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Abiding, or Not John 15:6-8

Intro: Last week we took some time to consider the phrase takes away in vs2. Jesus is giving a parable at the beginning of ch15. He's painting a word picture for the disciples to illustrate the necessity of abiding in Him in order to be fruitful. We noted that the primary and most common usage of the Greek word that is translated as takes away is actually lifts up. This usage gives us the proper sequence of the Father's care of His vineyard: He first lifts us up and draws us closer to Him and the natural result of this is – we then become productive in light of His care for us.

I bring this up again because it's critical for us to remember and clearly understand what Jesus is teaching in this parable. He's speaking to His followers (believers) about a very important aspect of the Christian life. We must keep this in mind as we proceed through our text today for this knowledge will assist us in making proper sense of the text.

When Jesus Christ delivered this parable of the vine and branches, He knew what he was talking about. He wanted to emphasize that His disciples must be fruitful. It's an interesting characteristic of the grapevine that it is good for nothing except bearing fruit. If it does not produce grapes, it's basically worthless. The reason for this is that the wood of the vine is too soft for any other purpose. You can build a house with wood from a tree but the wood of the vine is too small, gnarled and twisted to be of any use in construction. Besides, the wood is too brittle – it can't stand up to any amount of pressure without snapping. In fact, it's not even good for burning. Oh, it will burn, but it burns too fast to cook with or to heat a structure. The best you can do is pile it up and burn it quickly to get rid of it.

This is exactly the point Ezekiel makes in ch15 of his prophesy. He is describing the complete uselessness of Israel in her then very unproductive state (2-4). This is the same image that Jesus is using for those who are joined to Him in faith. This leads to some very pointed questions. Are we joined to Christ in salvation? If so, are we fruitful? Are we actually useful to Him? Or, are we just a lot of leaves and soft wood that serves no purpose for His kingdom? I pray that by the end of this message, you will be able to

answer each of those questions with clarity and confidence.

6-8- vs6 contains the phrase cast out - a negative. But our starting place should not be with the negative idea but with the positive: remaining. Why? Because remaining in Christ is the major emphasis of this section of John. The word “abide” occurs 8Xs in just 7 verses (**4-10**), while the idea is alluded to even more often. It’s also true because the negative “does not abide” is bracketed between 2 positive statements (**5 & 7**). Besides, how would we properly understand what a failure to abide really is unless we first know what abiding in Christ means?

1st) remaining in Christ is only for those who are in Christ already. Christ’s challenge here is for those who are already Christians, those who’ve believed on Jesus as Savior and committed themselves to Him as Lord of their lives. Is this you? If so, then this parable is for you. You can go on to what Jesus is saying about a full and fruitful life. If not, you must stop right here and come to Him. Don’t think that Jesus is giving a formula for a full and fruitful life to everyone, regardless of their relationship to Him. No, He’s only speaking to born-again believers and He’s giving this promise only to them. So come to Him if you’ve not already done so. Recognize both the guilt and the consequences of your sin and turn to Jesus for forgiveness, salvation and new life in Him. If you will receive Him, He’ll receive you!

2nd) remaining refers to conscious decisions or choices we make in living the Christian life. When Jesus talks about abiding, he’s talking about the will - about choices, the decisions we make. We must choose to do those things that expose us to Him and keep us in close contact with Him. That’s what abiding means. We’ve been placed in Christ by the Holy Spirit. Now we must choose to maintain that relationship by the decisions we make—decisions to expose ourselves to His Word in order to learn about Him, and to relate to Him in prayer wherein we engage with Him. It also refers to our decisions to relate to other believers in church life experiences like bearing one another’s burdens, confessing our faults and sharing fellowship with one another. This is where we learn about and see Christ in one another. All of this is designed to relate to Him. Abide in me requires an active, deliberate decision of the will to obey His Word, believe what He says and stay in touch with Him.

3rd) Remaining is necessary for answered prayer (**7**). We saw this point

earlier in [ch14](#) where Jesus speaks of the expression of our love for Him through obedience to His commandments. Some people think they can have the person of Christ without the doctrine of Christ. They like the idea of Jesus, but they shy away from His teaching. This is impossible! Jesus has declared that He will not come and make His abode with any except those who keep His commandments. You can't separate Christ from the Word because He is the Word! How can we call Him Master and Lord and not do the things He says? If you won't have Jesus and His words, He won't have you or your words.

6- We've considered the positive side of abiding. Now we must look at the negative side – what is the consequence of not abiding? First, we should notice what Jesus is not saying. He does not say that “if anyone does not bear fruit, he is cast out...” The emphasis is on abiding, not on bearing fruit. Jesus alone knows who abides and who does not. This truth cannot be perfectly discerned through the outward estimation of fruit that we humans are limited to. Just because someone appears to be fruitful to us does not mean that they are truly abiding; just because someone may appear to have no fruit at all doesn't necessarily mean they're not abiding in Christ. Only Jesus determines the heart.

Having said that, we must admit that the tone Jesus uses in [vs6](#) is somewhat disconcerting; even frightening. This verse presents a problem for all Christians. Jesus isn't just saying that if we fail to abide in Him we will be unfruitful, although that is clearly true. What He seems to be saying is that if a believer fails to abide in Him, he'll be cut off from the vine and will wither and be gathered up with others who've also been cut off and be burned. This makes us think of being burned in hell. This verse seems to teach the possibility (or fact) that a saved person can become lost and be condemned to eternal suffering. Is this what [vs6](#) is teaching? If not, how should we interpret this verse?

There are 3 basic views taken on this verse. The 1st is generally held by most non-Reformed (Calvinist) theologians and is exactly as was just laid out – a believer can lose their salvation. Thus, the doctrine of eternal security must be rejected as unbiblical. But, is this a valid assessment? Let's look at all that's involved. If we take this interpretation as being correct, we're immediately confronted with a ton of other texts that contradict it. We must then reject [Phil 1:6](#); [Rom 8:35](#); even [John 10:27-29](#). If we accept this

view of vs6, we're saying that God Himself will thrust us out, cut us off from a living union with His Son – not because of some gross sin (blasphemy, adultery, murder, etc) but simply because we failed to abide in Christ. This from the same God who pledged Himself to defend us from all enemies!

Can a Christian really believe that? I don't see how, at least not after they've thought it through clearly. If that were the nature of our God, we would've been cast off long ago; we would all be in hell. But, our experience teaches us that God actually bears with our fruitlessness, sin and unbelief, and out of His great love for us He continually works to bring us forward in our Christian walk. Thus, to accept this view is to slander the character of our God and put the lie to our own experience.

The 2nd view holds that this verse applies to nominal Christians – Christians in name only. They believe the word “anyone” refers to unsaved individuals; namely those of the old branch of Israel that was cut off so that the Gentiles might be grafted in and people like Judas. But again, this view doesn't hold up to even a light scrutiny. Jesus is speaking to His disciples about the disciple life. The context doesn't allude to any new class of persons being dealt with here. It is true that there will be many individuals who profess to be Christians who are not and eventually they will be separated out from the true church and be lost – but that's not the point of this passage.

The 3rd view will be familiar to those who come to the Thursday night Bible Study. This view holds that it's not the believer in danger of being cut off and burned up but rather their works that are burned if they're not done in Christ. There are several things that support this idea. Primarily, the emphasis of this parable concerns fruitfulness, not salvation. Also, while it's true that burning is often associated with hell and thus, the lack of salvation; that doesn't mean it's always associated with it or that it's associated with it here. Burning is not always used of hell (1 Cor 3:12) Here, it's associated with the destruction of useless works not the loss of salvation and is the most appropriate view of our text. It's always dangerous to interpret a parable on any level other than what's involved in its most basic point.

Also, note the actual wording of the verse. It says the one who does not abide is cast out, “as a branch” or like a branch. So, it's not as a “son” that he's thrown away, but as a fruit-bearer. He may be useless to Christ and the kingdom of God but still a Christian. There's even a change in number

between the first part of the verse and the second. In the first part the important term is singular: “anyone. . . .” In the second part the key term is plural: the “them” and “they” is what comes from the “one” who is thrown away in terms of his usefulness. It’s the Christian’s works rather than the Christian himself that are destroyed (Lot). “He was out of fellowship with the Lord, he ceased to bear fruit to His glory, and his dead works were all burned up in Sodom; yet he himself was saved!”

8- This verse looks to the future. We’ve already seen that the Father is glorified through the work of the Son (13:31-32). Now, we have another great truth: that the Father is also glorified in the work of believers who abide in the Son! There is an idea of completeness and certainty in this statement and I find that to be very encouraging. The disciples will definitely glorify the Father by their continual fruit bearing because they can’t and won’t bear fruit of themselves. Their fruitfulness will be the evidence of the Father at work in their lives through the Son; thus, it will glorify Him!

In fact, as the last part of the verse says, the bearing of fruit is the evidence that they are disciples. So the Father is glorified both in their fruit-bearing and in their continuing to be disciples. This is a strong suggestion that discipleship is not a static state of being but a growing and developing way of life. The true disciples is always becoming a disciple more fully: always pressing forward into a deeper understanding of Jesus and His word, bravely launching out, over and over again into greater experiences of faith and situations of complete trust so as to see Christ work through them to produce fruit in their lives that will bring glory to the Father.

So, if we accept the 3rd view of vs6, that it’s the believer’s works that are burned and not the loss of salvation, should we rejoice since we are safe once again? Should we relax simply because we won’t be condemned to hell for our fruitlessness? No, indeed! Hell is horrible because it is such a waste of opportunity but is a fruitless Christian any less a waste? It’s a horror to think that someone who has been miraculously saved by the shed blood of Jesus Christ and is now being cultivated, cared for and even coddled by the heavenly vine-keeper; one who is being preserved for heaven could still be unfruitful in their life due to the failure of a proper heart response to the One who has graciously done all this for us. Saved yet fruitless! Let us never be content with that! It’s to our shame if we ever are.

It's also foolishness on our part. If we fail to abide in Christ we will forfeit the 2 great blessings promised to us here. 1st) is fruitfulness. Is it wise to be fruitless? Does it make sense to be unproductive in the Christian life when we could actually be highly productive to the blessing both of ourselves and all those around us, both saved and lost? No true Christian can ever agree that this is a wise course of action. Jesus will do all the work of making us fruitful, all we must decide to do is abide in Him and continue to choose to keep abiding in Him.

2nd) privilege of answered prayer. A failure to see prayer answered means something's not right in the disciple's life. It could be that something's not right in the abiding and the prayers are amiss and thus, unanswered. It may be that something is not right in the asking and there's no perception of what Jesus desires to do in and through the disciple.

These are the 2 great spheres of blessing available for those who abide in Christ—fruitfulness and the privilege of answered prayer. Both gifts are offered by the Father and Son to the believer and they longingly desire to give them. Both gifts are necessary for living a successful, meaningful Christian life and we desperately need them both. We who belong to Jesus Christ should constantly aspire to and obtain these divinely appointed blessings.

Search your heart today and see if you can recognize any fruit. If you can't put your finger on one thing, maybe you need to find out for sure if you are truly in Christ. This is the first and most important decision you will ever make in your entire life. Will you make that decision today? 😊