



THE VINE & the Branches

Abiding in Christ

Introduction

The small band of eleven men who had been in relationship with the Incarnate Lord of heaven and earth for 3½ years accompanied their Master as He steadily walked in the direction of Gethsemane in obedience to His Father's will. Soon they will see Him lift up His eyes to heaven and utter those famous, solemn words: "Father, the hour has come." Before long, they will cross over the ravine of the Kidron, enter their favorite garden with Him, and encounter the traitorous Judas for the first time since, Satan-filled, he left them after the Last Supper. But now, during these final moments together before His arrest, Jesus opened His heart to His beloved disciples, revealing a message which could never be uttered by the leaders of Buddhism, Islam, or Hinduism.

Introduction

Jesus was in no hurry as He spoke. No one would take His life from Him. He would lay it down at the time of His own choosing. In these final moments before He was taken from them, Jesus imparted life-giving truths which they needed to understand, first for themselves, and then for the entire world. His message would come to them in the form of an allegory and become known as *The Vine and the Branches*. It would be so clear and powerful that it would shape the lives of millions of people for centuries to come. In contrast to the deaf and dumb idols created by the hands of pretenders and the false religions established by imposters, the incomparable Christ used a common Israeli vineyard to teach them how to constantly remain at home with the Father through Him and to bear fruit that would endure forever.



“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser” (John 15:1).

Introduction

As we noted from the beginning of this series, Jesus identified Himself as the True Vine, the Father as the Vinedresser, and all true believers as the branches. His tone was as pastoral as it was true. The Father, He revealed, will lift up the branches from the dirt and mud, cleanse them, and tie them to the trellis so that they can bear much fruit. “You are already clean,” He told them, but My Father will keep on washing and cleansing you by the Word throughout your lives so that you will be able to bear even more fruit for the glory of His name.

Suddenly, His message changed. He turned from His descriptive, introductory remarks and used, for the first time, the imperative mood. In the first word of verse 4, He gave a concise command: “Abide.”

John 15:4

- “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me” (NASV).
- “Remain in me, and I will 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” (NIV).
- “Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can’t bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can’t bear fruit unless you are joined with me” (*The Message*, Eugene Peterson).

Abide in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED)

Of the 22 definitions cited in the OED, 14 are recorded as *rare*, *somewhat rare*, *now rare*, *archaic*, *somewhat archaic*, or *obsolete*. When Alfred Lord Tennyson said, “I will **abide** the coming of my lord,” he simply meant “I will wait for the coming of my lord.” When T.S. Eliot wrote, “In the storm, should we not wait for the sea to subside, in the night **abide** the coming of day?” he was suggesting that we should wait for or expect the day to emerge after the night. And in an earlier period, you may have invited a friend to “**abide** a bit,” by which you would have meant that you would have liked for him or her to stay with you for a little while longer.

What, then, was Jesus commanding His disciples to do?

The Literal Meaning of the Word *Abide*

- The Greek word for “abide” (*meno*) in John 15:4 means *to remain or stay*, sometimes literally. For example, the Gerasene demoniac “was **not living (staying)** in a house, but in the tombs” (Lk. 8:27). And just before Paul and the others onboard were about to be shipwrecked on Malta, he told the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men **remain** in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved” (Acts 27:31).
- We commonly ask questions like this: “Where are you staying while you are here?” “Where do you live?” “Who are you staying with?” Or, we use the word as a command: “Stay right where you are!” “Stop talking!” (remain silent). “Please don’t go” (stay with me). “Always stay the same” (remain as you are). “Stay tuned!” (don’t go away).

An Initial Insight from the Literal Meaning

The invitation to remain in Jesus implies that it is possible to leave Him, that the vital connection with Him might be broken.





What Is Figurative Language?

- Figurative language contains figures of speech (such as metaphors, personifications, allegories, similes, etc.) which are “expressions that make comparisons or associations **meant to be interpreted imaginatively rather than literally.**”
- Figurative language “is essentially the language of poetry...Poetry is more densely figurative than ordinary conversation or than most prose writing, and its figures, especially metaphors, are more evocative and compelling” (Morner and Rausch).
- Jesus is using a concrete surface story (the vine and the branches) to convey abstract meanings that lie outside the narrative itself.

The Figurative Meaning of the Word *Abide*

- Used figuratively, the Greek word means “to remain, continue, abide.”
- John the Baptist: “I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven; and He **remained** upon Him” (Jn. 1:32-33).
- “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but **the wrath of God abides on him**” (Jn. 3:36).
- “If you **abide** in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine” (Jn. 8:31).
- “I have come as light into the world, that everyone who believes in Me may not **remain** in darkness” (Jn. 12:46).

The Recurrence of “Abide” in John 15



The figurative meaning of the Greek word for “abide” occurs 12 times in John 15:1-16.

Verses 4 (3 times), 5, 6, 7 (twice),
9, 10 (twice), 11, & 16

Question

So, what did Jesus mean when He told His Apostles to “abide in Him?”

Let’s examine other passages of Scripture to find the answer.



Christ Abides in Believers

- “And if **Christ is in you**, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness” (Rom. 8:10).
- “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but **Christ lives in me**; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and delivered Himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20).
- “To them (believers) God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is **Christ in you**, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).
- “And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that **He may be with you (remain) forever**” (Jn. 14:16).

Believers Abide in Christ

- “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood **abides in Me**, and I in him” (Jn. 6:56).
- “The one who says he **abides in Him** ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked” (1 Jn. 2:6).
- “And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for any one to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, **you abide in Him**. And now, little children, **abide in Him**, so that if He should appear, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming” (1 Jn. 2:27-28).

Believers Abide in Christ

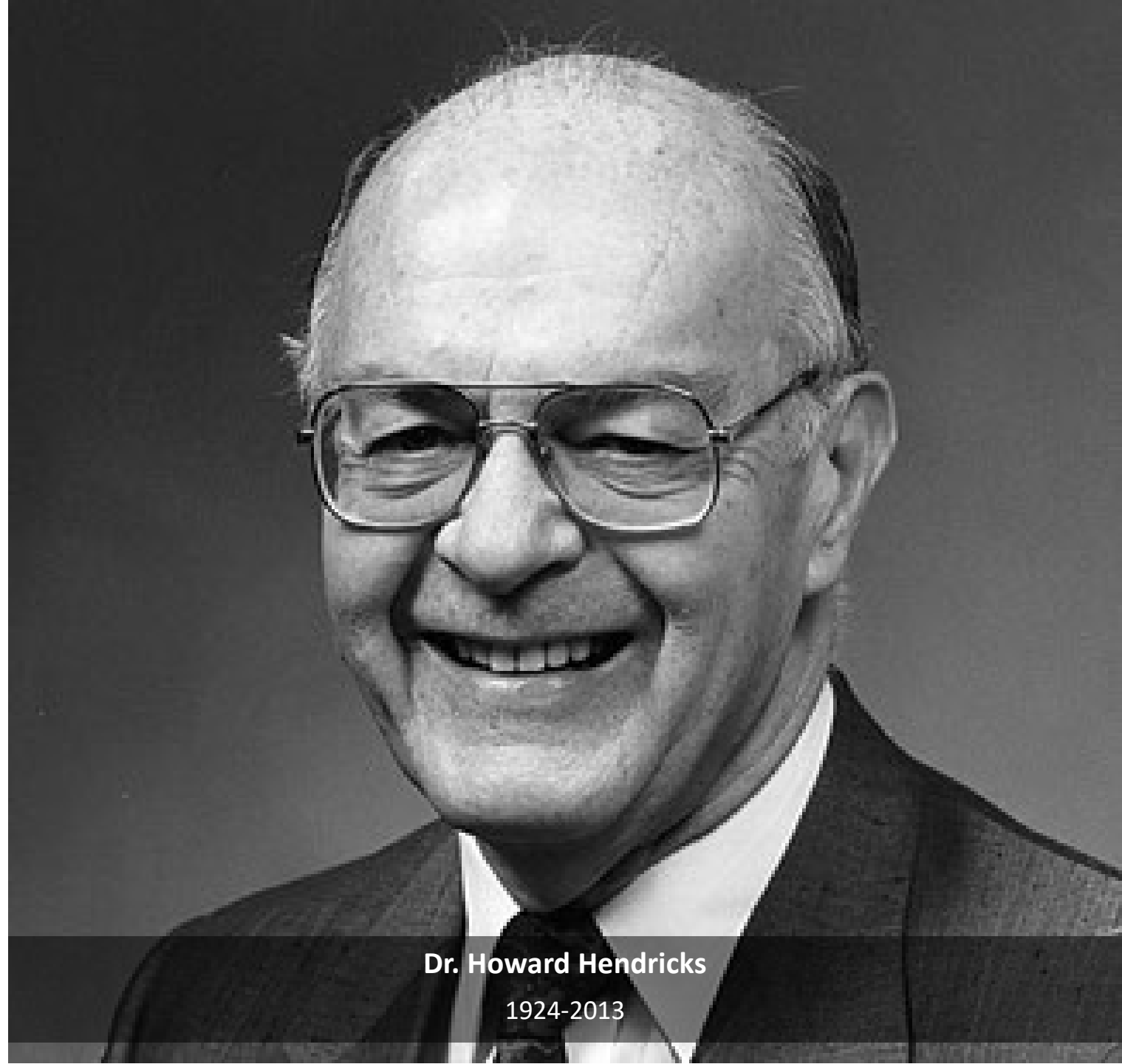
- “No one who **abides in Him** sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him” (I Jn. 3:6).
- “As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, **you also will abide in the Son and in the Father**” (I Jn. 2:24).
- “Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. **Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son**” (II Jn. 9).
- “If you **abide in my word**, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Jn. 8:31-32).

Both: Christ in Believers & Believers in Christ

- “And the one who keeps His commandments **abides in Him**, and **He in him**. And we know by this that **He abides in us**, by the Spirit which He has given us” (1 Jn. 3:24).
- “God is love, and the one who abides in love **abides in God**, and **God abides in him**” (1 Jn. 4:16).
- “No one has beheld God at any time; if we love one another, **God abides in us**, and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that **we abide in Him and He in us**, because He has given us of His Spirit. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, **God abides in him, and he in God**” (1 Jn. 4:12-13,15).

Dr. Howard Hendricks on the Spiritual Life

The spiritual life is “the life of Christ produced in the believer by the power of the Holy Spirit in obedient response to the Word of God.”



Dr. Howard Hendricks

1924-2013



Insights on *Abiding in Christ*

1. There is a difference between being *in Christ* and *abiding in Christ*. While both are possible only by His grace, the first one comes to pass as a result of His divine call and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. The second is our responsibility and demands our obedience. The first is perpetual, while the second can be interrupted (see A.W. Pink).
2. As branches, we must stay connected to the vine (Jesus) and appropriate **His life-giving “sap”** for fruitfulness and overflowing joy.
3. The source of **barrenness** in a Christian’s life indicates a lack of personal communion with Christ.



Insights on *Abiding in Christ*

4. “**No branch bears fruit in isolation.** It must have a vital connection with the vine. So to abide in Christ is the necessary prerequisite of fruitfulness for the Christian” (Leon Morris).
5. “Not only are believers in Christ, Christ is in them. Yet **the two are not absorbed into one another**; the individuality of each is safeguarded. Christ remains the Lord, the object of faith, and believers his subjects. It is a oneness of *communio* (communion) rather than *unio* (union) (Knox Chamblin).
6. “**Prayer is the determinism to be alone before God**, with no gallery to play to and no distracting comparisons to make” (Dr. James Houston).



Christ's Warning

- “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me” (John 15:4b).
- Jesus teaches the absolute necessity of remaining in Him.
- “In nature, it is absolutely self-evident, a branch bears no fruit unless it remains in the vine” (Lenski).
- The imperative is a **constative aorist** which places on Jesus’ lips this force: “Remain! Once for all!” In other words, do not ever separate yourself from Me! The constative aorist “looks at the whole action simply as having occurred, without distinguishing any steps in its progress” (Moulton).

Secrets of the Vine

“His purpose is not that you will do more for Him but that you will choose to be more with Him. Only by abiding can you enjoy the most rewarding friendship with God and experience the greatest abundance for His glory....Jesus is showing the disciples how an ongoing, vital connection with Him will directly determine the amount of His supernatural power at work in their lives.”



Bruce Wilkinson

Dr. Ken Boa



Ken Boa

PhD, New York University & DPhil, Oxford University
President, Reflections Ministries
Atlanta, Georgia

It is “a misguided strategy to live the spiritual life in our own strength, supplemented by a measure of divine assistance. It was never God’s intention to give us a hand in living the Christian life....The heart of devotional spirituality is abiding in Jesus by being in his presence and communing with him in ever-increasing ways. The more we seek him, experience him, and immerse ourselves in him, the more we are transfigured into his image and likeness.”

Enjoying God's Presence

“Oh, this thing of keeping in constant touch with God, of making Him the object of my thought and the companion of my conversations, is the most amazing thing I ever ran across. It is working. I cannot do it even half a day – not yet, but I believe I shall be doing it some day for the entire day. It is a matter of acquiring a new habit of thought. Now I like God's presence so much that when for a half hour or so He slips out of mind – as He does many times a day – I feel as though I had deserted Him, and as though I had lost something very precious in my life.”



Frank Laubach
Missionary to the Philippines
1884-1970



“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him” (Jn. 14:23).



Conclusion

“You didn’t choose me, remember; I chose you, and put you in the world to bear fruit, fruit that won’t spoil. As fruit bearers, whatever you ask the Father in relation to me, he gives you.”

- *The Message*, Eugene Peterson