VINES AND BRANCHES

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Category: John Fifteen

Article # one: **Intro**

Jesus called Himself a door ("I am the door"), bread ("I am the bread which came down from heaven"), light ("I am the light of the world") and a vine ("I am the true vine"). We walk through Jesus the door to enter the Father's kingdom, we eat the "bread of life" that we may have eternal life, we walk in the light to escape darkness, we attach ourselves to "the true vine" so we may bear fruit.

John 15 is the only chapter in John's gospel that is entirely red ink. Jesus alone is speaking. Do you recall the words of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 7:24 - "Whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man." John 15 is the pure words of our Teacher, and we would be wise to build our lives on what He is saying to us in this chapter.

Jesus directed these chapter 15 words to the twelve-minus-one after the Passover meal while Judas was about his nasty business of betrayal. However these words are also directed to each of us. It is important to see that, as Jesus was talking to them, He is talking to you whenever you read His words attentively. Otherwise the words would not have been recorded.

When Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches," Peter, for example, was to take this personal and realize from his Master's perspective he, Peter, is a branch. Likewise you and I. From your Master's perspective you are a branch. Jesus Christ calls you a branch and a branch is what you should consider yourself to be.

Jesus spoke John 15 to you as certainly as he spoke it to the eleven, as certainly as He spoke to anyone who is His. These words are not to the world but to the church. They are grand words, no words loftier, yours to be prized.

Jesus had been raised in practicality and knew about such things as shepherding and fishing and farming and agriculture, though apparently He was most familiar with carpentry. He was a man (Man) of the land who assimilated His surroundings. He not only noticed the widow who gave her last, He noticed the fig tree not bearing fruit and the healthy grape branches that did.

In this series we study His words, specifically verses one to eight. As John 3:16 is crucial to the world, so these words of John 15:1-8 are crucial to the church. Without the truths taught here, as taught elsewhere in various expressions, we cannot (cannot, cannot) bear good fruit. I strongly suggest you memorize these verses.

J O H N 1 5 : 1 – 8 :

1. “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.
2. “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.
3. “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.
4. “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.
5. “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.
6. “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.
7. “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.
8. “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”

C h a l l e n g e : *This series of articles is about abiding. At this moment you are abiding in, receiving nourishment from, someone or something. Perhaps you are attached to more than one 'vine', even several. Who you are is a result of who you have been fastened to during your christian years. Your God is a jealous God, jealous for you and your affections. Your Master, your Teacher, your King, Your Lord speaks to you through John chapter 15. If you seriously consider His words, and make room in your life for His words, you will prosper. You will be different to the degree you embrace them.*

P r a y e r : *Jesus Christ, my Lord and my God, anoint the reader and anoint my words, in Your priceless name I pray.* (And hopefully the reader says, “Amen!)

Article # two: **The True Vine**

J E S U S : *I am the true vine.* (John 15:1)

When our Lord calls himself “the *true* vine,” he alludes to the actuality there are vines, spiritual vines, of another sort. The pharisees would be in this category.

Attached to the pharisees were most. Their invitation extended to the people was the same as Christ’s, “Abide in (us).” Like Jesus, they wanted the people to be nourished from their vine alone. They were jealous for their affection, reverence, loyalty and money. Unlike Jesus, they wouldn’t take no for an answer.

Because both wanted them the two vines clashed. The war for the allegiance of the branches began immediately after Christ’s forty-day fast in the wilderness. They debated publicly and Jesus won, so the religious leaders reached into their bag of dirty tricks and soon their competition was nailed to a

cross. Three days after the cross they realized the war was only beginning.

A. W. T o z e r : *A natural but carnal desire on the part of a gifted minority (is) to bring the less gifted majority to heel and get them to where they will not stand in the way of their soaring ambitions.* (God Tells the Man Who Cares)

Not much has changed. There is still a battle between “the true vine” and the false.

Not everyone in North America is attached to a spiritual vine. Some simply do not give spiritual matters much concern. But many do, and all that do attach themselves to a spiritual vine, and of those most are *not* connected to “the true vine.” Many are attached to a cult vine, a new age vine, a *works* vine, a false religion vine. We are interested in evangelicals and will turn our attention to the evangelical vine.

One could use many words to define evangelicalism. Perhaps it's suffice to define evangelicalism as: *A mixture*. Or: *Christ, plus, plus,plus.*

Evangelicalism is a mixture. (Adversely, pharisaism is *not* a mixture.) Evangelicalism contains in part - embraces somewhat - Jesus Christ. (Pharisaism rejects Christ.) Evangelicalism is attached to both "the true vine" AND a false vine, the false being the collective traditions and dictates of men. Being attached to evangelicalism is being attached to both "the true vine" AND a false vine.

J E S U S : *He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.* (John 14:21)

The test of love is obedience. Obedience not only tells us who we love but who we abide in. Evangelicals obey the words of Christ AND the words of men. Can you see why evangelicalism has both good fruit and bad?

A story: Several years ago a brother in Christ was saying he tithed to his 'home' church. I pleaded with him to reconsider, there is more fruitful ways of directing his givings, most of his tithes would be consumed by building expenses and salaries, he could invest in work in third world countries thus multiplying the effect of his contributions. He refused to heed. Had he invested those thousands of dollars more wisely, more in keeping to the heart of Jesus, multitudes would have escaped that horrid place Jesus warned us about and instead lived in eternal joy with Jesus and the Father.

Question: Who does this brother abide in? My answer would be both Christ and man. If you find this confusing, it gets more complicated yet. Another story:

A brother in Christ wants out of evangelicalism, but his wife has no intention of leaving. So he stays. While seeking understanding in this matter, the Lord gave me three words: Adam and Eve. *Adam and Eve?* I inquired. And then came the understanding. Adam loved God and Adam loved Eve. When tested he chose his wife over God, just like this brother chose his wife over the prompting of the Holy Spirit. This evangelical is attached to the vine of Christ AND the vine of evangelicalism AND the vine of his wife.

Evangelicals are attached to more than one vine, perhaps several. All *other* vines are idols. If evangelicals were attached only, or at least primarily, to "the true vine" this series of articles would not be written (and this website not created). Evangelicalism is one of many, to quote myself (above, first paragraph), "spiritual vines of another sort." That's *the* problem, and all problems are rooted in that problem.

Though Jesus is the only true vine, He is one of many. Obedience to His commandments is proof of abiding. Faithfulness is abiding in Him alone. Personal revival will begin when one renounces all other vines, all other lords.

It is okay to challenge all who claim authority and special status. More, it is dutiful. What one refuses to bring under the light of Scripture is an idol.

A. W. T o z e r : *To love God is to love truth.* (God Tells the Man Who Cares)

C h a l l e n g e : *Ask yourself some hard questions: "In whom am I abiding? Who am I obeying? Who has my allegiance?" Seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit. (And God bless you!)*

P r a y e r : *Triune God, help us! Holy Spirit, Your anointing.* (And hopefully the reader says, "Amen!")

Article # three: **The Vinedresser (Part 1)**

T h e V I N E : *My Father is the vinedresser.* (John 15:1)

T h e V I N E D R E S S E R : *This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!* (Luke 9:35)

T h e V I N E : *I have given to them the words You have given Me.* (John 17:8)

"Them" is the eleven, "them" is me, "them" is you. The Father gave John 15 to Jesus, Jesus passed this chapter on to us. John 15 is a gift of the Father to us. It is a divine teaching on relationship and it's imperative that we 'get it'. Why?

John 15 teaches us two requirements for answered prayer:
1. We must abide in Christ and
2. Christ's words must abide in us.

Unless these two conditions are met, prayers, though they be fervent, will go unanswered. So we must fully understand the word *abide.* What does it mean to *abide* in Christ and what does it mean to have Christ's words *abide* in us?

When Jesus talks *abide,* He is talking *relationship.* There is no better example of a wholesome relationship than between the Son and the Father, the Vine and the Vinedresser. So let's look at that association.

We know Jesus was devoted to His (and now our) Father by His speech. He taught us, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." Words express our inside. Jesus spoke much of the Father as revealed in the gospels. Listen to your Master in the gospel of John:

"The Father….. the Father….. My Father….. the Father….. the Father….. the Father….. the Father….. the Father….. the Father….. the Father…. the Father….. the Father….. the Father….. the Father….. the Father….. God the Father….. the Father….. the Father….. the Father….. the Father….. the Father….. the Father….. the Father….. the living Father….. the Father….. My Father….." I will stop here, at the end of chapter six (of twenty-one), having, I am sure, made the point that the heart of Jesus was filled with the Father. That's abiding.

To further help us understand *abiding,* let us now find an illustration of a christian abiding in Jesus. Philemon is Paul's shortest letter, one chapter:

"Of Christ Jesus….. the Lord Jesus Christ….. the Lord Jesus Christ….. in Christ Jesus….. in Christ….. of Jesus Christ….. in the Lord….. in the Lord….. in Christ Jesus….. our Lord Jesus Christ." Philemon is not an exception. Paul mentions Jesus, or refers to Jesus, about 136 times in Romans and an average of 116 times in his two letters to the Corinthians. Again, that's abiding.

So let's look at these two examples of abiding again.

1. The Vine and the Vinedresser.

T h e V I N E : *I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.* (John 17:4)

It was the 24/7 relationship with His Father that enabled Jesus to fulfill the high calling on His life. Out of this powerful bond one planted seed (Jesus) resulted in a crop of millions, perhaps billions, of sons and daughters.

2. The Vine and a branch. Out of this superior relationship came much good. The branch, Paul, finished his course and has earned a "crown of righteousness."

T h e V I N E : *The Father who dwells in Me does the works.* (John 14:10)

"The Father….. does the works" through Jesus. And Jesus "does the works" through those relationally attached to Him. As relationship empowered Jesus, so relationship enabled Paul and enables us. No relationship, no power. Improving relationship increases power and ability. Devaluing relationship decreases power and ability.

C h a l l e n g e : *The fruit of your life will coincide, exactly, with your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. You can better that relationship by asking the Lord, fervently and often, to better the relationship.*

P r a y e r : *Father, teach us to abide in Your Son. Father, anoint this article. In His name.* (And hopefully the reader says, "Amen!")

Article # four: **The Vinedresser (Part 2)**

J E S U S : *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, that it may bear more fruit.* (John 15:1,2)

The Father prunes you. If you didn't know it before you know it now. It's the word. Now you must progress from *knowing* to *realizing.* To realize is to abide in the awareness of something you know. Realizing is apprehending a truth. Meditation (or purposeful consideration) helps us advance from fruitless knowing to fruitful apprehending.

This is vital: The Father only prunes those who want to be and ask to be pruned. He works through (as He saves through and sanctifies through) our cooperation, never trespassing the free will He has given. Pruning is a beautiful thing, and you get as much as you want and petition for.

And it is important to know the Father's methodology. *How* does He prune us? Christians have imagined some scary tactics the Father uses to prune His children: Causing (or allowing) accidents, sickness, various heartaches, even temptation. John 15 teaches how the Father clips the bad and useless and ugly from our lives.

J E S U S : *You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.* (John 15:3)

To prune means to cleanse. The eleven had been made clean by the pruning (or cleansing) of Jesus' teachings, "the word which I have spoken to you."

I can *hear* you!.... *But I thought it was the* Father *who does the pruning!* The Father prunes through Jesus. (As the Father does everything through Jesus.)

J E S U S : *The words which you hear are not Mine but the Father's who sent Me.* (John 14:24)

Again, what the Father does He does through His Son.

P a u l : *There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.* (1Tim. 2:5)

Jesus is the go-between, the Father on one side, christians on the other. We attained the Father through Jesus, the Father attained us through Jesus. For all eternity we relate to the Father through Jesus, for all eternity the Father relates to us through Jesus.

This is what the vineyard of John 15 looks like: Jesus is the vine.... you are one of many branches.... attached to you are clusters of grapes.... some neighboring branches have more grapes, some less.... the Father is the vinedresser.... the pruning shears are the Father's truths as taught by Christ via the Holy Spirit.

J E S U S : *By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit.* (John 15:8)

The Father was glorified by the fruit of Christ's life. Since, He has been glorified through His obedient

adopted sons and daughters.

J E S U S : *I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.* (John 17:4)

C h a l l e n g e : *You have one chance to glorify your Father on earth. Fruit-bearing season is coming to a close. Soon you will be gone, living elsewhere, opportunity either lost or seized.*

P r a y e r : *Father, we invite Your Spirit to deal with our hearts and minds that we may glorify Your name on earth as did our Elder Brother.* (And hopefully the reader says, "Amen!")

Article # five: **The Eleven**

The eleven were privileged beyond measure. They were discipled by Jesus for three years.

You and I have known a few good people, but only good by human standards. We have known a few brave and generous, but only compared to ourselves. Jesus was in an entirely other realm of integrity and goodness and greatness, and the eleven spent many of their days in the presence of this unique person.

They shared the campfire with the spotless "Lamb of God." Broke bread with the only person "who knew no sin." Shared a boat with the long-awaited Messiah. Walked the hills with "Immanuel..... God with us."

The eleven were privileged beyond measure. Did you know the eleven were chosen by the Father?

J E S U S : *They were Yours, You gave them to Me..... Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition.* (John 17:6,12)

And did you know the Father has a specific purpose for *your* life? As with the eleven, the Father, the good vinedresser, is active, through Jesus, bringing it to pass.

Now back to the eleven. These men lived, for three years, as none other has lived, under the immediate ministry of our precious Lord Jesus Christ. In them was invested the treasure of the gospel, and in them the responsibility of preaching Christ to the world that hated Him and them. So what becomes of a life discipled by Jesus Himself?

The eleven were never bored. Boredom will certainly creep into any life outside of Christ, but never the life in Christ. They had many adventures:

Twice they saw thousands fed with a few loaves and a couple of fish. They were amazed to see a violent storm submit to His voice. They witnessed thousands healed and thousands delivered from demonic strangleholds. Their Master bested the feared scribes and pharisees. They were shocked at the sight of a large herd of swine rushing madly into the sea. Lazarus was raised from death in their

sight. A fig tree wilted under His curse. They were there when Jesus took a whip to the moneychangers. They sat under teachings no man had before spoken. They witnessed Jesus raised from the dead, nail holes in His feet and hands. They gazed into the clouds as their Master disappeared from sight. Tongues of fire settled upon their heads and they found themselves speaking in strange languages. Infirmities were healed and demons cast out at their command. Under their preaching ministry multitudes were born into a new spiritual life.

Yes, there were distresses:

They got homesick. Their muscles ached from many miles on dusty roads. Often they collapsed around the fire in exhaustion after a day of ministering to the crowds. They had a share in the hatred directed at Christ. Wherever they traveled there was conflict. They suffered the guilt of deserting their Master when things got scary. All heard the mob chant, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" and watched helpless as their Lord was lifted in disgrace on a cross. They hid in fear from their many persecutors. All but John were martyred.

And then their eternity begins:

The eleven are at this moment relationally closer to Jesus than most. As they were in intimacy here, they are in intimacy there. Here they shared the campfire, there they share the fire of His glorified Presence. They are highly honored, highly esteemed. They have no desire to be anywhere else.

The eleven were eleven branches abiding in the one "true vine." The abundant fruit of their lives was a result of that abiding. The power required to fulfill their commission came through relationship. The life of the vine continued to flow through the branches when Christ was seated at the right hand of God.

C h a l l e n g e : *The eleven were no more fruitful then their relationship. And no less. Same with you. You can be more fruitful. Your power is relative to your abiding. Christian, choose Christ!*

P r a y e r : *Father, we require much of the Holy Spirit to make wise choices. I pray a full measure of Your Holy Spirit upon the reader, the writer and this article. In Jesus' precious name.* (And hopefully the reader adds much power to this prayer by saying a fervent, "Amen!")

Article # six: **The Twelfth**

Judas Iscariot ate with, traveled with, listened to, worked with and admired the same Jesus as the eleven, yet now they live in two different worlds, one of continuous woe, the other unbroken joy.

Four questions:

Question # 1: Was Judas *never* attached to the "true vine" or was the branch once attached and became detached?

J E S U S : *Any branch in Me that does not bear fruit (that stops bearing) He cuts away….. If a person does not dwell in Me, he is thrown out like a (broken-off) branch, and withers; such branches are gathered up and thrown into the fire, and they are burned.* (John 15:2,6 Amp)

It seems Jesus is saying there are branches once abiding in Him that are no longer attached. It is quite possible Judas was such.

Question # 2: How many fit into the category of "does not bear fruit (that stops bearing)"?

In my opinion, many. If there were fifty new converts in a room, all zealous to serve their new-found Master, several will eventually stop bearing good fruit altogether, a few will bear much, most will bear little. Those bearing little fruit will not be cut from "the vine"; they will make it to heaven. However, there will be a day when they will see their large stack of "wood, hay, straw" burned by fire.

Question # 3: Did Judas (or will Judas) make it to heaven?

J E S U S : *Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.* (Mat. 26:24)

Conclude for yourself if Judas is in heaven or….. somewhere else.

A large portion of the gospel churches are taught "once saved, always saved" (eternal security). That would imply Judas was never saved. However Christ's language seems to indicate otherwise. Since Judas "betrayed" Christ he must have been relationally attached.

Also, there is a growing number who believe people like Judas will be included in "the restoration of all things" (Acts 3:21) and others say, no, "the restoration of all things" is limited to that "which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets" (same verse). It does seem if Judas were one day to be restored the words of Christ - "It would have been good for that man if he had not been born" - would be less than true. (Even if it took Judas a million years to be restored, he would have a billion years plus to enjoy heaven.)

Jesus taught (at the sermon of the mount) the wise man is he who hears His words and builds his life upon those words. The eleven were wise. And Jesus taught the foolish man is he who hears but does not build on His words. Such was Iscariot. They who bear but little fruit are somewhere between wise and foolish, wise to respond partially, foolish to not give themselves over fully to the Master's words of instruction, reproof, correction.

Branches who bear less and less fruit have reason to be nervous. One day little might become none, the "vinedresser" will come with His pruning shears, and soon those "branches will be gathered up, and thrown in the fire, and….. burned."

Question # 4: Why did Judas betray Jesus?

It seems Judas had more confidence in the wisdom of established leadership than in Christ. Their words had preeminence over His words. Judas was a branch more attached to a counterfeit vine than “the true vine.”

In my opinion, Joe and Jill Average Evangelical are more attached to christianity than Christ. Loyalty is toward His, not Him.

A. W. T o z e r : *Among the gospel churches Christ is now in fact little more than a beloved symbol.* (God Tells the Man Who Cares)

A. W. T o z e r : *The cross is her official flag, but in the week-by-week services of the church and the day-by-day conduct of her members someone else, not Christ, makes the decisions.* (God Tells the Man Who Cares)

C h a l l e n g e : *Dig a little deeper, pray more passionately, surrender totally, spend more time in the Bible, praise more fervently, abide more fully*.

P r a y e r : *Father, we make an official prayer request, made official because we ask in the name of Christ Jesus: More of Your Holy Spirit! Without Him we can't. With Him we are able. And God, anoint this article.* (And hopefully the reader says, "Amen!")

Article # seven: **Abiding**

J E S U S : *Abide in Me.* (John 15:4)

This is the crux of John 15. Get this and it's all you have to get. Miss it and you miss everything.

What does it mean to *abide* in the Lord Jesus Christ?

As stated previously, the optimum example of *abiding* is Jesus and the Father. Jesus was sent to earth by His Father, and yet the Two were very much together as the words of Jesus so sufficiently express:

J E S U S : *My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.* (John 4:34)

J E S U S : *Whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.* (John 5:19)

J E S U S : *I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.* (John 8:28)

J E S U S : *As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father.* (John 10:15)

J E S U S : *I and My Father are one.* (John 10:30)

J E S U S : *The Father is in Me, and I in Him.* (John 10:38)

J E S U S : *The Father who dwells in Me does the works.* (John 14:10)

J E S U S : *I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.* (John 16:32)

J E S U S : *I have glorified You on the earth.* (John 17:4)

That's abiding.

Abiding in means *dwelling in* or *living in*. Jesus said, "The Father who dwells in me does the works." When a branch is relationally attached to the Vine it is the Vine, not the branch, who "does the works." The sole responsibility of the branch is to be, and remain, relationally attached to the vine.

I will say it again: The sole responsibility of the branch is to be, and remain, relationally attached to the vine.

If the connection between a vine and its branch is healthy there will be a strong flow of sap from the vine into the branch causing fruit to be birthed and to mature. Spiritually, if the connection between "the true vine" and the branch is healthy there will be a continuous flow of grace from the Vine into the branch causing fruit to be birthed and to mature.

You might think, as a branch, this is all very good. But no! Therein lies the problem.

You see, the branch has an ego. The branch wants recognition. The branch has difficulty merely bearing; it wants to *produce.* It wants something to boast about to fellow branches, to be able to say, "Look what I have done (for the Lord, of course)!"

P a u l : *I have been crucified with Christ.* (Gal. 2:20)

Paul was a branch who died, mostly, to the old self life, and in so doing became very much alive in Christ. He bore much fruit, and his words still bear fruit worldwide. If every christian could say with Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ" the collective fruit would be immense, the entire world would soon be saved.

The problem is self. Self wants to govern self, quite resistant to surrender its lordship, even to Christ. That's why the connection to "the true vine" is weak. And that's why the flow of grace is inadequate. And that's why fruit is sparse.

Abiding means trusting. Jesus fully trusted the Father, the Father fully trusted the Son. Without trust there is no abiding.

Abiding means focusing. We cannot say we abide in one and consistently focus on another. Newlyweds, still in infatuation, abide in each other. They are quite focused.

Abiding means following and obeying.

Abiding means loving. (It could also mean hating.)

Abiding in Christ means being consistently aware of His presence, realizing He is *here.*

It must be said that, sadly, you will never relate perfectly with Jesus here on earth. Paul's relationship was good, as was that of John the Baptist and John the apostle and Stephen and others, but not perfect. The only perfect relationship was between Jesus and His Father.

The most we can hope for, strive for, pray for is *increase. Continual* increase. To love Him more is always doable. To have more of Him, relationally, should be the ache of our hearts. Think *more.*

It was because of the seamless relationship with the Father that Jesus accomplished His commission perfectly. Only perfection can do perfection. The few of us who manage to finish our course will do so through much stumbling and setbacks.

We are not 'altogether'. Everything we accomplish is by tenacity. We fail, dig deeper into Christ, try again. Perhaps our disappointments far outnumber our successes but we keep going, keep leaning and trusting. We gain Christ, and thereby gain power and grace and the Holy Spirit.

Now let's look at the person who tries to do, to accomplish, to succeed *outside of* Christ.

J E S U S : *Apart from Me (cut off from vital union with Me) you can do nothing.* (John 15:5 Amp)

J E S U S : *As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.* (John 15:4)

Jesus uses language difficult to misconstrue. Yet North American gospel churches are loaded with people (so-called laymen and so-called clergy or ministerial) who attempt to accomplish good works outside of "vital union with" Jesus Christ. This explains, fully, their lack of fruit. The fruit they do bear is consoling evidence there is a degree of abiding. Relationship can be measured by fruit.

Jesus promises those who abide in Him *will* bear fruit. (It is obvious the fruit we bear will be relative to the quality of that abiding.) And Jesus promises those who do not abide in Him *will not* bear fruit.

Wisdom cries out: *Meditate on, seriously consider what Jesus is saying to you in John 15. If you desire to bear fruit you MUST abide in Him. If you do abide in Him you WILL bear fruit.*

We *bear* fruit, we don't (cannot) *produce* fruit. We are fruit-bearers, not fruit-producers. Though we cannot produce, many (most?) spend their christian lives trying.

There are two notable truths about fruit-producers:

1. They do not produce fruit.

2. They do not bear fruit.

Those living to produce do so by self-effort. They are leaning on, trusting in, glorifying, yes, abiding in self.

Jesus said, "Apart from Me you can do nothing." What does *nothing* mean? Jesus was not saying, "Without Me you cannot tie your shoelaces" (though that is true). He was telling us in no uncertain

language we cannot do any spiritual good unless we are relationally attached to Him. Listen again to our Teacher:

J E S U S : *I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.* (John 15:5)

C h a l l e n g e : *Jesus cannot abide in you (be relationally attached to you) unless you abide in Him. Relationship necessitates two. The worth of relationship has been determined, not by Jesus, but by you. There is more, dear brother, dear sister! There is always more!*

P r a y e r : *Jesus! Our heart's cry is "more"! Increase! More today than yesterday! More tomorrow than today! More next year than this year! More, dear Jesus, more! And my heart's cry is that You anoint this article. Thank You, Lord. (And hopefully the reader says, "Amen!")*

Article # eight: **Words**

J E S U S : *If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.* (John 15:7)

Because nothing is more important to a christian than knowing how to get prayers answered, and because answered prayers glorify the Father, we listen again to the words of Pastor Jesus: "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you."

Two requirements must be satisfied to get a response from heaven to your requests:

Condition # 1: You must abide in Christ.

Condition # 2: Christ's words must abide in you.

In this article we focus on the second requirement. Regarding spiritual matters, it is possible the words of many abide in you. Some of those words are beautiful, some ugly. The beautiful are genuine, the ugly are false. The beautiful set free, the ugly bring bondage. True words originate from "the true vine"; false words come from false vines. You are responsible for the words abiding in you.

J E S U S : *You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.* (John 15:14)

And you are the world's friend if you do whatever the world entices. You are the friend of god custom and god tradition if you do whatever they command. You are your friends' friend if you do what they want.

The branch can know what vine she is attached to by considering whom it is she obeys. One can easily determine whose disciple he is by the words he cherishes.

False vines speak (and write) false words. Many counterfeit words indicate many counterfeit vines.

The pharisees, leaders of many, typify the false vine. Today there are many false vines out there beyond evangelical circles. And within.

It is false words of false vines that keep the evangelical congregation in apathetic weakness. A crossroad is the time when an accepted false word is confronted by a true word. Three examples:

Crossroad # 1: Mr. and Mrs. Average have for years called John Smith "Pastor," just like everyone else, and refer to him as "our pastor." One day they learn there is no scriptural precedent for such a practice, that it is an insult to Jesus to call a man *Pastor* because He, Jesus, is the sole pastor of His flock. But if they stopped calling John *Pastor John* John would certainly take offense, and it is self-defeating to offend the very hub of church life.

Crossroad # 2: "Pastor" John announced from the pulpit tithing to the church will now be a requirement for membership. Until now the Averages gave half of their donations to the church and half elsewhere including missionary friends overseas. They had heard both sides of the tithing argument and have serious reservations with the requirement of giving ten percent of their combined income to the local assembly. However, if they lose their membership they will sink to second-rate adherent status.

Crossroad # 3: The Averages feel qualified and stirred to teach a Bible course in their home. Should they seek the pastor's blessing or just obey the leading of the Spirit? Suppose they ask his permission and he says *no?* Suppose he says *yes* but dictates what the lessons should be?

Three crossroads (three of many), three decisions. This is no small matter. The spiritual future of the Averages will be affected by choices made. Their choices will determine their lord.

If Mr. and Mrs. Average really are average they will call the man *Pastor* John, tithe, and seek his permission and blessing. Such decisions will cause the connection between these two branches and "the true vine" to be weakened while strengthening their attachment to a false vine. The words of another will abide in their hearts. Prayer power will diminish.

And while denying Christ they will deny denying Christ. ("The heart is deceitful above all things.") Compromise makes the slope more slippery.

But the Averages don't have to be average!

Again, the Averages don't have to be average!

Anyone can set their will to obey the words of Christ. The Holy Spirit is the enabler, and He will enable those who choose to follow Christ. Yes, there is a cost, a heavy one perhaps, but the cost is minuscule compared to eternal rewards forthcoming.

The Averages can bear much fruit, walk an adventurous walk with Jesus, experience the miraculous. They can accomplish, with and through Christ, their divine calling. They can know the Master.

J E S U S : *Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.* (Mat. 5:11,12)

The door of escape from bondage to man is repentance. The temptation is to excuse oneself, appropriate a victim mentality, blame the pastor, the system, or anything that moves and breathes. Though there have been adverse influences in all of our lives, "My grace is sufficient for you."

J E S U S : *When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth.* (John 16:13)

L a r r y J o n e s : *The Spirit of God is continually leading into all truth. He never rests. He never stops leading. He is always teaching. The one who doesn't arrive at truth is the one who refuses to be led, to be taught. No man will be able to stand before God and say, "Excuse me, Lord, I didn't know," because He could well reply, "You didn't know because you refused to be taught. You refused to be taught because you preferred deception. You preferred deception because you loved another more than Me."* (A Catholic No More)

C h a l l e n g e : *The only one stopping you from entering deeper into Christ is you. You are responsible for you. You will give an account to Jesus for choices made. Whose words will steer your life? To which vine will you be attached? (May God richly bless you!)*

P r a y e r : *Jesus, so many words! So many vines! So much deception! Help us, Lord! Cause us to be filled with Your Spirit. Cause us to embrace Your profound words! And Jesus Christ, anoint this message!* (And hopefully the reader says, "Amen!")

Article # nine: **How-to (Part one)**

We have all read more than one *how-to* book: How-to be successful at marriage, how-to raise kids, how-to build a healthy church, how-to overcome depression, loneliness, stress, addictions, etc., how-to pray, fast, study the Bible, how-to handle finances, how-to make and keep friends, how-to be successful in business, how-to cope with past traumas, how-to, how-to, how-to.

Many (most?) how-to's circumnavigate "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" and are therefore false gospels offering generic solutions equally acceptable in non-christian circles. (Be suspicious of teachings acceptable in non-christian circles.)

This article regarding how-to abide in Christ is a how-to that *de*-necessitates most other how-to*s*. Let's examine Psalm 91.

This psalm begins with, "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High" and is followed by several promises including protection from the enemy, diseases, fear, evil, and plagues. More, such a person will be given authority over the enemy, have prayers answered, live a long life, and

experience deliverance in times of trouble. You can see that a book entitled, “How To Dwell In the Secret Place” would negate the need for most how-to literary works and, further, prove such works untrue.

“He who dwells in the secret place” in Psalm 91 is the same person as “He who abides in Me” in John 15, and the many promises of the psalm are for all who abide in Christ.

If you are truly intent on drawing relationally closer to Jesus, willing to suffer whatever consequences including isolation, misunderstanding and tarnished reputation, know that all resources of heaven are on your side.

Jesus taught us the world loves its own. Similarly the lukewarm loves their own, the church-centered loves their own, man-gazers love their own. Know that those who refuse Christ’s call into intimacy will not want relationship with those who accept. You will lose friends.

But you know all that, you have counted the cost, and Jesus is worth it all. This article is for you.

The one determined to seek Christ must think *trekking,* not arrival. To go in the right direction, that is the goal. One doesn't fly, one walks. True, the pace of some is quicker than others, but no one arrives. A spaceship headed toward the sun will never reach the sun, it’s too far away. But every day it gets a little warmer. So it is for the seeker of the Son….. she gets consistently warmer.

Not to say there are not bad days, even bad weeks. There are dry times when it’s tough slugging and you seem to be losing ground. But the trend is upward while most are trending down.

Because everyone is different….. each has his distinct history and personality….. the path to fervency will be distinct. The Potter is the same, the consistency of the clay varies. You cannot walk the path of another. Your guide must be the Holy Spirit, not man.

The Holy Spirit. You must know you are going nowhere good without the Holy Spirit. If you are dissatisfied with the fruit in your life you will continue to be so until your relationship with the Holy Spirit is adjusted. Have you heard this one?….. “Insanity is doing the same thing expecting a different result.”

Embrace the Holy Spirit as lord and pastor and guide and helper. (This necessitates renouncing man as lord and pastor and guide and helper.) Again, *embrace* Him! Like this: “Holy Spirit, I hereby accept and embrace You as my lord and teacher. I acknowledge my dependence on You to take me into fervency for Jesus Christ. I partner myself with You. From now on it’s You and me.” There.

And you must identify the enemy in your life that has kept you from being satisfactorily fruitful….. yourself (your self).

Self. Self is a selfish, controlling, self-centered, self-reliant person who sits on the throne of the infertile life. This person must be dethroned. For most, to do so will take persistence and time, perhaps years.

P a u l : *For the flesh sets its desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another.* (Gal. 5:17 NAS)

Self is a survivor who knows how to play the game quite well. Self will convince you Christ is lord of your life while he/she makes the decisions. He insists on being pampered and flattered. He won't vacate the throne voluntarily, he must be removed. To remove him he must be out-strategized. That's part two.

C h a l l e n g e : *Is your relationship with the Holy Spirit as it should be? Look into yourself for the answer. Your life is the measure of that relationship.*

P r a y e r : *Jesus, to gain You we must gain the Holy Spirit. More of Him, Lord Jesus! More of Him! And….. Your blessing on this message, Lord.* (And hopefully the reader says, "Amen!")

Article # ten : **How-to (Part two)**

The victor of war is usually the one with the best strategy.

This *is* a war, has been since Adam botched it, and every earthling is in it. The church is the only force equipped to do battle against the enemy of the dark, and the condition of our planet suggests we must learn proficiency.

This war includes numerous skirmishes over the administration of each christian's life. If more of these confrontations were won the major war for the souls of nations would be advanced. There should be little contest. Christ should govern the heart of every believer for it was He who saved and set free. But, simply, He does not.

In some cases another man or group of men sit on the throne of Joe and Jill Average, but most often it is *self.* This self is not the born-again spirit of man, but the unconquered, unsanctified soul (which many understand to be the mind, emotion and will).

If self remains lord, one cannot sufficiently abide in Christ; such a one abides, mostly, in self. Remember His words, "Without Me you can do nothing." Though self can't, self tries, and no amount of failure will convince him to abdicate. Though self is okay, even beautiful, he/she must be servant, not captain.

So self must be dethroned. Who will depose self? Will Christ? Christ will not dethrone your self. Will you dethrone self? You can't. ("Without Me you can do nothing.") Well, who?

Christ *and* you. Do you see how it all comes down to relationship? Not Christ (who will never trespass your free will), not you (who are just not able), but Christ *and* you, Christ's power flowing into your life as, and to the degree, you relationally attach yourself to Him.

A big mistake is to try to forcibly remove self. To do so, one's attention will be on self, not Christ. Rather we focus on Christ, and as that focus becomes steadfast He will rule our lives. Simple?

Lucifer's very first mistake was turning his attention from God to himself. As you know, immediately after Adam sinned he became *me* conscious and wanted to cover up. We born-agains must turn our focus from *me* to Him. We must.

Purpose in your heart to have self dethroned and Christ exalted. This could take years. Years!?

Years. It may take some time for our easily deceived hearts to even understand what the lordship of Christ looks like (even though it is utter simplicity). Perhaps it took a long time just to realize Christ is not where He should be in your life. Yes, for Christ to be lord *in fact* and not lord *symbolically* could take years. So let's get at it.

How do we become that person who focuses on Christ? Strategize.

Let's start by examining your prayer life (your alone time with Jesus). If it's hurried, sporadic and sparse changes must be made. Said another way, this is war and you need a military victory in your prayer life.

When the allied forces invaded France on June 6, 1944, their intent was to establish a beachhead. D-day was most critical. Fail to gain a foothold, a piece of real estate where they could bring in manpower and artillery, and they would have no hope of driving the enemy east from where he came.

You might be wise to establish a *beachhead* in your day, a fixed time, be it an hour or part of an hour, that is your time with Jesus. No distractions, no phone calls. You and Jesus. The two of you. Alone. Abiding in each other. (Not to suggest staying focused on Christ will be easy.) It would be difficult to overstate the need for this spiritual beachhead in your 24-hour day.

Once firmly established you can go about the business of conquering the rest of the day. One hour turns into two, two into three, three into four. Eventually your entire day will be consumed communicating with, focusing upon, believing in, serving, abiding in Jesus. Fruit will increase as abiding time increases and improves.

A. W. T o z e r : *The man who would know God must give time to Him. He must count no time wasted which is spent in the cultivation of His acquaintance.* (The Divine Conquest)

If after considering this advice you make the decision to establish an alone time with Jesus at, say, 6-7:00 am, you have just made a mistake! What!?

You have done what we all do more often than not..... *you* have made a decision rather than being led by the Holy Spirit. You see, Christ wants to govern your life by communicating to you through the Holy Spirit. When we bow to the lordship of the Holy Spirit we are actually bowing to the lordship of Christ Himself. As a matter of fact, the *only* way we can serve Christ is by our obedience to the Holy

Spirit. If *you* make a decision to set aside a certain time that decision is one (another one) Christ never made.

Beware of a symbolic Holy Spirit and a symbolic Christ! A symbolic lord is not lord. Most make the Holy Spirit lord symbolically, and then go about making their own decisions. This is *self-rule* cloaked in religiosity.

So let's start over. It has been suggested you establish a set time, an alone time, every day with Jesus. Your response should be, "Holy Spirit, is this what Jesus would have me do? If so, let me know what time this should be. I submit to Your leadership." And then you wait, perhaps minutes, perhaps days.

He may direct through an impression, a word from a friend, a Scripture verse. If you feel He wants you to meet with the Lord between 6-7:00 am, you might say, "Holy Spirit, this is what I discern You are saying, and I respond accordingly. If I am wrong, let me know."

And it is very important to add, "I do so only by Your power. I trust You to empower me to do what You instruct me to do." (This is an example only. Do not parrot these words or any other.) We must learn to walk in the strength of the Lord. "The just shall live by faith." (Faith is to be a way of life for he who has been made just.)

So that's an example of strategizing. Here are a few more (some you may already be applying to your life):

Speak Christ. Though others don't, discipline yourself to speak His name. Every time you do a spiritual force is released blessing speaker and hearer. Speaking His name will bring Him to mind, reminding you He is *here.*

Learn generosity. Learn giving by giving. Giving is painful because self wants to hoard and self has little faith, always fearful of lack. Giving expands your faith and causes you to die to self. As someone said about faith, "Use it or lose it." (We are to give under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.)

Watch those crossroads! You may have said some wonderful words of dedication to Jesus in your alone time and soon you are faced with a situation whereby you can prove you meant what you said. Choosing Christ at our crossroads draws us to Him. Going the other way separates to a degree.

Stop thinking good me, bad me. The world does that, always fretting about being good enough. Your good enough is in Christ. As you abide in the awareness your righteousness is in Him, you will falter less and less. Since "The just shall live by faith," "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith." Or, examine yourself to see if you are abiding in "the true vine."

Read good books. Many over the years have traveled where you want to go and are gifted to point the way. Submit to the Holy Spirit. Let Him chose your reading material.

This list of strategies could go on and on. If you bow to the leadership of the Holy Spirit He will

impart wisdom and you will continually gain Christ. And that's what it's all about, gaining Christ.

C h a l l e n g e : *Christian, there is more of Christ to be gained! Choose (relationally more of) Christ!*

P r a y e r : *Father, your blessing on these words, in Jesus name.* (And hopefully the reader says, "Amen!")