

## **Abiding in Christ** **(John 15:1–17)**

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Beloved, when we read the first books of the Bible, we can quite readily relate to the historical narrative of Genesis and certainly to the opening part of Exodus. Exodus tells us the amazing story of God redeeming the people of Israel to be His peculiar people. Whenever we read the law, we are reminded that Jehovah delivered them, redeemed them from the bondage of Egypt, and led them through the Red Sea. However, when we then consider the book of Leviticus with its various prescribed sacrifices, its detailed descriptions of animals to be sacrificed, and the profuse shedding of blood, one may wonder what the overriding purpose of this elaborate sacrificial system is. What helpful instruction can we extract from this as New Testament believers?

The profound truth that emerges is that God was not merely interested in redeeming a people unto Himself, but rather that His ultimate objective and desire was to bring His redeemed people into an intimate and functional relationship with Himself. Through the sacrificial system, and thus on the basis of shed blood, God provided everything necessary for His redeemed people to live in daily fellowship and communion with Him.

The Lord achieved this primarily by instituting the morning and evening sacrifices. In so doing, He perpetuated the worship pattern established in the Garden of Eden, where He met with Adam and Eve every morning and evening in the cool of the day. For our first parents, these daily encounters with God were the highlights of their day—sacred moments when God drew near

to His son and daughter and communed with them, and they, in response, worshiped Him.

As a continuation of that foundational pattern of communion with Himself, God prescribed that a lamb would be slain every morning and evening. By way of these sacrifices, God communicated daily to Israel, “I am your God, and you are My people.” These sacrificial lambs, of course, pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ, who, as the Lamb of God, would come in the fullness of time to take away the sins of the world. Because of these sacrifices, God’s redeemed people could live in daily fellowship and communion with Him. The Lord knew, however, that His redeemed people would remain sinful and thus be prone to stumble and ready to halt. Yet God, as a manifestation and affirmation of His covenant faithfulness, remarkably made full provision for such a people—a people bent toward backsliding.

Every morning at nine o’clock, by way of the bloody sacrifice, God reassured His people: “My dear people, I am your God, you are My people, and today I am ready to forgive your sins—your sins of commission and omission.” At the end of the day, at three o’clock, another lamb was slain, and God, as it were, said to His people, “Though you have sinned against Me, I want you to know that I am still ready to forgive.” Thus, God made daily provision for the sins of His redeemed people so that He could dwell in their midst and live in daily fellowship with them.

However, the slaying of the lamb was not the only component of this daily ritual. The crowning event of the morning and evening sacrifices would be the priest entering the sanctuary on behalf of the people of Israel. There, he would offer up the praises of Israel to God, thereby causing the entire nation to enter symbolically and representatively into His presence. Meanwhile, the godly would wait outside for God’s response. Following the transaction at the altar of incense, the priest would emerge from the sanctuary and, on God’s behalf, pronounce His blessing upon His people. In essence, He thereby communicated, “I have accepted the sacrifice. Because of this bloody sacrifice, I can bless you and keep you, and

I can cause My face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. I can lift up My countenance upon you and give you peace.”

Why have I elaborated on this, dear congregation? To make the point that God redeemed His people for a purpose, namely, to have an intimate, loving, and functional relationship with them. The blessed application of this truth for us is that God also desires such intimate fellowship with His people today. Christ came into the world for that very purpose—not only to redeem us or save us from our sins, which is the negative aspect of His work, but also for the positive purpose of establishing a deep, personal, and intimate relationship with us.

Christ came into the world so that on the basis of His redeeming sacrifice, He could bring us back into an everlasting love relationship with God. My question, therefore, is this: “Do you have a vital and loving relationship with God in Christ? Is that a living reality for you?” You may respond, “Why do you ask?” My answer is that I wish to demonstrate that Christ has made full provision for His children to enjoy intimate and continued fellowship and communion with God through Him.

With God’s help, we are therefore going to focus on John 15:4-5. Here, we read God’s Word and our text for this sermon: “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.”

We will focus on abiding in Christ as the very essence and secret of a vital and fruitful spiritual life. Abiding in Christ involves at least three key aspects. First, we have a *pressing command*, for when Christ says, “Abide in me, and I in you,” He is not making a suggestion; rather, He is issuing a loving command, an imperative. Second, there is a *profound reality*, expressed in verses 4b and 5a: “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches.” Third, we have a *precious promise*: “He that

abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.” In other words, “without abiding in Me, you cannot bear fruit.”

### **A Pressing Command**

John 15 is part of the remarkable discourse Christ proclaimed to His disciples in the upper room on the eve of His crucifixion. One could argue that there is no other portion of Scripture where Christ so fully opens His heart and fully communicates who He was and why He came as He does in John 14–17, and thus, certainly also in John 15.

In our text, Christ uses an analogy that would have immediately resonated with His audience, especially His disciples—the analogy of a vine and its fruit-bearing branches. Vines grew everywhere in the land of Canaan. Christ often used analogies from nature to communicate foundational truths. While commentators have speculated on what might have prompted Christ to use this analogy, the central truth is clear: He likens the relationship between Him and His children to the intimate relationship between a grapevine and its branches.

A vine by itself, without its branches, would be nothing more than a useless piece of wood. Apparently, the wood of a vine cannot be used for anything else other than sustaining its branches. Thus, what makes the vine useful and attractive is that it produces branches that bear abundant fruit. For seven years, I lived in southern Ontario and was surrounded by vineyards. Annually, I witnessed the process of vines bearing abundant fruit.

It should at once be obvious that there is an intimate connection between the vine and its branches. The vine finds its expression and identity in its branches and the fruit they bear. The glory of the vine comes to full expression in its branches and the fruit they produce. It is that profound connection between the vine and its branches that Christ uses to illustrate the essence of what it means for believers to abide in Him.

At the same time, however, it should be equally obvious that branches on their own—apart from the vine—are useless. Without being connected to the vine in a real and living way, branches cannot but be fruitless and useless. Such branches will be good for only one thing: to be cast into the fire. Though such branches appear outwardly to be connected to the vine, their fruitlessness and barrenness prove that there is no living connection with the vine—and, thus, that they are dead branches.

As to the living branches of the vine, our text beautifully illustrates that all of Christ's energy is devoted to the branches that are united to Him. His focus is on causing those branches to bear spiritual fruit. At the same time, He wishes to underscore our complete dependence on Him as believers—as living branches. He does so, however, to encourage us that everything we need to be spiritually fruitful is to be found in Him. He wishes His people to delight in the fact that in Him there is an inexhaustible and abundant supply of spiritual grace and strength.

What is unique about this vine is that, by nature, no one is a branch of it. By nature, we are branches of the wild vine of Adam, which produces only evil fruit. However, when the Holy Spirit performs His mighty, heart-renewing work in us, He unites us to Christ. Thus, the spiritual union that unites Christ and His people is forged by the Spirit of Christ, who thereafter dwells both in Him and in His people. When the Spirit performs His marvelous work of regeneration, He cuts us off from the old vine of Adam, and He grafts us into the new vine of Christ, who is the second Adam (or the last Adam).

Dear believer, this truth is both humbling and encouraging. To be grafted into Christ required something profound: the vine itself had to be wounded. Just as in nature, where grafting requires the vine to be cut to receive a new branch, Christ, the true Vine, had to be wounded so that you, a sinner and a child of Adam, could be grafted into Him. In the realm of nature, even skilled horticulturalists sometimes fail in their grafting efforts. However, when the Holy Spirit cuts us off from Adam and grafts us into

Christ, His grafts never fail. Once He unites us with Christ, that relationship is permanent and abiding.

In the opening verses of this chapter, Christ tells us that His Father is the husbandman. The Father, as the husbandman of the vine and its branches, is wholly committed to ensuring the fruitfulness of the branches. Why? Because the Father loves His Son, and consequently, everything He does is for the glory of His beloved Son. Dear believer, the overarching purpose of your redemption is the glory of God's Son—a redemption and a glory that will endure forever.

The Father's eternal objective is that you would begin to resemble His beloved Son. Thus, He chose you in His Son in order to become like His Son. Paul tells us that believers have been predestined to be conformed to the image of God's Son (Rom. 8:29). Dear believer, to achieve this, Christ declares that His Father will not hesitate to use the pruning knife of affliction in your life. I witnessed this pruning process firsthand when I lived in the Niagara region of southern Ontario. Every spring, vineyard owners and their servants prune the vines to ensure that they will be as fruitful as possible. Similarly, the Father's pruning in your life—by way of affliction and perplexing providences—is designed to bring about abundant spiritual fruitfulness for the glory of His Son.

Your heavenly Father is, therefore, fully committed to your fruitfulness and will do whatever it takes to make you a fruitful branch. The more fruitful you are, the more glory it will bring to His Son, which is both His desire and ultimate goal. To achieve this, the Father will cut away everything in your life that prevents you from resembling His Son. Likeness to God's Son is the essence and defining feature of spiritual fruitfulness.

Dear believer, it is the Father's design that you would demonstrate Christlikeness, that is, that you would bear the fruit of Christ's Spirit as defined in Galatians 5:22–23. Without biblical evidence of growing Christlikeness, one cannot claim to belong to this Vine. It is impossible to be united to Christ without becoming like Him. Union with Christ will always manifest itself in likeness

to Christ because the life that flows out of Christ is, by its very nature, entirely focused on Christ.

This blessed, experiential interaction with Christ is the core element of Spirit-wrought spiritual life. Thus, Jesus says in John 6:45, “Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.” Consequently, if the Father, by His Spirit, works irresistibly in you, you will be irresistibly drawn and attracted to Christ. As already stated, the life that proceeds from Christ will always be oriented toward Christ.

This means that the Father, who, by His Spirit, will lead us to His Son, will therefore also purify and cleanse us by His Word, thereby molding us to reflect the image of His Son. This means, dear believer, that if you are facing trials or afflictions, you need to understand that the Father has one goal in mind: to make you die to yourself and conform you to the image of Christ. Paul has that growing conformity in mind when he writes in Romans 8:28, “All things work together for good”—that is, all things must and shall work together to conform you increasingly to Christ.

Dear believer, you have been chosen in Christ, given to Christ, redeemed by Christ, drawn to Christ, and united to Christ so that you may become like Him and live forever for His glory. This is the great purpose of your redemption. Yet remarkably, Christ tells us that while this vital relationship with Him is secure, He desires that our relationship with Him would be fully functional and that we would fully enjoy its benefits. Thus, because we are united to Him, He calls us actively to abide in Him by faith.

What does it mean to abide in Christ? Though it sounds so simple, the very essence of this spiritual exercise can prove to be rather elusive. A seasoned and teary-eyed believer once shared with me that he had read Andrew Murray’s precious book, *Abide in Christ*, twenty times but still struggled to grasp its full meaning. His honesty was humbling, for abiding in Christ means more than merely coming to Him. Simply put, it means that we must stay with Him, walk with Him, live in fellowship with Him, and

cleave to Him. How profound and yet simple is Christ's loving and urgent imperative!

Christ here calls His people to enjoy the full advantage of their relationship with Him. Everything you need for your spiritual life is to be found in Him. Therefore, He urges us not merely to come to Him and then wander away, but rather to stay and abide with Him. By faith, we are to continually draw from the inexhaustible resources found in Him, appropriating all the blessings and strength He offers. Such abiding in Christ is the secret to a healthy, fruitful, and vibrant spiritual life.

The notion that Christ would only provide His people with an occasional and intermittent token of His favor is a profound distortion and misrepresentation of God's Word. Christ's desire—the desire of the very Christ who saved and redeemed you—is for you to reap and enjoy all the benefits of redemption. He longs for you to live out of His fullness and receive grace upon grace (John 1:16). What a beautiful statement this is! In the original Greek text, the phrase “receiving grace upon grace” conveys the image of one grace tumbling over another grace—grace upon grace. How consistent this is with what He declares in John 10:10, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” Christ, therefore, exhorts His people, saying, “By faith, you must abide in Me, appropriate your position in Me, and make Me the absolute priority and fountain of your spiritual life.”

In Acts 11:23, Peter exhorts believers that “with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.” This is exactly what Christ is asking of us—to cleave to Him with purpose of heart. As you nourish your body daily, so you must also nourish your soul every day. Abiding in Christ requires abiding in His Word. Being alone daily with Christ and His Word in our closet is not an extraordinary expression of spiritual life but rather an essential discipline of a healthy spiritual life.

Despite the busyness of life, you must carve out time daily to be alone with Christ and His Word, for the more you abide in His written Word, the more you will abide in the living Word, Jesus

Christ. Many can testify from experience that seasons of faithful engagement with Christ's Word lead to spiritual flourishing, while times of neglect bring decline. Yet Christ makes it clear that your spiritual life need not decline. Everything you need for a vibrant, healthy spiritual life is to be found in Him.

Christ, therefore, lovingly summons His people to abide in Him—in His wounds, in the merits of His active and passive obedience, in His finished work, in His promises, and in His Word. Even more compellingly, He urges us to “continue” (or abide) in His love (John 15:9). Carefully note the wording here. He does not command us to abide in our love *for Him* but rather in His unwavering love *for us*—a love so profound and all-encompassing that we cannot fully comprehend it. That love is eternal, infinite, and steadfast. Christ underscores this by declaring that He loves His people with the same love with which the Father loves Him (John 15:9). This incomprehensible and unconditional love fuels His abiding commitment to our spiritual well-being and His desire for us to flourish spiritually.

By commanding us to abide in Him, Christ makes it clear that though we are entirely indebted to His gracious work in us, we must not be passive in our spiritual lives. Instead, He calls us to actively focus on Him and exercise faith in Him. His command is reasonable because, as true believers, we are partakers of His Spirit. Christ is not asking the impossible when He exhorts us, by virtue of His Spirit dwelling in us, to take full advantage of our relationship with Him. Christ wants believers to know and understand that the riches to be found in Him are unsearchable and inexhaustible. By abiding in Him, Christ desires, as stated earlier, to minister grace for grace to us out of His infinite fullness.

When we read of Enoch and Noah walking with God, Scripture sets before us a model for the Christian life. Though they were Old Testament saints, they were walking with (or abiding in) God—in the Christ yet to be born. Christ's message in John 15 is that walking with God—abiding in Christ—should be the norm of the Christian life rather than the exception. Christ, therefore,

lovingly reminds us, “My dear people, My dear branches, since everything you need to nourish and sustain your spiritual life is found in Me, abide in Me.”

Peter beautifully emphasizes this profound truth when he writes, “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (2 Peter 1:3). This verse could not be clearer: all things that pertain to life and godliness are given to us through Christ. As stated earlier, Christ said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). Regrettably, however, believers often live far below these privileges. Why? Because we fail to abide in Christ.

The call to “abide in Me” is in the present tense, meaning that Christ exhorts believers to abide in Him continually and habitually—to abide in Him again and again. If you’ve ever read Andrew Murray’s classic work on abiding in Christ, you will know how masterfully he unpacks this essential spiritual exercise. He explains that abiding in Christ is the most powerful and effective remedy against the commission of sin. Murray once stated, “You cannot consciously abide in Christ and sin simultaneously.” He is not implying that Christians can live sinlessly but rather that abiding in Christ and sinning are mutually exclusive activities. When we are focused on Christ and are consciously abiding in Him, how can our souls then be attracted to sin? Yet we are so often vulnerable to sin because we have not learned to abide in Christ daily. This truth is one of the essential components of what Christ is teaching us here and should be deeply convicting to the believer.

### **A Profound Reality**

In Colossians 1:10, Paul calls us to “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.” Christ drives this point home when He says, “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in

the vine; no more can ye except ye, abide in me.” Fruit-bearing—demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit as described in Galatians 5—is impossible apart from abiding in Christ. While it is possible to live a moral, outwardly decent life without abiding in Him, such a life lacks true spiritual fruitfulness.

There are professing believers who appear to be connected to Christ the vine but are, in reality, fruitless branches. Christ makes it clear that it is impossible to be fruitful or Christlike unless you obey His loving command to abide in Him. When Christians fail to abide in Christ, which sadly happens all too often, it results in an experiential disconnect—not a real disconnect. Although the objective relationship between the believer and Christ is secure and unbreakable, the subjective experience of that relationship can be negatively impacted by sin and backsliding.

The experiential disconnect that will then occur between Christ and our souls will resemble what occurs when a child’s disobedience negatively impacts the parent-child relationship. Though the relationship itself will never be in jeopardy when a child sins and offends the parent, a breach of fellowship will occur. That breach cannot be healed until the cause is addressed through repentance, sorrow, and forgiveness. Similarly, when believers neglect to abide in Christ, disregard His Word, and fail to walk in fellowship with Him, an experiential disconnect will manifest itself.

Christ urges His people to abide in Him because doing so is essential for consistent and enduring fruitfulness. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit unless it remains connected to the vine and draws life from it, believers cannot be spiritually fruitful without a real, living connection with Christ. Experientially abiding in Him by faith is the key to a flourishing spiritual life.

Again, Christ emphasizes in this passage that continual fruit-bearing should be the norm of the Christian life. However, this is only possible through continually abiding in Him. True, vital Christianity consists of a daily and functional relationship with Christ. As stated earlier, God instituted the morning and evening

sacrifice so that His redeemed people could live in daily fellowship with Him—fellowship that was possible because of the sacrificial offerings which anticipated Christ's ultimate sacrifice.

The apostle John reminds us in 1 John 2:1–2: “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins.” The more we abide in Christ, the more sensitive we will become to sin, and the quicker we will recognize that we have grieved the Spirit. In such moments, we must immediately return to Christ, repelling Satan's lies and distortions that aim to keep us from coming to Christ and abiding in Him. Thus, in order to abide in Christ continually, we must ever be mindful of the words of the apostle John: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). There is, therefore, no reason for a believer to continue living apart from Him.

Sadly, many Christians appear insensitive to sin because they are not abiding in Christ and thus are living at a distance from Him. However, if we walk with Christ daily, feeding on His Word and maintaining fellowship with Him—not just during our closet moments but also throughout the day—we will become increasingly sensitive to sin and more ready to confess it immediately. Failure to do so will not only interrupt our fellowship with Christ but will also render us unfruitful. Satan will, therefore, do everything in his power to keep us from abiding in Christ. Though he cannot rob the believer of his salvation, he can rob him of the joy of that salvation that issues forth from abiding in Christ—and consequently keep the believer from living a Christ-honoring and fruitful life.

Since habitual fruit-bearing is the mark of a healthy branch, habitual fruit-bearing is the only reliable evidence of being in Christ. The visible Christlikeness that manifests itself habitually in the lives of true believers is the legitimate evidence of our invisible relationship with Him. This invisible and vital union must become visible in a Christlike life.

In John 8:31, Christ says, “If ye continue in my word,” or as it can also be translated, “If ye abide in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.” Professing Christians cannot claim to know, believe in, or love Christ—the living Word—unless they consistently honor His written Word in their walk of life. All who are united to Christ the living Word will naturally, as new creatures in Christ, desire to live in obedience to His written Word. These two experiential realities are inseparably linked: union with Christ always manifests in likeness to Christ—union with the living Word always produces obedience to His written Word.

### **A Precious Promise**

Having stated the vital relationship between Himself and His people, Christ also gives us a precious and encouraging promise: “I am the vine, ye are the branches.” This declaration is the last of the seven “I am” statements in the Gospel of John and is exquisitely beautiful. Simply put, because Christ, as Jehovah in the flesh, is the “I am,” we, His people, are what we are. “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit.” Notice that Christ is not merely speaking of a little or occasional fruit but rather of *much* fruit.

What a gloriously assuring promise Christ articulates here for all who abide in Him! How beautifully He reiterates and stresses the intimate, experiential, and unbreakable union between Himself and His people! Christ assures His believing people, “I am your vine, and you are My branches.” This profound reminder of our extraordinary and real relationship with Him guarantees that He will support and sustain us in that relationship.

In light of this intimate and irrevocable relationship, Christ urges us to abide in Him—to live in daily fellowship with Him—and thereby fully embrace the blessings this abiding will yield. He desires that His people would have a functional, daily, and fruitful relationship with Him—a relationship marked by spiritual vitality and abundant joy. The Christ who declares in John 10:10, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more

abundantly,” also declares, “These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full” (John 15:11). The Christ who has loved His people with an everlasting love, who secured their salvation by His death and resurrection, and ever lives to make intercession for them, is so desirous that they would also prosper and flourish spiritually.

This desire aligns with Christ’s passionate desire to glorify His Father who had sent Him, and thus He declares, “*Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples*” (John 15:8; emphasis mine). Consequently, the more fruit believers bear, the more Christlike they will become, and the more Christlike they become, the more the Father will be honored in them. The Father delights in seeing the reflection of His only begotten Son in His people. Indeed, this is the very purpose of our redemption!

In the glorious future that awaits God’s people, the Father will forever delight Himself in His redeemed people as He beholds in them the perfect image of His only begotten Son. They, as His redeemed and adopted sons and daughters, will, in turn, forever delight themselves in Christ, beholding in His blessed countenance the glory of the Father. However, this mutual delight already begins here on earth as believers cultivate a real, living, and genuine relationship with Christ by abiding in Him. And the more fruit we bear by abiding in Him, the more His and our Father will be glorified!

Therefore, a life of consistent Christlikeness should also characterize us, just as it did the early Christians, who were first called “Christians” in Antioch because of their pervasive and infectious Christlike and Christ-centered witness. Can that also be said of us? Paul writes in Philippians 1:11, “*Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God*” (emphasis mine). Such fruitfulness ought to be the desire of every believer—to bear the fruits of Christlike righteousness by abiding in Christ for God’s glory and praise.

Christ reinforces this truth both positively and negatively. After urging us to abide in Him to bear much fruit, He admonishes believers that “without me ye can do nothing.” This passage is one of the most misquoted passages of Scripture, often taken out of context and used, instead, as an excuse for spiritual indifference or inability. However, Christ’s intention with these words is not to justify fruitlessness but rather to emphasize the urgency of habitually abiding in Him. When viewed in its context, He is saying, “Without abiding in Me, you cannot bear any fruit—you cannot live a fruitful Christian life.”

Thus, His message is clear: “Apart from Me, you cannot make it. Without Me, you will not be fruitful. Without Me, you cannot bear fruit.” These words are not meant to discourage us but rather to encourage us. By way of the negative statement, “without me ye can do nothing,” Christ simply wishes to reinforce negatively what He has just stated positively, namely, that by abiding in Him, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13).

Christ lovingly exhorts us that we should not attempt to live the Christian life in our own strength. He is saying, “Without abiding in Me, you will fail. Apart from Me, you will stumble, backslide, lose your witness, and become fruitless. Therefore, abide in Me.” Thus, His loving imperative to abide in Him is both a reminder of our dependence on Him and an invitation to experience the abundant fullness of life that He promises.

How grievous it is when those who profess the name of Christ become fruitless, backslide, and become ensnared in world conformity! What dishonor they bring to Christ! This tragic reality is all too common, as many claim the name of Christ but live in ways that contradict their profession. Such a contradictory lifestyle deeply dishonors the Savior—and, by extension, His Father. In a worst-case scenario, it may even be that their connection to Christ is not genuine, despite their outward claims. Christ Himself addresses this reality, speaking of fruitless branches that appear connected to the vine but bear no fruit.

Granted, there will be ups and downs in the spiritual lives of God's children. There may even be times of serious regression and backsliding. However, the Father, the divine husbandman, will not permit such spiritual decline to persist indefinitely. He is jealous of the honor of His beloved Son and, therefore, is deeply committed to caring for the vine, which is His only begotten Son. Since the Father gave His Son and allowed Him to be wounded so that we could be grafted into Him, He will not forsake the work of His own hands. If we backslide or stumble, He will lovingly use the pruning knife of affliction and adversity to restore us so that we may abide in Christ once more.

Dear reader, are you a fruitful branch of the Vine, Jesus Christ? Are you abiding in Him? As Hosea 14:8 declares, "From me is thy fruit found." This is precisely the point Christ is making in the passage we have considered. He is the source and fountain of your spiritual life. Everything you need for the Christian life is to be found in Him, and He provides it abundantly. Christ assures us that those who abide in Him will never be put to shame. He promises, "If you abide in Me, I will abide in you." In John 15:7–8, He says, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples."

Let us, therefore, examine ourselves. God forbid that our connection with Christ and His church is merely an external one, and we would prove to be fruitless branches in the end. Christ states in John 15:6 that the future of such branches is to be burned—to be consigned to that place where the wrath of God the Father will burn forever against all who have rejected His Son so freely offered to us in the gospel. However, what is impossible in the realm of nature is possible in the realm of grace. Christ, by His Spirit, still transforms fruitless branches into fruit-bearing branches. Therefore, while He proffers peace and pardon, flee to this willing and able Savior of sinners who will in no wise cast you out (John 6:37).

Finally, dear believer, if your spiritual life is weak, if you have grown distant from Christ or have become entangled with the world, repent today. Fall at the feet of the Savior and confess your failure to abide in Him. He is willing to receive you—seventy times seven times! He is gracious and faithful, ready to forgive your sin, cleanse you from all unrighteousness, and renew His call to you: “*Abide in me.*” If, by faith, you (again) abide in Him and He in you, you will indeed bring forth much fruit. Amen.