches.

God is the farmer, God is the vinedresser. Christ is the vine, the true vine. It is Christ who is obviously working in His incarnation under the leadership and the care of the Father. He says that through His whole ministry. He submitted to the Father in everything He did. The Father is the one caring for the vine. There are two kinds of branches. There are fruitful branches, true believers like the eleven who remained; and fruitless branches, like Judas who left.

Now that Judas is gone, our Lord speaks in verse 4 – and that's where we want to pick it up – to the remaining eleven, and to all others who are still claiming to be followers of Christ. "Abide in Me," that's the command. The word is "remain, stay." "Don't do what Judas did. Don't leave. Don't go out. Stay. Remain." This is a simple command, but it really dominates the rest of this text. The word "abide" is used ten times: "Stay. Stay."

I would simply echo that to you, if you have made a profession of faith in Christ, if you have attached to Christ at least from the human perspective from what we can see and experience, don't leave. Stay. Stay. Give evidence that your faith is real. Stay. If you leave, you demonstrate that you are a fruitless branch, never had eternal life, and will be cut off, dried up, and burned.

I keep reminding you of 1 John 2: "They went out from us because were not of us. If they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out from us that it might be made manifest they never were of us." But to the one who abides, our Lord makes incredible promises – and that's what we've been looking at.

Go back to verse 4. The first promise is salvation, eternal life. That is contained in His words, "I in you." "Abide in Me – remain, stay – and I in you." That is how you define what it means to be a Christian. It is to be indwelt by God, indwelt by God. Down in verse 5, He says the same thing: "He who abides in Me and I in him."

Back in chapter 14, He made promises that are equally stunning. Chapter 14, verse 16: "I will ask the Father, He'll give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it doesn't see Him or know Him. But you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you, in you." There, we are promised that the Holy Spirit will be in us as true believers. Incredible truth.

Down in verse 20: "In that day you will know that I am in My Father and you in Me, and I in you." Not only the Spirit, but the Son. And down in verse 23: "If anyone loves Me, he'll keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him." The Holy Spirit, the Son, and the Father, the triune God takes up residence in the life of a believer. That is what salvation is. That eternal life that we receive is the very presence of God. We become, as Peter says, "partakers of the divine nature."

So we remind you that when you describe yourself and say, "I'm a Christian," and somebody says, "What does that mean?" it is far more than that you believe certain things, or that you go certain places, or go through certain religious ceremonies. It means that the Trinity lives in you. God has taken up residence in you. You are His dwelling place. You are His temple.

John – you will remember this – said the same thing in His first epistle, 1 John 4: "If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. We have seen and testify the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. We have come to know and believe the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."

You have it again: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, all abiding in the believer. That's salvation. You're a new creation because you became a partaker of the divine nature. You are presently the possessor of the very life of God, which is as eternal as God is. You will never die; you will only go into eternal glory.

Another way to understand that is your salvation was a bigger change than your resurrection because you were given the divine nature; you're only awaiting the fullness of its expression. That's salvation. So the first thing that comes to one who abides is salvation.

The second thing is righteousness, or sanctification, if you will – sanctification. Verse 4 again: "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing." Using the agricultural metaphor: a branch lying on the ground isn't going to bear any fruit because the fruit comes up from the root through the vine and extends out the branches. If you are connected, however, you will bear fruit, you will bear fruit. "You will bear –" according to verse 5, "much fruit."

What is this? We talked about it last time. It is basically righteousness, righteousness, which is another way to speak of sanctification. Righteousness is being separated from sin, and that's what sanctification is. So if you are a true believer, then God has taken up residence in you. That presence of God, that indwelling, divine nature, will be manifest by its own characteristics, and your life will give a demonstration of righteousness. That's sanctification.

Philippians 1:11 speaks of the "fruit of righteousness." Romans 6:22 speaks of the "fruit of holiness." Romans 7:4, "fruit unto God." James 3:17, "good fruit." Second Corinthians 9:10, "righteousness." Colossians 1:10, the "fruit of every good work." Ephesians 5:9, "all godliness, righteousness, and truth," the fruit of righteousness, godliness, truth. Hebrews 12:11, the "peaceable fruit of righteousness."

In other words, if you are connected to the vine, the life of God, which is pure and holy, will manifest itself through you. You will be characterized by righteousness: by righteousness thoughts, righteous words, and righteous deeds – not perfect, because that divine nature is still incarcerated in unredeemed human flesh, and not until you get rid of this sinful body will the expression be perfect. But nonetheless, it's there.

And what is this righteous fruit? Well, we went over it last time: repentance for sin – a true repentance and a life-long repentance, that righteous fruit. John the Baptist said that. Holy attitudes. The fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control. Praise and worship, the fruit of our lips, giving praise to God. Giving to people's need - Philippians 4, Romans 15 – that's fruit; communication of truth that blesses others, that's fruit – 1 Corinthians 14; pure conduct – Philippians 1, Colossians 1; and then finally we said when you bring someone to the knowledge of Christ through the gospel, that is fruit – Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 16: Any righteous deed that comes as a result of a righteous nature and a righteous attitude. So what do you receive if you stay? Salvation, sanctification. Salvation, sanctification, righteousness.

Now let me take you to the third – and I'll give you six before we're done this morning, a total of six. Number Three: answered prayer, answered prayer. Look at verse 7: "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." That is an astounding promise, is it not? "Ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you, if you abide in Me." There are two qualifiers here. Qualifier Number One: "If you abide in Me," if you are a true believer, if you are a true branch, if you have a permanent union with Jesus Christ in which His life is coming through you.

Let me look at it on the other side. If you're not a true branch, you are on your own, my friend, you are on your own. God guarantees no answer to your prayers, no involvement in your life. You have no promises; you have no assurances. You can make no claims on Him; He has no obligation to you. God never promises to answer the prayer of a nonbeliever, or a false believer. He's under no obligation to do that. If you are a Judas branch, you have no claim on Him. I think it's important to remind you of that because there are lots of "prayers" floating around in the air from people who pray to God without any true relationship to Him and somehow expect an answer. God can, if He chooses of course, answer a prayer for His own purposes, but He has no obligation.

I think about that whenever there's some kind of national day of prayer or when I hear people sort of blithely say, "We're praying for you," and I want to ask, "To whom? And on the basis of what, and why?" God is under no obligation to the children of Satan to answer their prayers, except one prayer: repentance and faith in Christ, and a cry for salvation. Any other prayer you're on your own.

Well, you're on your own, but you're not really on your own because you're of your father, the devil. You're in the kingdom of darkness, not the kingdom of light. You're under the power of the prince of the air who works in the children of disobedience to affect his own will. You're part of the kingdom from which believers are delivered. So you're not on your own. You have Satan and his demons moving in your kingdom and accomplishing their purposes. "But if – " on the other hand, verse 7 " – you abide in Me, if you're a remaining branch, possessor of true eternal life, if you're abiding in Me, everything changes. You can ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you."

Now that sounds like a carte blanche. Some people think it should be, that whatever people decide they want, God should have to deliver as if He's some genie who jumps out of a bottle when they rub it and gives them whatever they want. But there's a second condition. The first condition: "If you abide in Me – " second condition, verse 7 " – and My words abide in you, and My words abide in you."

Now, that's not talking about the red letters in your Bible; not talking about the actual things that

Jesus said. I don't like red letter Bibles for that very reason; it's all from God. But that is simply saying if the truth from God abides in you. Why does He say that? Because to be a believer, you have access to God. To be a believer, you have the promise your prayers will be answered. But also to know that your prayer is going to be answered, you have to know something about God. You have to pray within the framework of God's revelation.

So Jesus says that second condition is that – to borrow Paul's language in Colossians 3, "that the word of Christ dwells in you richly." You understand from Scripture who God is, what He desires. You understand who Christ is, what He desires. You understand who the Holy Spirit is and what He desires. Can you imagine without that condition, if God just said, "If you abide in Me, ask whatever you want and I'll do it." We would be running things.

If God was simply a genie who popped out of the little bottle and gave us everything we want, we would be all on a course to self-destruction. James says, "Look, here's the problem. Your prayers aren't answered because you ask to consume things on your own lusts." In other words, you're asking from your own perspective. You want what you want.

Look, there are people who call themselves Christians who believe that we can ask for anything and God is duty-bound to give it to us. No. If you're a believer, a true believer, you meet condition number one. But condition number two is that you pray within the framework of the words that have been revealed from God to you that tell you about God, and about His will and His way and His kingdom and His purpose.

Now, the disciples back in Matthew 6 said, "Lord, how should we pray?" and Jesus said, "Pray like this: 'Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your will be done and Your kingdom come,'" okay, then we'll get to me. All legitimate prayer starts with the recognition of God's name, that is what is consistent with His glorious person; God's will, what is consistent with His glorious purpose; and His kingdom, what is consistent with His glorious unfolding plan. Person, purpose, and plan. So I need to have the words of Scripture, the words of revelation, the words that tell me about God and Christ and the Holy Spirit, and the kingdom of heaven, and the will of God. I need to have those words abiding in me so that they control my requests.

Go back to chapter 14 for a minute. We looked at this months ago, verse 13: "Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it."

Does that mean if you just tack "in Jesus' name, amen" at the end, you get what you want? No. It's not some kind of a formula. "If you ask anything consistent with My name." What is My name? Lord Jesus Christ. Anything consistent with My sovereign lordship, anything consistent with My saving purpose, anything consistent with My messianic rule over My glorious kingdom. You're asking in the framework of the name of Christ, the name of God, the purposes of God.

Look at chapter 16 for a minute, verse 23. It's going to come up again on this same Thursday night in the upper room, or in the walk to the garden in this case. Verse 23: "In that day, you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything – " here comes the qualifier again " – in My name, He will give it to you. Until now, you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full."

Verse 26: “In that day, you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request the Father on your behalf; for the Father Himself loves you because you have loved Me.” In other words, “Whatever you ask in My name, consistent with My purpose and My glory and My kingdom, which is equal to the Father’s glory and His kingdom, the Father will do to put His glory on display. But it’s always in My name, in My name, in My name.” It’s repeated over and over again.

So, I remind you that this is an incredible, incredible promise from the Lord that whatever you ask consistent with His person, purpose, and plan, He will do. Your prayer should demonstrate, 2 Corinthians 10:5 that “every thought has been taken captive to the obedience of Christ.” You pray within the framework of divine purpose.

You might even say this: “Father, this I ask because this could be what You desire for Your glory, this could be what You desire for Your kingdom, this could be what You desire to exalt Your Son, this could be what You desire to show the power of Your Holy Spirit.” That’s the principle, always with a view to the divine name, the divine plan, the divine purpose, the divine person. This is what James calls “the prayer of a righteous man.”

And James says – 5:16, James 5:16, that prayer is effective. “The effective prayer of a righteous man,” because he prays out of 1 Corinthians 2:16, we have the mind of Christ. If you have a rich, loving, obedient relationship to the vine, and if the true life of God courses through your life, your desires will be His desires, your loves will be His loves, your longings will be His longings, and you will ask always in that framework. Your prayers will always be “glorify Yourself, advance Your name, advance Your kingdom, advance Your gospel.”

Now John understood this. He was there listening to this and he wrote in 1 John 3:22 these words: “Whatever we ask, we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commands us. The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him.” It’s all tied together: abiding, obeying, loving, praying.

Jude 20 has an interesting little phrase: “praying in the Spirit.” Some people think praying in the Spirit is falling over in a dead faint. You’ve seen it on television I’m sure. Praying in the Spirit is rolling your eyes back into your head and spouting some kind of gibberish. No. Praying in the Spirit.

What do you mean “praying in the Spirit”? How does the Spirit pray? Romans 8: “The Spirit prays according to the will of God. The Spirit prays according to the will of God. The Spirit knows the mind of the Father, the Father knows the mind of the Spirit, the Spirit prays consistently with the will of God, with the divine will in mind.” Praying in the Spirit is not some ecstatic experience in nonsense, it is praying specifically and particularly within the framework of the will and purpose and person of God as revealed in Scripture. Now when you pray like that, and when you pray from the vantage point that you not only know those things but you are an obedient believer, you have qualified to have your prayers answered. God will be faithful to answer your prayers. Now, there’s a lot to be said. More about that maybe a little later in our study of this section.

Let me give you a fourth blessing, a fourth blessing: “If you abide, the Lord promises you assurance, assurance.” Verse 8: “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My

disciples.” The hardworking vinedresser finds His glory in the fruitful vine. The hardworking vinedresser finds His glory in the fruitful vine.

I remember meeting a gentleman, a nearly 90-year-old gentleman who grows grapes up in the Central Valley and he wanted to show me his operation – one of the largest grape growers in California – and I thought he would take me to an office and show me whatever. I got up there, got in a pickup truck, bounced along through some ruts and ended up ankle-deep in dirt, walking down one row, after another, after another, while he reached in and pulled out the grapes. He showed me the fruit of his labor by showing me the grapes, and he explained to me every kind of grape. He found that if I wanted to know about him, I didn’t need to see his pickup truck and I didn’t need to see his office, I needed to see his fruit; and then I needed to eat it, which was an incredibly wonderful experience.

This is what the Father does. The Father is glorified when He goes down the rows of His children and when He sees the fruit. God’s glory is in the display of His own fruitfulness through us. God is glorified when we bear fruit. It’s like Matthew 5:16, “Let your light so shine before men.” It’s a different metaphor, same idea. “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and – ” do what? “ – glorify your Father who’s in heaven.” That glory goes to God.

It’s as simple as this: for a believer, for a true believer, you are not the explanation for your life, you’re not it. People may poke around to try to figure out why you are the way you are. There isn’t a human answer. There isn’t a human answer. There’s no human explanation for me being who I am. I am not the explanation of my life. God in me is the explanation of my life.

If there’s any love in me, it is the love of Christ shed abroad in my heart. Any transcendent love beyond human love, beyond normal love, is the love of Christ shed abroad in my heart. If there’s any joy in me, any unassailable joy, any joy that never is touched, any joy that transcends all earthly joys, it is the joy of Christ in me. If there’s any peace in me, any peace in the midst of horrendous issues, if there’s any tranquility in me that is inexplicable, it is the peace of Christ which passes understanding. If there’s any gentleness or meekness in me, if there’s any humility in me, it is the gentleness and meekness of Christ in me. If there’s any truth in me, it is the truth of Christ in me. Any wisdom in me, it is the wisdom of Christ in me. I am not the explanation for my life, He is.

Now, the benefit of this, incredible benefit, just an incredible benefit – back to that same verse, verse 8, “and so prove to be My disciples.” The benefit is I know I’m a believer. How do I know I’m a believer? How do I know that? Because I can’t explain my life. I can’t explain my love. I can’t explain my peace, my joy, my knowledge, my wisdom, my understanding, my usefulness. I can’t explain me humanly – can’t. I can’t. Something is going on in me that has no explanation on a human level. So I look at my life and I have assurance that I’m a true branch because I see all this fruit, all the fruit that we talked about last week.

Go to 2 Peter 1. Peter talks about virtue here. First of all in verse 4, 2 Peter 1:4, he says, “We have become partakers of the divine nature, escaping the corruption in the world by lust.” So we’ve been transformed. We’re out of the corrupt, into the incorruptible. We have become partakers of the divine nature. That’s God in us, the eternal life in us. And as a result of that, as a result of that, we have been delivered from the corruption in the world by lust.

Now that we're abiding, what do we do, just sit there? No, we get busy and deepen that abiding. How do we do that? "Apply all diligence – " verse 5 " – all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence; in your moral excellence, knowledge; in your knowledge, self-control; in your self-control, perseverance; in your perseverance, godliness; in your godliness, brotherly kindness; in your brotherly kindness, love."

What do we do? We cultivate that in us. And the result? If that happens, "if these qualities – " look at verse 8 " – are yours and are increasing – " more fruit, much fruit, " – they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." You look at your life, and you go out and you do ministry, and you're diligent in testing your faith, and stepping out on faith, and being morally pure and excellent and having sound knowledge, and exercising self-control, and persevering in the truth, and obedience and godliness and brotherly kindness and love. If you pursue those things, you will be neither useless nor unfruitful; and so you will look at your life and you'll say, "Look at my life: look at the usefulness, look at the fruitfulness."

If you don't do that, verse 9 says, "If you lack these qualities, you're blind and shortsighted, and you will forget your purification from your former sins. You will lose touch with your true state." A disobedient believer, a sinful believer, an irresponsible believer may be a true branch but lose touch with that reality.

"So – " verse 10 " – be all the more diligent to make certain about his calling and choosing you." Not certain to him, he knows. But how do you know? Well, as long as you practice these things, you're never going to stumble into doubt – never. You're going to go roaring into the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ in the future. Be diligent. Be diligent. If you are diligent in your fruitfulness, you will have assurance, and you will live with what Peter says in 1 Peter 1, is "more precious than gold, the proof of your faith." So the true branch, blessed with salvation, sanctification, provision through answered prayer, and assurance.

Two more. Number Five: love – it's going to be quick – love, verses 9 and 10. Our Lord says words that are familiar to us. "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 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." For us, a statement in verse 9: "Abide in My love. Abide in My love." "Stay in the place of My love."

Jude put it this way, Jude 21: "Keep yourselves in the love of God." What does he mean by that? Stay where you can be showered with His love. Stay where you can be showered with His love. Don't move out of the circle where His love is poured out.

Well, how do you stay in that circle? How do you do that? You love Him in return. How do you demonstrate that love? Go back to 14:15. "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." Verse 21, chapter 14: "He who has My commandments keeps them is the one who love Me."

So it's pretty clear, and we see it again in verse 10 of chapter 15: "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in My love." So how do you stay in the place where you can be lavished by divine love? Be what? Obedient. Be obedient.

You're an abiding branch. You're connected. You have that eternal life living in you. Stay in the place

where you can receive the maximum outpouring of love. Step out of that circle and you're going to get disciplined; you're going to get chastening; you're going to have trouble, trials. "Every son the Lord loves He – " what? " – chastens."

Chapter 17, the end of it, as Jesus prayed that great prayer, verses 25 and 26, He said, "O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that you sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them." Is this an incredible thing, that the very love that the Father has for the Lord Jesus Christ is the love that Jesus prays the Father will put in us. This is love beyond comprehension.

Chapter 13, verse 1, says "having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the fullest extent, to the max." He loved them as infinitely as God is infinite. His love for us is stunning, it is perfect, it is unconditional, it is sovereign in that we love Him because He first loved us. It is unfailing, it is eternal, it is sacrificial, it is gracious, it is merciful, it is generous, it is lavish, and it is unbreakable. "Nothing will ever separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus," Romans 8.

His love is poured out on us, and that the deluge basically is connected to our obedience. The more you obey, the more you are lavished with divine love. And who is the example of obedience? Verse 10: "Just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." Jesus perfectly obeyed the Father, and the Father poured out perfect divine love on Him. The more like Christ we are, the more of God's love we experience. The more we follow the obedience of Christ, the more lavish the love of God becomes on us.

That's an amazing thing to live a Christian life for a long time and just live in the lavish realities that we're talking about, to have salvation, some benefits of being the age I am, to have had salvation, and to see sanctification, and to have answered prayer, and to understand that I am a true branch abiding in the true vine, that the Trinity lives in me because of the fruitfulness; and then to know that I've lived so many years in the love of God just lavished on me – incredible. So this is what a true branch is. This is a true believer – saved, sanctified, direct connection to God for what's on His heart, assurance, and lavished with love.

There's a final benefit blessing, and that's joy, verse 11, joy. "These things – " meaning everything He's just said in the previous ten verses. "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you and your joy may be made full. If there's any love in me, it's Christ's love. If there's any peace in me it's His peace. If there's any joy in me, it's His joy, because I'm a partaker of the divine nature. "I'm saying all these things to you so that you may have My joy and that your joy may be made full." That's good news for the eleven.

Listen, the Christian life is not a life of rigidity, restriction, restraint, deprivation. This is not unhappy legalism, this isn't some kind of brow-beating dower experience of gutting it out. This is living, as the Scripture says, "with joy unspeakable, joy unspeakable – joy that can't even be articulated." He says in chapter 16, verse 22, "You have grief now – " to them he says, " – but I'll see you again and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you."

All these things are permanent: a permanent salvation, a permanent sanctification, permanent access to the throne of God for all that is necessary, permanent assurance, permanent love,

permanent joy. John picked up on that when he wrote his first epistle, chapter 1, verse 4, he said, "These things I write that your joy may be full."

You have an alternative. You can turn and do what Judas did, you can walk away – walk away from salvation; walk away from sanctification, righteousness; walk away from answered prayer; you can walk away from the security and assurance of knowing you belong to the Lord; you can walk away from lavish, divine love; and you can walk away from everlasting joy. You can do that. You can walk away from all that being perfected in heaven, and one day hearing the words of the Lord: "Enter into the joy of your Lord," when you enter into eternal joy. You can walk away from all of it. Judas did. Judas did.

But if you walk away, there are warnings. Look at verse 2: "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away." Then verse 6: "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned." Jesus said way more about hell, everlasting burning in hell, than He did about heaven. You can walk away. Judas did, and Jesus said he went to his own place. His own place was hell. He walked away from the presence of God, and he's there and will be there forever. That's the option; there's no middle ground.

"Cast into the fire and burned," we don't need to explain that. The New Testament describes hell – everlasting darkness, weeping, wailing, gnashing of teeth, burning, remorse. Horrible place. We can make that choice.

Peter obviously understood this and wrote these words: "If after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." He's got to be thinking about Judas. They escape defilement, meaning they stepped out of the world, they stepped into the realm of Christ. They stepped into His world.

"If they've done that and they are again entangled in the defilements of the world and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first." Whoa. "It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. It's like a dog returning to its vomit; a sow, after washing, returning to wallowing in the mire." Don't leave; stay. All the promises are to those who remain.

Father, we thank You that You have given us Your Word. Thank You for its encouragement to our hearts, as well as its warning. We understand the seriousness of it. Thank You, Lord, for the inescapable clarity with which You have spoken on an issue that is more important than any other, both in time and eternity.

Lord, take this truth and apply it to heart. May it do Your work in Your way, for Your glory, Your honor, Your kingdom; that's our prayer. Speak to the hearts of those who may only be superficially connected. And, Lord, grant them a true and saving faith, true repentance, and true and eternal life.

COPYRIGHT (C) 2018 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<https://www.gty.org/about#copyright>).