

The Benefits of Abiding in Christ, Part 1

Scripture: John 15:4–11

Code: 43-80

Open your Bible now to the fifteenth chapter of John, John chapter 15. It is pretty popular to refer to one's relationship to Jesus as a personal relationship. That seems to be kind of a contemporary, common, evangelical vernacular. In fact, it may be how you view the distinction between some kind of nominal Christian and a genuine Christian. You might say to someone, "Well, you may go to church, and you may carry out some of the ordinances, but do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?" That's the pretty common language.

In fact, that has become sort of the typical approach to people. "Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?" I just want to kind of qualify that, if I can, for a moment. Every human who has ever lived has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and for most of them it's not a good one. It's a relationship between one who is judged and the Judge. Jesus knows every human being personally and intimately - every thought they've ever had, every word they've ever spoken, every deed they've ever done, every relationship they were ever engaged in. All of that is on record in heaven, and on the basis of that will come eternal judgement because apart from believing in Him, the record of their thoughts and motives and words and deeds and relationships only consigns them to eternal hell. It is very personal. Every person will be judged on a personal, individual basis by the Judge, who is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Maybe there would be a better way, then, to refer to the legitimacy of a genuine relationship to Christ than to say, "Do you have a personal relationship with Him?" I understand what you mean by that, but we need to go beyond that, that is not a biblical term. You're not going to find that kind of phrase used in Scripture. But it then poses the question: What is the true nature of a Christian's relationship to Christ? What is the true nature of a Christian's relationship to Christ? How do we understand the spiritual reality of our union with God, our union with Christ? How do we understand that?

The Bible helps us by giving us a series of analogies. The Bible refers to the relationship between a believer and the Lord as the relationship of a sheep to a shepherd. The Bible also refers to that relationship as the relationship between a child and a father, between a subject and a king, between a slave and a master, and it even refers to that relationship as the relationship between a body and its head. And Scripture delineates these things. In particular, the New Testament focuses on the body metaphor, but all the others appear both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. And they all convey some aspect of our relationship to the Lord: a shared life, shared characteristics, sovereign power, control, direction, obedience, provision, protection, feeding. All of those things are bound up in those metaphors.

Now, before us today in the fifteenth chapter of John is another of those very instructive metaphors - pictures, images - so that we can define our relationship to Jesus Christ in biblical terminology; and it is the relationship between branches and a vine. I want you to go back to chapter 15, and I'm going to read verses 1 through 11, even though we've already covered the first three verses - that was a few weeks ago - and I want to make it all clear in your mind.

Chapter 15, verse 1, Jesus 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.”

Ten times in those verses that I read to you, really starting in verse 4, you see the word “abide.” So we’re talking about what it is to abide in Christ, to abide in Christ. That’s a familiar term to people who have been Christians for a long time. It’s a term that has been much used. It has been given lots of spiritual connotations, but we’re going to dig down into this text and find out precisely what our Lord intends to say by this. But let’s back up to the opening three verses and sort of set the scene. There are four identities here. There is a vine. There is a vinedresser. And there are two kinds of branches. There’s no mystery about who is the vine. Our Lord Jesus says, “I am the true vine,” verse 1, and again in verse 5. There’s no question about who is the vinedresser, the One who cares for the vine and its branches. Verse 1, “My Father is the vinedresser.” This is about God through Christ working with people. The question is about the branches, and in verse 5 our Lord said, “You are the branches.” He was talking, essentially, to his apostles. “You are the branches.” But there are two kinds of branches. There are branches that abide and produce fruit, and there are branches that do not abide, do not produce fruit, are cut off, dried up, and burned.

The question is, How are we to understand these branches? Who are the fruitless branches mentioned in verse 2, the branch that doesn’t bear fruit? And then in verse 6, the one that is thrown away, dried up, gathered, cast into the fire and burned? Who are the fruitless branches, and the other, who are the fruitful branches who bear the fruit, verse 2, verse 5, and verse 8? Who are they? Well, let me recreate for you the context. The context is a very simple context. This isn’t our Lord among many people. This isn’t our Lord in the midst of the crowd. When He says “you”, He’s directing His words at the Twelve. In fact, in particular at this point, He’s directing His words at the eleven remaining, Judas having been dismissed.

Now, where are we in the life of our Lord in John 15? It’s Thursday night in the Upper Room, celebrating the Passover with His disciples the night before He is crucified. And on that night He gives many promises to His disciples. They start in chapter 13, run all the way through chapter 16. Then in chapter 17 He prays a prayer to the Father that the Father will fulfill all the promises He’s made in those previous chapters. It’s a significant, really an incomparable, unparalleled section of Scripture. Nothing like it anywhere in the Bible because it’s loaded with promises to our Lord’s people. That means us.

Now, as He comes to chapter 15, the drama of Judas has already taken place. Judas has been exposed. Satan has entered Judas – that’s what the text says – and Judas has left, dismissed by

the Lord. He has gone to set out the details for the betrayal of Jesus, the arrest of Jesus in the middle of the night, which leads to the execution of Jesus on the cross the next day. The eleven are left. One has defected. It is a massive defection. Judas is the branch that doesn't stay. Judas is the branch that doesn't remain. Judas is the branch that doesn't abide.

Now, in all honesty, if you looked at the twelve apostles up to this point, and somebody told you there is one of them that is fruitless, that produces nothing, that is going to be cut off, withered, burned – Who is it? If you were just looking at the behavior of the Twelve, you might assume it could be possibly Peter. Peter seemed to stumble more than the rest, at least there's more revelation about his stumblings than anybody else. Peter seems to have a kind of dominating self-confidence that makes him tell the Lord, the Lord is not going to do things that He says He's going to do. Peter overstates his affection, overstates his strength, overstates his commitment. Could it be that Peter is the one who is the fruitless branch?

The point being, you wouldn't have necessarily picked out any of the others. It was Judas all along. But from the superficial viewpoint even of the other eleven, they all said when this was announced, "Is it I? Is it I? Is it I?" There was nothing about Judas that manifested the fact that he was fruitless and headed for hell. But that's how it is with some branches because perceivably they are attached. Judas was attached visibly to Jesus. It was a superficial attachment. It was an attachment with no life, and that became obvious when he no longer was abiding in Christ.

Now, this is a very common reality, and I think you know it today. You know there are people in the church with us this morning who are fruitless branches, who are here, who make some profession of interest in Christ to one degree or another, but their lives do not manifest His power and His life. You know that. And you could go from here, the microcosm to the macrocosm of other churches and denominations and fellowships to the church at large, and you know that Christianity is this massive kind of reality in the world that is filled with all kinds of people, many of whom have no genuine, fruit-bearing power. This is a concern of our Lord.

Go back to John chapter 2. You remember in chapter 2, verse 23, He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, and during the feast He was doing all kinds of signs, wonders, miracles. And it says in verse 23, "Many believed in His name." That sounds hopeful. It sounds good. "But Jesus," verse 24, "on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man." He knew it was a false faith. He knew it was a superficial faith. They believed in Him, but only superficially. At that point, one of those men, one of those superficial-interested sort of quasi-believers, was a man named Nicodemus, who then poses questions to Him in chapter 3, who later came to be a true follower.

But there were lots of superficial followers of Jesus, lots of those who were attached outwardly. Go to chapter 6, at the point where Jesus does this massive miracle, feeding as many as 20,000 to 25,000 people by creating food. This is a wonder that is inescapable as an act of God. And there were many followers that Jesus drew up to this point and from this event, but in verse 66, Jesus was speaking, and in response to the words He said – not the miracles He did, but the words He said – "Many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore." They left. They did not abide. They did not remain. They did not stay.

"So Jesus said to the twelve, 'You do not want to go away also do you?' Simon Peter answered

Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and come to know that You are the Holy One of God.'" And yet, "Jesus answered, 'Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?' Now, He meant Judas...[who] was going to betray Him." There in their own midst, not only were there many who defected openly, but there was Judas whose defection had not happened.

In the eighth chapter and verse 30, "As He spoke," again, "many came to believe in Him." Many make some kind of profession that allows for some kind of attachment to Jesus, to which He responded in verse 31, "Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed in Him, 'If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine.'" *Mathts alths*, "genuine students, genuine learners, genuine disciples." And then "you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." They hadn't yet come to know the truth. They hadn't been set free from the search for the truth and from the bondage of sin. Whether or not they were true disciples would be manifest, because they would continue to obey His word. There were many superficial followers who defected.

In chapter 12, and a very interesting group is mentioned in verse 42. "Many...of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God."

Listen, superficiality tracked Jesus through His entire ministry, as it does today, as it does today. Chapter 13, again, in the incident of the washing of the feet, verse 10, Jesus says to Peter, "'He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.' For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, 'Not all of you are clean.'" And, again, they had no idea who this was. Judas was not exposed.

Now, just a reference again to something else that John wrote over in 1 John chapter 2 and verse 19 - very important statement, speaking of people who defect, who do not abide, who do not stay - "They went out from us, but they were not really of us." John knows this now from what he learned about our Lord's words in John 15 and the experience of Judas and others. "They went out from us," and it's still happening in his experience as an apostle, "but they were not really of us; if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us." And then down in verse 24, "As for you," he writes - he says now the same thing that our Lord said to the disciples that night - "As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life." "You abide in Me, and I'll abide in you." John is reiterating what he heard on that Thursday night and is recorded for us in John 15.

The command then that I want you to notice is in verse 4, "Abide in Me," "abide in Me." Let's not get too mystical about that, too spiritual about that. It's simply the Greek word *men*, which means "to stay, to remain." Don't leave, don't forsake Me, don't walk away. This could speak to the issue of what theologians call the perseverance of the saints. Stay. Don't do what Judas did. Don't do what many other Judas-like persons do.

Hebrews 4:14. Hebrews, the book of Hebrews, written to a Jewish community of believers - and attached to that Jewish community of believers were some fence-sitting non-believers who were attracted to Christ. They were associating with those believing Jews, but they weren't making a full commitment to Christ. And so in Hebrews 4:14, the writer of Hebrews says, "Let us hold fast our

profession.” If you make any profession of Christ, hold on to it. And all the way through Hebrews there are warnings to this group of Jews, attached to the true believers, who have not come all of the way to Christ. You’re warned over and over and over. Chapter 2, chapter 3, chapter 4, chapter 6, chapter 10 - warning, warning, warning, warning. “Don’t leave.” “Don’t go away.” “Don’t defect.” “Don’t apostatize.” “Hold fast that profession.”

Now, that is all our Lord is saying in verse 4: stay. “You’ve made a profession. You’ve made an association. Stay, remain, abide. Don’t leave.” There is an Old Testament moment that I think elucidates on this. Turn to Deuteronomy 31; Deuteronomy 31 and verse 14. This is a final word from Moses - really to the people as the leadership of Israel has transitioned from Moses, who can’t go into the Promised Land because of what he did - and Joshua, who will lead them into the Promised Land. Moses has been their leader for 40 years.

The Lord comes and says to Moses, Deuteronomy 31:14, “Behold, the time for you to die is near; call Joshua, and present yourselves at the tent of meeting, that I may commission him.’ So Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves at the tent of meeting. The Lord appeared in the tent in a pillar of cloud, and the pillar of cloud stood at the doorway of the tent.” This is the Tabernacle. “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers; and’ – listen to this – ‘this people will arise and play the harlot with the strange gods of the land.’” They’ve been wandering 40 years. They’re about to go into the land, and God says they’re going to play the harlot with the strange gods of the land. They’re going to go into idolatry. “Into the midst of which they are going, and they will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them. Then My anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide My face from them, and they will be consumed, and many evils and troubles will come upon them; so that they will say in that day, ‘Is it not because our God is not among us that these evils have come upon us?’ But I will surely hide My face in that day because of all the evil which they will do, for they will turn to other gods.’” And they did - massive defection.

They were attached to the covenant people, Israel. They were only superficially attached to the covenant people, Israel. That became manifest when they did not remain, when they did not stay faithful, when they did not continue, when they did not persevere. “Don’t be like them.” The apostle Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, warns the Corinthians not to do that – “Don’t be like those in the wilderness who defected.” There are all kinds of warnings throughout the New Testament to be faithful, to remain, to stay.

That is what is going on here. Stay. We all know people who were around a while, and then they left, and it wasn’t because they left town. They left God. They left His people. They left the Scripture. “Don’t do that. Stay, remain, abide.” Why? Starting in verse 4, there’s an unfolding of the blessings of abiding, the promises of abiding. Profound blessings come to those who stay. Blessing number one: salvation; salvation, eternal salvation. Now, how would you describe your salvation? If somebody says to you, “You’re a Christian, aren’t you?” and they say, “Well, what does that mean?” What do you say? Do you say, “I go to church”? A lot of people do that. You say, “Well, you know, I worship. I go to a Bible study. I believe the Bible.” Is that what you would say? Let me give you the baseline, bottom line, irreducible minimum, which at the same time is the eternal, infinite maximum. If you’re a Christian, here is what you say: “Abide in Me and I in you.” What does it mean to be a Christian? It means – listen - God lives in you. Yes, the Creator God of the universe, the infinitely holy triune God lives in you. That is the essence of what it means to have a relationship with God in salvation: God lives in me. And that may be the best way that we can explain our own lives and our

own identities.

Rather than saying, “I have a personal relationship with Jesus,” which sounds kind of like you’re somebody special, you would be better off to say, “Well, God, the eternal God, holy God, the Creator God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit live in me.” What!? But that is essentially exactly what our Lord is saying, and it’s a trinitarian presence, staggering reality. Now, I grant you that the glorious manifestation of the children of God of Romans 8 has not yet been manifest, has not yet been made visible. That won’t happen until we’re glorified. So in the meantime, we are veiled, right? We are veiled. The world doesn’t see us. It is important to know who we are, so I am, I am literally a body in which God lives. He lives in me. The Lord has come to live in me.

In the fourteenth chapter, our Lord was talking to the disciples on the same night. In verse 23, He says, “If anyone loves Me” – “if your love is real, you will obey.” Love and obedience go together. “He will keep His word; and My Father will love him,” and how much will he love him? He will love him so that, “We will come to him and make Our home with him.” “This is who We are. This is absolutely who We are.” It’s just a truth that gets repeated and repeated.

Go back to verse 17 of John 14, talking of “the Spirit of truth,” the Holy Spirit. “You know Him because He abides with you and will be” – Where? – “in you.” So verse 23 says, “We” - the Son and the Father, – “will make our home with him.” And verse 17 says the Holy Spirit will make his home in us, and verse 20, “In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.” The Trinity lives in a believer.

It is really stunning and our Lord affirms this in His High Priestly Prayer in John 17:23, “I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.” What manifests our transformation to the world is the presence of God in us. Really an astonishing thing, absolutely an astonishing reality. If you stay, it’s evidence your faith is real, and if it is, then God takes up residence in you.

Romans 8:10 says, “Christ is in you.” “Christ is in you.” First Corinthians chapter 3, verse 16 - Paul loved this truth - “Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” Then over in chapter 6, verses 19 and 20, “Do you not know your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price.” Tremendously stunning truth. Second Corinthians 6:16, “We are the temple of the living God.” Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” “Christ lives in me.” Ephesians 2:22, “You are built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.” Colossians 1:27, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

How do you talk about yourself as a believer? You talk about yourself as the residence of God, the temple of God. Listen to what John says over in 1 John, building on these truths. “You are from God, little children,” verse 4, 1 John 4:4, “and have overcome them;” - Listen to this - “because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.” You worry about Satan in the world? Don’t worry about Satan in the world. “Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.” Verse 13, “By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us.” How do we know that? “Because He has given us of His Spirit. We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him.” Verse 16, “We have come to know and have believed 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.”

I wish we'd start talking like this, right? To abide is to remain, and for all who remain, they give evidence of a genuine salvation, and how is that defined? It is defined as God living in us. God living in us, taking up residence. Colossians 1:21 says, "You were formerly alienated" - from God - "hostile, engaged in evil deeds. He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel." If you remain, if you stay, if you abide, He abides in you. This is an incredibly stunning reality. You think about the condescension of our Lord to take on a human body, but He took on a sinless human body. What kind of condescension is it for the triune God to take on a sinful body, take up residence in us?

Now, I want you to look at 1 Peter chapter 1, 1 Peter chapter 1, verse 3. This is a doxology really, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." All right, we're born again, which means we have new life, divine life. We have obtained, verse 4, "an inheritance imperishable, undefiled, will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you." And we "are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

On the one hand, we persevere and remain and stay and endure. On the other hand, God keeps us. And then this most significant section, verse 6, "In this you greatly rejoice" - What? What are you rejoicing? - "for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials." Why? Why would we rejoice in trials? Why is James telling us, "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials?" Why is Peter saying this? Because, that's the proof of your faith. Your faith isn't proven until it's tested when something goes wrong. What happened in the parable of the soils? Tribulation, distress; the plant died out, fruitless. Deceitfulness of riches, cares of the world, trouble with problems, that's the test.

The best thing that could possibly happen in your life as a believer is to have your faith tested, because when it's tested and it holds, this proves its reality. The best thing that could happen is to have a disaster that is beyond your control, something outside of your power that is a trial of grave difficulty, because that's what reveals the false. Their faith can't survive; it collapses. But when you are distressed, who have a true faith, your faith is proven to be, "More precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, and it may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; though you have not seen, you love."

The best thing that could happen to a believer is to have something go wrong in life, something go wrong. And the more that goes wrong, and the more times things go wrong, and the more years you experience the things that go wrong, the more your faith is tested. The more your true faith is tested, the stronger it becomes. If it's a false faith, it collapses. So, I love that phrase, "The proof of your faith, which is more precious than fine gold."

The greatest gift you could possibly have is to know your faith is real, right? That keeps the hope of heaven bright. That keeps the knowledge of forgiveness clear. That brings joy into your life. That takes the fear out. New Christians struggle with that. You lead someone to Christ. They're new in the Lord, maybe days, months, years. Life is going on pretty good. They don't have a lot of issues. They don't have a lot of struggles. Their faith is not tested. Maybe they feel insecure. "Lord, save me. I don't know if I'm saved. I wonder if I'm saved. Maybe I'd better pray again, try to make sure

this is real." People may do that frequently. Then a major test comes, which could shatter a false faith, a superficial confidence in God. And they go flying through that, and their faith is not weaker. It's what? It's stronger, and that becomes the proof that it's a saving, enduring faith.

So the first benefit of staying is everlasting salvation. You're on your way to heaven. You're on your way to be found, 1 Peter 1:7, "In praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Verse 9, "You will obtain as the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." I don't want to go through life worrying about whether I'm saved, but I can't necessarily get that confidence on my own. Some of it comes from reading Scripture, which tells me that a true faith is a lasting faith. But how do I know I have a true faith? You know you have a true faith when you have a proven faith. And the more your faith is proven, and the more you have the tests, the stronger your faith becomes, and you get this pure gold gift of the full knowledge that you're headed for heaven.

So you say, "Abide in Me." Why? Because, "If you abide in Me, I abide in you." That's how to define yourself. "I'm a Christian." Well, what does that mean? "God lives in me. Father, Son, Holy Spirit live in me, not only in me, but in every other Christian. But in me, personally, in me." This is beyond comprehension. This is a condescension even beyond the condescension of our Lord into a perfectly sinless body. Were it not for grace, this wouldn't happen.

So that's the first benefit. The second - and we'll be able only to introduce this - is fruitfulness. Sticking with the metaphor, fruitfulness. Go back to verse 4, "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." Don't forget that. "He who abides in Me and I in him" - there it is again - "in him" - I in him, I in him - "he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."

All right. This is sequential, isn't it? If you're a true believer, if you're an abiding branch, then Christ is in you. He is in you. He lives in you, and the result of that is manifest fruit. You will bear fruit. Verse 2, you will bear more fruit when you are pruned. What's that? Providential trials, troubles, tribulations that we talked about. You will bear fruit. You will bear more fruit. Verse 5, you will bear "much fruit." Verse 8, "The Father is glorified when you bear much fruit," and look at verse 8, "and prove to be My disciples." So, what's the proof that you're a true branch? Fruit. Part of that fruit is the fruit of endurance, patience through trials.

There's a negative in verse 4, "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me." That's stating it negatively. Then it's stated positively, the same thing, in verse 5, "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit," and then back to the negative as a warning, "apart from Me you can do" - What? - "nothing." Because you can't accomplish the work of God in human strength. The weapons of our warfare are not fleshly.

Romans 7, Paul picks up this same idea in verse 4: "Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God" - that we might bear fruit for God - "for while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death." If you are in Christ, you bear fruit for God. If you're not in Christ, you bear dead fruit - lifeless, useless.

Fruit is everywhere in the Bible. There's a simple sort of summary statement in Philippians 1:11, I think, that tells you what it is. Paul talks about living lives that are abounding more in real knowledge and discernment and approving things that are excellent, being sincere and blameless. And then in verse 11, he says, "Having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ" - who is the vine - "to the glory and praise of God" - who is the vinedresser. So what is fruit? It's righteousness. It's righteousness. Can't do that without the presence of God. "In my flesh, I can do no good thing. Even my righteousness is filthy rags."

Fruit is righteousness; and when the Trinity takes up residence in us, necessarily fruit will be produced. Righteousness will manifest itself because righteousness has taken over inside. Hosea 14:8 says, God says, "From Me is your fruit found." "From Me is your fruit found." Luke 6:43-44, our Lord said a good tree doesn't bring bad fruit. A bad tree doesn't bring good fruit. "By their fruit, you" - What? - "you know them."

How do you prove to be a disciple? Go down to verse 8. How do you prove to be a true disciple? How do you prove you're not a fake? How do you prove you're not a fraud? Well, we saw: one, you remain even through the trials; but two, you bear much fruit. You bear much fruit. Fruit, yes. More fruit, verse 2. Much fruit, verses 5 and 8. Now, let me move that idea of abiding in Christ, remaining in Christ, from salvation into sanctification for a moment, and let me just kind of draw it out a little bit. You are, as a matter of reality, abiding in Christ and He is in you. But if we look a little deeper into that relationship from a sanctifying aspect, the more you abide in the presence of and the knowledge of and the love of and the obedience to Christ, the more fruitful you become.

Our Lord acknowledged this in the parable of the soils. The good soil, the seed went in, and it produced fruit, but not everybody had the same, right? Some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, some a hundredfold. We could all say, "Well look, the Trinity lives in me. The Trinity lives in me. I possess the life of God, and God manifestly demonstrates the fruit of righteousness." And that would be true of all of us, but not to the same degree. That is why there are so many commands in the Bible, because the assumption is that we can disobey. We can cease to keep the Word, cease to love the Lord, cease to honor the Lord, cease to do His will at points in our lives that restrict our fruit bearing. Yes, we all bear the fruits of righteousness, but we don't all have much fruit, and we all need to have more fruit.

We say, "How do you do that?" Well, it's not a matter of human effort. It's about abiding in Christ. Now, let me make a simple point out of this. The more you focus on Christ, the more fruitful you become. The more you focus on yourself, the less fruitful you become. Lose yourself in the glory of Christ. That's 2 Corinthians 3:18. As you gaze at His glory, you move from one level of glory to the next to the next to the next by the Holy Spirit, until you literally become like Him. Yes, yes, we battle against sin. Yes, we war against the flesh. Yes, we beat our body into submission so that we're not cast away. Yes, we're zealous for virtue and holiness and purity. But all of that is in response to the vision of Christ that keeps expanding and becoming larger and richer and more glorious.

I just don't know how Christians sitting in churches where Christ is not constantly exalted, I just don't know how they survive the shallows of their sanctifying experiences. Fruit comes by abiding. All Christians, true Christians, abide. All who abide have Christ and God and the Spirit abiding in them. They all then become fruit-bearing trees. They produce deeds of righteousness, attitudes of righteousness, words of righteousness, but not all to the same degree. The degree depends upon

the level of our commitment, which depends upon our affection for understanding of Christ.

Let's pray. Lord, we're very grateful for the opportunity to be together this morning and to worship You and to fellowship with each other. So thankful, thankful for our church, thankful for all You're doing here, for children, young people, adults, senior adults, families, single people, for all the truth that rings through this church all day, every day - and especially on this day. And Lord, we pray that it would all lift up Christ, that it would all exalt Christ, that we might find our all in all in Him; that we might be able to say, "Christ is all in all to us." Therein lies the key to more fruit; much fruit is being lost in wonder, love, and praise, seeing the vision of Christ in all His beauty and glory. And putting on display that fruit, we assure our own hearts of salvation, and we assure others of your transforming power. We pray that we might be a people of much fruit, much fruit, that the world may see and know and glorify You. Enrich us by Your Word as it settles in our hearts. Father, help us, help us to abide in such a way that we bear much fruit so that You receive the glory. These things we ask for the sake of the One who loved us and gave Himself for us, even Christ. Amen.

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