

## REMAIN IN JESUS

John 15:1-17

Key Verse: 5, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

I have a shirt I received as a gift which says, "Remain in Jesus." I was wearing this shirt in Australia when an elderly gentleman read it and said to me, "I'm glad that you do!" That was such an encouragement to me. But I must say that to wear a shirt that says, "Remain in Jesus" is a lot easier than remaining in Jesus.

This passage contains the 7<sup>th</sup> and final of Jesus' "I am" statements in John's gospel. Jesus calls himself the vine, while his disciples are the branches. In the midst of this last private discourse with his disciples, Jesus exhorts them to remain in him. And Jesus promises that when they do so, they will bear much fruit. We will think about what it means to remain in Jesus and what it means to bear much fruit. Let's listen to Jesus and take his command to remain in him to heart so that we will bear much fruit and glorify God.

First: Remain in Jesus

The other gospels tell us that after the Last Supper Jesus went with his disciples to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane. The last words in John 14 are "Come now; let us leave." So Jesus left the upper room with his disciples. Jesus continued talking to his disciples, using a gardening metaphor. Look at verses 1-2.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." Jesus has already used 6 "I am" metaphors thus far in John's gospel. Jesus is (1) the bread of life (6:35), (2) the light of the world (8:12), (3) the gate (10:9), (4) the good shepherd (10:11), (5) the resurrection and the life (11:25-26), and (6) the way, the truth and the life (14:6). Now Jesus declares he is the true vine. This implies that there are false or imperfect vines. What is a vine? A vine is the main stem attached to the root of a plant. The vine contains the life-flow of the plant, drawn from the earth, sun and water. The branches of a plant must be connected to the vine to have life in them. Consider a rose in a vase. It looks beautiful for a few days. But eventually it wilts because it has no life in itself. It is not connected to the earth, the sun and the water. So it has no life in it, and it soon withers and dies.

Jesus is the true vine. Jesus is declaring to his disciples that he is the source of life. Jesus is the source of the good that our souls are seeking. To hungry souls, Jesus is the bread of life. To souls in darkness, Jesus is the light of the world. To souls in danger, Jesus is the gate to safety and the one who lays down his life for us. To all in the shadow of death, Jesus is the resurrection and the hope of eternal life. To all who are lost and wandering, Jesus is the right direction for our lives, like a lighthouse to ships on a dark, stormy sea. And as the vine, Jesus is again the source of life and good fruit. To use a human body analogy, Jesus is the heart who gives oxygen-rich blood to the whole body.

Jesus is the true vine. His Father is the gardener. The gardener tends and takes care of the vine. The purpose of the vine is to bear fruit. The gardener and the vine have the same hope or purpose. So the gardener does two things to help the vine to bear fruit: he cuts off fruitless, dead branches, and he prunes or cleans good branches to make them more fruitful. Take note that pruning or cleaning is the gardener's work. It is not something that we do. It is what God does to the branches. Bible scholars debate what it means that God cuts off dead branches. Do these branches refer to unbelievers? Or does it refer to fake Christians? Or does it refer to

genuine Christians who need some painful divine discipline? A biblical case could be made for each of these options. Yet, rather than focusing our discussion on eternal security or the perseverance of believers, let's focus our thoughts on what Jesus focused on, which is remaining in him.

Look at verse 3. "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you." Here we get a clue how God does his cleansing, pruning work in people. It is through the word of God. The word of God, together with the work of the Holy Spirit in a person, has cleansing power. The disciples of Jesus who had committed their lives to Christ were "clean." That's what Jesus said when he washed their feet: "You are clean, though not every one of you." He meant that Judas Iscariot, the one who was about to betray Jesus, was unclean. Judas had not committed his heart and life to Jesus. He did not remain in Jesus.

Look at verses 4-6. "Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned."

Jesus introduced a key word here which he repeats 11 times in verses 4-10. What is that word? Remain. This word can also be translated: "abide," "continue," "stay," or "hold." It's the same root word in John 8:31 where Jesus defines his disciples as those who "hold" to his teachings, that is, they are those who remain in his word.

Jesus says that to remain in him involves remaining in his word, holding on to his word. Sometimes we hold on to some negative comment or an insult and it echoes in our minds and angers us. That is contrary to remaining in Jesus and his word. At such times we must remember Jesus' word. It can help us to read his word, listen to his word, and even memorize his word. I like music. In particular, my family can testify, I always listen to Christian music. I like to listen to Christian music because it soothes, lifts and inspires my soul and keeps me focused on Jesus. Sometimes I hear other worldly music when I'm in a restaurant or some other public place. Then I find myself humming or repeating that other music, even sometimes ungodly music, which I remember from my days before I started seriously following Jesus. When I realize it, I make an effort to sing a Christian song to restore the right music in my spirit. There are so many teachings or ideas or music here and there that are vying for our ears and hearts, claiming, "This is the way. Follow it to happiness and peace." The book of Proverbs tells us that both Folly and Wisdom are calling out to us to follow them. Which one will we follow? Will we follow what feeds our flesh, or what honors and is in step with the Holy Spirit? It's our choice. Whatever we listen to, watch, read or meditate on influences us and shapes who we are. This is why it is so vital to remain in Jesus' word.

Practically, we can do this through Bible reading and study—personally or in a small group. We can listen to sound Bible preaching and music, or watch godly movies or videos (which are somewhat hard to find). In reality, we are surrounded daily by messages that are contrary to what Jesus did and taught. One way Christendom dealt with these bad influences was to withdraw in isolation to Christian communities, like monks in monasteries or nuns in convents. Yet Jesus taught his disciples not to completely withdraw but to go and preach the good news, to go and make disciples of all nations, and to let their light shine to the world. Still, we need times of prayer and withdrawal from the world.

Some do this through morning devotions to align their minds and hearts with Jesus in his word. Others do this through journaling or spending reflection time in God's word. Some do this by memorizing Bible verses or passages. We should thank God and take advantage of the fact that

we have brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ who are serious about following him and growing in his grace. We can meet with them for mutual encouragement in Jesus' word.

There is one more thing that Jesus says about remaining in him. It's in verses 9-10. "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love." To remain in Jesus is to remain in his word and to remain in his love. Loving Jesus is not just singing songs of praise to him. Loving Jesus is obeying him.

We cannot say we love Jesus and then delight in disobeying him, openly or secretly. Viewing pornography, for example, is not loving Jesus. Sleeping around is not loving Jesus. Abusing our bodies with drugs or alcohol or wasting our time is not loving Jesus. Living a worldly or rebellious life is not loving Jesus. Gossiping is not loving Jesus. This is not to say that we can live a perfect, sinless life. But should we try to? Actually, yes. Jesus said, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48).

It's important for us to keep a humble, earnest attitude before God. This includes accountability with other sincere Christ-followers who love and want to obey him. May God bless our gatherings in the Lord for accountability, mutual encouragement and prayer. On average I attend two worship services and three group Bible studies a week plus some one to one Bible studies. Still, I need accountability. May God bless all our accountability groups in our church. For me, I pray to make more serious effort to join the NU men's weekly accountability group to pray with and for this group of brothers in Christ when I can.

Second: We will bear much fruit

So to remain in Jesus is the command or imperative in this passage. And it comes with a promise. Look at verse 5 again. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." Again, this is the 7<sup>th</sup> and final "I am" statement in John's gospel. Jesus promises that when his disciples remain in him, they will bear much fruit. He also declares that apart from him his disciples can do nothing. So the command is to remain in him. It is not to bear fruit. Fruit-bearing comes naturally with remaining in Jesus. Then what is the fruit he wants us to bear, and is there anything we can do to remain in him?

Let's start with the second question: is there anything we can do to remain in him? We already thought about remaining in Jesus' word and remaining in his love. Remaining in his love includes confessing our sins and obeying his word. If we are harboring sins in our lives then that is not loving Jesus.

Jesus gives another secret to what it means to remain in him and what we can do. Look at verses 7-8. "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." Remaining in Jesus is not robotic. It is relational. Jesus wants us to have a loving, reliant relationship with him. This is not merely through reading our Bible and trying to obey it. It is also through prayer. Jesus promised that when we remain in him we can ask whatever we wish and it will be done for us. And this is related to bearing the fruit that he wants and promises. Jesus connects bearing lasting fruit with answered prayers in verse 16: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you."

Jesus said "whatever you ask in my name." Jesus already mentioned asking in his name twice in the last chapter and he will mention it three more times in the next chapter. Jesus said in John 14:13-14, "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified

in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.” Christians have the greatest privilege to come to God in prayer in the name of Jesus.

What does this mean? What does it mean to pray “in Jesus’ name”? It doesn’t mean that ending all our prayers with the words “in Jesus’ name” is some kind of magical, automatic guarantee that God will give us whatever we ask. “Lord, I pray to win the lotto. In Jesus’ name!” It’s possible, but probably not going to happen. Praying in Jesus’ name means to pray prayers that are aligned with Jesus’ mind and heart. What would Jesus pray? How would Jesus pray in this situation? What is God’s will and desire?

1 John 5:14-15 speaks to this. “This is the confidence 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 asked of him.” When we ask in accordance with God’s will, that is, in line with the mind and heart of God, we can have confidence that our prayers are accepted by God.

James 4:2b-3 urges us to pray, but with a caution: “You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” So we must ask God but we must ask with right motives.

Jesus invites us: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened” (Mt 7:7-8).

So again, what is the fruit that Jesus promises we will bear? We have a strong clue in verse 8, which says, “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” Jesus already talked about the proof that a person is his disciple. What is the proof? It is that we hold and practice his teachings. He said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples...” And what is his teaching? Love one another.

Jesus said in 13:34-35, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” Jesus’ disciples are recognized as the ones who obey his command to love one another. If we do not love one another we are not Jesus’ disciples, whatever we may think or say.

So, according to Jesus, the key proof that we are Jesus’ disciples is love: love for and obedience to Jesus, and love for people, especially for Jesus’ people. It’s interesting to note that first on the list of the fruit of the Holy Spirit is love. Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 5:22-23a, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” So we can say that the good fruit of remaining in Jesus is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, beginning with love, joy and peace.

Jesus already mentioned that to love him is to obey him. He also mentioned peace as his gift in the last chapter, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (14:27). And here in verse 11 he mentions joy: “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” Jesus promises us love, joy and peace. This is the good fruit of remaining in him.

Jesus repeats his command to love one another in both verses 12 and 17. And Jesus says that they are to love one another as he has loved them. Wow! Jesus’ love is so patient, sacrificial and non-judgmental. Jesus described this life-giving love in verse 13: “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” What is the greatest expression of love? It is

the ultimate love expressed in movies and in real life: to give one's life for another person. And that's what Jesus did. He gave his life for us. And he calls us friends. No longer servants. But friends.

Look at verses 14-15. "You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you." We are servants of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. But even more than that, we are privileged to be called friends of God and friends of Jesus Christ! What a privilege and honor! A friend is privy to what is going on in someone's life, because they are trusted and loved. Jesus made known to his disciples the secrets of the kingdom of God. They were his true friends. And we are his friends if we love and obey him. He shares with us what God is up to. He shares the mind and heart of God.

Another proof of his love is that he chose us. See verse 16a, "You did not choose me, but I chose you..." We may think that we chose Christ. Actually, he chose us. He loved us first. He forgave us first. He called us out of darkness into his light. 1 Peter 2:9 says, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

In review, what is the good fruit that Jesus says we will bear when we remain in him?

First, it is the fruit of repentance or confessing our sins. Matthew 3:8 says, "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance." And, 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." So good fruit is a life of confessing and repenting our sins. This is contrary to denying or covering up our sins or acting like we are always right.

Second, it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit or Christ-likeness. If we are moving toward Christ and the Holy Spirit that is good fruit. If we are becoming more like Jesus that is good fruit. The main fruit of the Spirit is love. This love is expressed in obedience to Jesus.

Third, the fruit of good influence. If you put a life of repentance and growing in Jesus' image together you are going to be a good influence to others. Your life will encourage and inspire others to follow Jesus Christ. This is true of all the apostles, like Peter, Paul and John. Our lives should be winsome for those who are seeking God and the truth. People should not look at us and say, "If that is what it means to be a Christian, then I'm not interested." Of course, people could say that if they're steeped in sin and have no desire to change. But if someone is genuinely seeking God, then our words and actions and attitude should be an advertisement for Jesus and Christianity.

So, we need to check our words and actions and attitude. If these are not a good advertisement for Jesus, then we need to repent. If we are causing people to sin or rebel or ignore God, then we need to repent. People should not look at our lives and say, "What a hypocrite!" or "What a proud and judgmental person!" or "What a lazy and self-centered person!" Rather, they should see humility that comes from repentance, and genuine love for God and for people. They should see a person who prays and holds on to Jesus' word. So what do people see when they look at your life and mine?

Jesus is the true vine. We are the branches. If we remain in him, if we remain in his word, if we remain in his love, we will bear much fruit. Apart from him, we can do nothing. May the Lord Jesus help us all to remain in him and bear the good fruit of repentance, the fruit of good influence, and the fruit of love, joy and peace in our lives and in our ministries.