

## #42 “What Does It Mean to Abide in Christ?”

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Jesus spoke frequently to His disciples about abiding in Him. To abide in Him means to remain in Him. There is a sense in which all true believers will abide because Christ is faithful to complete the work He has begun in them (Hebrews 12:2, Philippians 1:6). Thus, Christ can say in John 6:56 that those who eat of His flesh and drink of His blood will abide in Him. In other words, those who truly embrace Him and receive Him as their Savior will be received as His children and will never be cast out of God’s family (Hebrews 13:5). Alternatively, those who refuse to receive Him as Savior are said to have the wrath of God abiding on them (John 3:36). So, in one sense, abiding means either belonging to Christ, in which case we will be kept by Him, or remaining under the wrath of God because of unrepentant sin and refusing to receive Christ as Savior.

In John 15:4, Jesus speaks of abiding in a secondary sense when He commands the disciples, “Abide in Me, and I in you.” Jesus is not speaking of their salvation but of something else related to their sanctification. In the previous verse, He addressed them as those who were “already clean,” meaning that they were already saved. Thus, He is not telling them to abide in Him in the same way as He preached to the unbelieving Jews in John 6:56. Rather, He is speaking of living lives of abundant fruitfulness. We as Christians can either fall to living a life of mediocrity and dead works, or we can be vessels through whom Christ is able to work His power and accomplish His kingdom purposes. Those who abide in Christ in this sense are promised to bear much fruit (John 15:5), to have their prayers answered (John 15:7), and to experience fullness of joy (John 15:11).

All believers are called to bear fruit, though how much will vary based upon a person’s faith and obedience (Romans 12:3, Matthew 13:23). Christ’s desire, of course, is that we bear much fruit, not just some or a little. If we abide in Him, we will bear much fruit (John 15:5). Fruit-bearing involves becoming like Christ as the Spirit conforms us more and more to the image of Christ (Galatians 5:22-23, Romans 12:1-2). Fruit involves an internal heart transformation to be loving, joyful, at peace, self-controlled, and any other manifestation of Christlikeness. Fruit also involves external behavior and obedience, such as any kind of good work, service, or ministry in the name of Christ and accomplished by His grace and power (Titus 3:14).

Abiding in Christ requires, first, that we obey God by keeping Christ’s commandments (John 15:10, 1 John 2:5-6). If we regard sin in our hearts, we cannot be fully filled with the Spirit of God (Ephesians 5:18). We will still have the Spirit, but we will be hindering and suppressing Him such that He cannot accomplish His will within us because of our hardness of hearts (1 Thessalonians 5:19). We will likely grow confused as to His

leading, we will struggle in our prayer lives, we will lose our joy and peace, and we will find ourselves striving in our own power. Sinning as believers doesn't separate us from the love of God in terms of our eternity, but it does separate us from being infused with the power and love of God to do effective, God-honoring ministry. There is no guarantee that we will bear genuine spiritual fruit if we serve with unconfessed sin in our hearts (1 Corinthians 9:17). Leaving sin unconfessed and living with secret sins is a quick road to a powerless ministry and a life of dead works. If we want to bear fruit and abide in Christ, we need to obey Him willingly and without secret sins.

Secondly, abiding in Christ requires that we recognize, acknowledge, and by faith live in light of the reality of our dependence upon God. John 15:5 makes it clear that, since Jesus is the vine and we are dependent branches, we need Him. Jesus says, "Apart from Me, you can do nothing." He will give us all of the resources and strength that we need to be able to do the works which He has prepared for us to do (2 Peter 1:3, Ephesians 2:10), but we must yield to Him, surrendering our will and desires to Him (Zechariah 4:6). Any mindset that retains self-sufficiency and not full reliance upon Christ will lead to dead works rather than genuine, Spirit-led, Spirit-filled, and Spirit-generated fruit.

God's desire is that we bear fruit that remains (John 15:16), meaning that it will prove to be of God and not of man. It will be a result of our yielding, submitting, and surrendering to Christ by faith, being willing to obey Him and letting Him have His way in our hearts. This fruit will endure the fiery test of the judgment seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:15), and we will be able to have confidence at His coming (1 John 2:28). Dead works give glory to the worker, whereas true fruit gives glory to God. When we truly let Christ work in us, we will be amazed at what He can do. It will be clear that such fruit is a result of God's grace working through human weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9-10), as the disciples certainly experienced themselves, being uneducated and untrained men (Acts 4:13). They were ordinary, but their God was extraordinary, and through them, He did extraordinary things. The same can be true for us.

We can live lives of obedience, joy, and fruitfulness as we abide in Christ, or we can live lives of feeble fruitbearing which will lead to joylessness and few rewards in heaven (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). God wants us to bear much fruit, and He came to give us abundant life (John 10:10). May we live lives filled with His power and love, bearing abundant fruit as our offering of thanksgiving to Him.