

Session Seven

Climbing higher

THE ASCENDING LIFE

God's Golden Stairway to Glory

PRINCIPLES OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

THE PRINCIPLE OF ABIDING IN CHRIST

John 15:1-17



Introduction.

After having recognized that Jesus is our ideal and that we must always measure ourselves against His perfection, having recognized that we have not reached that perfection, having identified the ways in which we have not reached it, having confessed those short-comings, having received forgiveness and cleansing for our imperfections, having experienced our crucifixion with Christ and having received the filling of the Holy Spirit by faith, then our next need is to continue to live on this higher plane and to move on up the golden stairway to glory by ABIDING IN CHRIST. This is the secret of victorious living! Abiding in Christ is best outlined for us in John 15:1-17, so let us now study this passage.

I. Abiding in Christ means submitting ourselves to the discipline of the divine gardener. (15:1-3, 6)

1. Unfruitful branches are cut off completely. (15:2a & 6)

This would seem to imply that one can be saved and then lost again, but this is not the teaching of the scripture as a whole. Once a person has been born, physically or spiritually, he or she cannot be un-born. We may bring disgrace on our Father, but we are still his children. He continues to love us in spite of our weakness and sin. What, then, does this mean?

(1) It may mean that a person who thought he was born-again was never saved in the first place (I John 2:19). It is normal for branches to bear fruit. If a branch does not normally bear fruit, then something must be wrong. Perhaps the branch is diseased or has been damaged. In any case, the gardener does not want a non-fruit-bearing branch to take nourishment from the vine and thus rob the other branches of that nourishment.

This seems similar to when Jesus “cursed” the fig tree which had no fruit on it (Matt. 21:18-19). It should have had small figs on it. It was not the season for ripe figs, but the small figs can be seen to begin developing as the leaves come on. It had leaves, but no young figs. Something was wrong with that tree!

A person may be “in the vine” but in spite of that not bear fruit because of sin--disease or compromise or lack of faith or a bad reputation or many other things which might offset our witness for Jesus and our ability to draw others to Him and bring them to saving faith. Such branches, since they do not bear fruit, may, at the discretion of the gardener, be cut off.

(2) If a person has been truly born again it is possible that being “cut off” may refer either to an early death or to being “put on the shelf” and unused for the kingdom of God. It surely would seem to mean a total loss of blessing and of fellowship with the vine. These two verses (2a & 6), like the passage in Hebrews 6:4-6, do not refer to a loss of salvation but to a loss of blessing; they compose a threat of lost blessing for one who does not abide in Christ.

2. Fruit-bearing branches are pruned back so that they will bear much fruit. (15:2b)

(1) This implies that we are to let the Lord cut out of our lives everything which is unclean, or unworthy, or would keep us from having the deepest fellowship with Him.

(2) We are already clean through the forgiveness and cleansing we received through the Word of Jesus (compare Eph. 5:26) when we first trusted in Christ and were born-again;

however, we are in need of daily, continual cleansing (compare John 13:10).

II. Abiding in Christ means remaining in close contact with Him at all times. (15:4, 5, 7-8)

1. Fruit-bearing is totally dependent upon a good connection with the vine. (15:4-5)
 - (1) For us this means living each moment in the conscious presence of God. How can we do this?
 - a. Start the day with Jesus. For Jews, the day always begins at sunset. Begin by saying "Good-night, Jesus; see you in the morning." Then let your first thoughts be of Him. If you program yourself at night to do this, you will most likely remember it when you wake up. Then, as soon as possible, preferably immediately, open your Bible (previously placed near your bed) and read a few verses (perhaps a chapter) and ask the Lord to show you how you can apply the verses today. If you make coffee, you can read while you wait for the coffee to brew.
 - b. Keep talking with the Lord all during the day about whatever you are doing or about whatever comes into your head while you are doing other things. If you are dealing with people all day long, this may be difficult, but try to take a few moments off to yourself (during a "break") and open your pocket New Testament and read a few moments. Think about what you have read and talk to the Lord about what it means. The more times you can open God's Word and read it during the day, the closer your contact with "the Vine."
 - (2) Let your roots go deep into the soil of Jesus' love and let them grow there and become long and strong so the "juices of life" keep flowing from Him into you.
2. Bearing fruit happens in at least two different ways:
 - (1) One way is through our personal growth, bearing the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).²² *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,*²³ *gentleness and self-control.* The word "fruit" is singular. It is just one fruit but it consists of various segments, like an orange. Consider each segment of the fruit. Examine your life to see if it is present. But personal growth also means growing more and more into the likeness of Jesus. This is God's purpose for us as we read in Rom. 8:29 "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son." This is a process which takes time, practice and effort. It's like working in a garden. After the soil is prepared and planted, the garden still needs to be kept clear of weeds and cultivated and perhaps given water if it does not receive enough rain. The principle of life is at work

in the seeds to make them grow and bear fruit, but we must help that process along by clearing out the weeds, cultivating the soil and providing water as needed. These principles can also be applied to our spiritual lives.

- (2) It means bearing fruit according to our kind--"the fruit of a Christian is another Christian."

If we are abiding in Christ, it should be obvious to others that we are somewhat different from other people. Our attitudes are different, our actions and reactions are different and our language is different. It ought to be easy for us to speak to others about our walk with the Lord and to ask others about their relationship with Him as well. We need to be ready always *"to give an answer to anyone who asks (us) to give a reason for our hope"* (I Peter 3:15).

III. **Abiding in Christ results in many blessings.** (John 15:7-17)

1. John 15:5 mentions bearing "much fruit." Such fruit includes:

- a. an **abundance of ANSWERED PRAYERS** (15:7, 19; I John 5:14-15).

John 15:7 and 16 say, *If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you. . . . I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.* This is not a blanket promise to give us any selfish thing we may desire, but is tied to *in my name*, meaning "as my representative." When we do business in the name of another person, we do so as that person's representative. We ask for what the person whom we represent would ask for if he were there to ask in person. So it is when we pray in Jesus' Name. We ask for what Jesus would request if He were here in person. Does our praying follow this pattern? Do we ask for whatever we need to fulfil God's purpose in our current situation or in our future?

I John 5:14-15 tell us: *This is the confidence that we have in approaching God that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we ask of him.*

- b. **Abundant HARVEST** of fruit.

In John 15:5 and 8 Jesus tells us: 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.*

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

As we mentioned above, bearing fruit involves both personal growth and

reproducing ourselves in others. Regarding personal growth into the likeness of Jesus, we need to study the Gospels especially in order to observe the qualities of Jesus' life so that we may imitate them. When Jesus responds to selfishness and criticism, do His answers take you by surprise? Did you expect Him to say what He says? Many times we cannot anticipate His answers! He makes us wonder how we would have responded in a similar situation. Are our attitudes like His? The best teaching from Jesus is found in His Sermon on the Mount. I have tried to expound His teaching in my seminar "Power over Pride in God's New Humanity." (Please go to freebiblecommentary.org and look in the lower left corner of the opening page. It is posted there, kindness of Dr. Bob Utley.)

Reproducing ourselves as believers in Jesus is sometimes called "winning others to Jesus" or "leading others to Christ." The most prominent example of that was Dr. Billy Graham who, by using modern media technology and great organization and training of others was able to multiply his ability to bring others to faith in Jesus by the millions. However, we do not have to be that kind of evangelist to be people who lead others to faith. Usually we lead others to faith in Jesus when we live as a good example of a Christ-follower and in our conversations seek to speak often of our faith and what it means to us and how others can also trust Him to be their Savior.

I do not think that we need to memorize a method for leading others to Jesus. I do think that we need to memorize the basic verses which teach the plan of salvation and then build relationships with others which will lead us to share with them how we came to the Lord and how they, too, can come to Him and teach them about simple faith and repentance, confession and submission.

c. **Abundant LOVE** conditioned on obedience

There are a number of verses in this chapter which emphasize this truth. In John 15:9-17 we read: 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.* ¹² *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.* ¹³ *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.* ¹⁴ *You are my friends if you do what I command you.* ¹⁵ *No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.* ¹⁶ *You did not choose me, but I chose you and*

appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ¹⁷ These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

Henry Drummond has written a small book called, *“The Greatest Thing in the World”* in which he shows in many ways that LOVE is the greatest thing in the world. I have re-read that little book several times and am always blessed by it. But what is love? There are many ways of looking at the meaning of the word in English, but as it is used in the Bible concerning God’s love (*agape* in N.T. Greek) we may say that it is: **a deep, unconditional, unselfish desire, leading to action, for the very best for the person loved regardless of the cost to yourself and regardless of the worthiness or the unworthiness of the person loved. It is something you DO more than something you feel. It requires the action of the will.**

Of course, whole books have been written on God’s love and what it means to reflect that love. There is not time or space to go into detail here, but by following the above principle we can measure our own application and progress against that.

- d. **Abundant JOY!** John 15:11 says: ¹¹ *These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.* This is one of the greatest blessings we receive from abiding in Christ! It is so sad to see many who claim to be Christ-followers upset and frowning when they could be rejoicing and victorious in Jesus!
- e. **Abundant FELLOWSHIP** with Christ and with each other. In John 15:12-15 we read this: ¹² *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.* The use of the word “friends” indicates warm fellowship. These men (the apostles) had followed Jesus day after day in all kinds of situations, in all kinds of weather. They had listened to His teaching, they had observed His miracles, they had experienced prayer and worship with Him. They loved Him because He first loved them. One result of that love was that He could now call them His friends, but He ties this closely to . . . **if you do what I command.** There is no substitute for obedience. We become Jesus’ friends by obeying His commands and we stay in fellowship with Him as we continue to obey His commands. His commands are

not always easy, but they are always what is best for us and for His kingdom purposes.

CONCLUSION: May God grant that each of us will rise higher, ascending ever closer to our Lord, by abiding continually in Christ.