

A.B. Simpson:

“I am the vine, you are the branches: He that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing.” (John 15: 5.)

The vine is the most important production of the vegetable creation; therefore it has been used by the devil for greater harm than anything that God ever made, for Satan ever loves to steal God’s best gifts. God has always used the vine as the symbol of the most sacred things, its juice being the type of Christ’s blood, and its stems and branches the most perfect figure of the mystery of godliness, Christ’s union with His people. The Scriptures give us no profounder view of Christian life than these verses contain. Let us look first at the spiritual teaching, and then at some illustrations of this in the figure itself.

Union With Jesus

The first truth conveyed in the Master’s teaching is that of union with Jesus. There are two sides to this. The first is “in me,” the second, “I in you.” The first expresses our justification; the second our deeper union with Christ in sanctification. To be in Christ is to accept Him as our Savior and to be justified through His blood and righteousness, accepted by the Father for His sake, and received into all His rights and privileges as the children of God and the redeemed family of Christ. There are two races: the Adam race and the Christ race. We are all born in Adam, and in Adam all die, but all who are in Christ shall be made alive. And so we came into Christ by receiving Him as our Head and our Savior and being born again into His life through His Holy Spirit. Every believer is in Christ, and there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, for we are made accepted in the Beloved.

To be in Christ has reference rather to our standing than our actual experience. It denotes the relationship between us and Christ rather than the actual life and realization of His presence and communion. Of course, it will bring an actual experience; but that is more fully described by the other phrase, “I in you.” This is the other side of our union with Jesus. It is that which brings Him personally into actual touch with us, for this is the great mystery of redemption, that Christ actually comes to dwell in the heart that is in Him, making it His personal residence and chosen home, and filling it with His love and joy and purity. In the previous chapter He had already explained this union and declared that it would be the first result of the Holy Spirit’s coming into the heart, that He should reveal it, consummate it, and make it intensely real to our consciousness. “At that day,” He says (the day of the Holy Spirit’s coming to abide with us), “you shall know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.” And still later He added, “If a man loves me, he will keep my commandments, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him.” And then He adds still further, “My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” This is the glorious reality to which He refers in this figure, “I in you.”

Again and again it is unfolded in the later teachings of the New Testament. The apostle declares that it was his great mission to unfold it, “the mystery which has been hid from ages and from generations . . . which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” It is the last appeal of the ascended Lord to the churches in Asia, that they will open the door and let Him come in, and sup with them, and they with Him. It is the last thought in His own intercessory prayer as He commits His dear disciples to His Father’s keeping, and prays that “the love with which You have loved me may be in them, and I in them.” It is the secret of peace; for He says, “My peace I give unto you.” It is the secret of joy; for He says, “My joy shall remain in you.” It is the secret of faith; for the apostle says, “Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” It is the secret of holiness; for “Christ . . . is made unto us . . . sanctification.” It is the secret of power; for “I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me.” It is the secret of all things, the solution of all problems, the spring of all spiritual blessings, for they are all in Christ Jesus. Such then, are the two sides of our union with Christ, He in us, and we in Him, even as the branch is in the vine, the members are in the body, the Son is in the Father.

The next truth conveyed here is communion. “Abide in me.” We must act according to the fact of our union, and keep up the fellowship and mutual relationships involved in this union. When the wife is married it is expected that she will act accordingly, and maintain the attitude of a wife by fellowship and dependence. When a partnership is formed between two human beings, they are expected to cooperate according to the agreement; and when the soul and Christ become united, there are certain actual relationships and mutual fellowships which are to be constantly maintained. This is spoken of as abiding, and upon the steadiness and simplicity of this depend the happiness and power of our Christian life. One of the attitudes implied in abiding is dependence. It is the habit of continually looking to Christ for everything; for He says, “Without me you can do nothing.” We are to continually distrust ourselves, feel our utter inability to think a right thought, and to

look to Him in utter helplessness; and yet in trustful reliance for every breath, thought and feeling, taking our life each moment from Him., both for soul and body, bringing every temptation to Him, every need, every desire, and living really by Him and on Him, as a babe upon its mother.

Another idea expressed by abiding is fellowship in prayer. There is a near atmosphere of prayer and communion which may be ceaselessly maintained between the soul and the Savior. Its spirit is very subtle, its home is like the Holy of Holies, its atmosphere is pure and fragrant as the inner chamber of the sanctuary. It is sullied by a breath of sin; it is broken by a thought of distrust and disobedience. It is a very close place in the "secret place of the most High . . . and under the shadow of the Almighty." There it is that we learn to pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks, and like Enoch, walk with God.

Another thought suggested by abiding is the momentary life. It is not a life of drift and impulse, not a life in which we act on general principles, but a moment by moment dependence upon Christ. It is simply finding that the life that can be maintained for one moment can be equally maintained for innumerable moments. It is just living out the simple word of Paul in Colossians, "As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him."

There are certain principles affecting this life of abiding. It is a principle of human nature that a succession of momentary acts repeated for a certain time produces a habit of thought and feeling, and that which at first is a somewhat labored purpose and requires much vigilance to maintain, gradually grows into a delightful habit of dependence, and the momentary acts of abiding are so simple that they are like the breathing of the lungs.

Our abiding depends upon our obedience. "If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love." We shall find ourselves, sometimes, in positions where we cannot touch Christ for help and blessing, and the reason is that there is some obstacle between us and our Lord, some disobedience or sin which must be removed. It is a matter not only of trust, but also of rightness, and we will find that our peace and communion depend upon walking closely with Him and listening to His holy will. It is if His words abide in us that we have the promise, "You shall ask what you will." He will show us faithfully the disobedience or the cloud, and will enable us to put it aside, and then will restore to us the joy of His communion and the fullness of His very Spirit. So let us abide in Him.

The Effects of Abiding

1. Cleansing. "Now you are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." This word was spoken in the thirteenth chapter. It came through the washing of the disciples' feet. And so He still waits to wash our feet from the stains of the way, and unless He washes us, we have no part with Him. We must be cleansed and keep clean in order to maintain our communion.

2. Fruitfulness. "He that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit." Fruit is different from effort. The farmer toils in his garden as he prunes and waters the tree and cultivates the ground, but the tree has no toil or effort, but with spontaneous freedom sends forth its leaves, its blossoms, and its fruits. And so in the Christian life there is no effort in bearing fruit if we have the life of Christ within us. It springs spontaneously from the full heart. The mother of liberty and love, and the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, and all the sweet graces of Christian life, besides the reproducing of ourselves in the lives and souls we bring to Christ.

3. Answered prayer. "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you." The reason of this is, our prayer will be His prayer, our desire will be His desire, our thought will be His thought, our faith will be His faith, and we will know as we ask that He accepts and gives because He prompts the prayer as He walks with us.

4. Love. "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you: continue (or abide) in my love." It is a blessed thing to live in love. Some people live in an atmosphere of constant duty. Our privilege is to live in an atmosphere of love, and to be so pervaded with the dear love of Jesus that we shall know that He is always pleased with us, though we often make mistakes, yet He accepts our true heart and loves us with all His heart.

5. Joy. "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." If He is in us, His joy will be in us, and our hearts will spring and sing with a gladness not our own, but wholly prompted by His Spirit within us.

6. Obedience. "You are my friends if you do whatsoever I command you." This is not obedience usually,

but it is obedience unconditionally and under all circumstances to “whatsoever I command you.”

7. Friendship. “You are my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knows not what his lord does: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.” It is delightful to walk with Jesus in holy confidence, and know that we have His freest communion, and that He treats us as His beloved ones.

8. Permanence in our work. “You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain.” That which springs from Him shall last and shall meet us again, not only here, but in the life to come.

These are the blessings of abiding. How precious, how complete, how eternal! Oh, that we may not miss one of them, but live so closely to our Lord that we shall have all the good pleasure of His goodness and the fullness of His blessing!

Some Illustrations of These Truths

1. The vine and the branch are one. The vine is not separate from the branch, but the vine includes the branch. And so Christ is not the vine separated from us, but the full Christ consists of Christ the Head and us the body. Christ has become forever so identified with us that He needs us to complete Himself. His joy is not complete without us. His glory is fulfilled in our glory and blessing.

2. The branches need much pruning. Much of the gardener’s work is to prune down the growth that is excessive and that would simply produce show and not fruit. And so our gentle and gracious Father cuts back much of our life that would simply grow into selfish luxuriance, and only leaves that which can bear real fruit unto Him. Let us trust Him. He is not destroying the tree, but only correcting it and its form, and enriching its fruitfulness and value.

3. The branches that bear fruit in the vine are the fresh ones. The little shoots that shall forth this spring, they alone bear the fruit. The old dried branches bear no fruit. They support the ones that do. And so there must be constant freshness and growth to our spiritual life if there is to be fruit. Only that which God is really doing in you, and doing today, will bear fruit to others. You cannot take the experience of a year ago and serve the Lord with that, but you must know Christ today in fresh and ceaseless communion, or you cannot accomplish any effective work for Him.

4. The vine is of no use for anything else but for fruit. It cannot be made into lumber or furniture; it has but one purpose. And so the Christian, especially the consecrated Christian, is worthless and useless, unless he abides in Christ and bears fruit for God. Oh, that we may continually abide and bear much fruit, for, “herein is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit,” and thus the Son will be satisfied for the travail of His soul and the sacrifice of His life.