

CHAPTER 18

GRAFTED INTO HIS DEATH

VITAL UNION WITH CHRIST ENABLES US TO BRING FORTH THE PARADIGM OF THE CROSS

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.
(John 15:5–KJV)

He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked. (1 John 2:6 - KJV) — MUST . . . TAKE UP HIS CROSS DAILY AND FOLLOW ME. [FOLLOW MY EXAMPLE] (Luke 9:23)

I am sure that most readers have heard and read much about Jesus’ teaching in John 15 regarding our “abiding” in Him as branches in the Vine. My recent reading of *Secrets of the Vine* by Bruce Wilkinson¹ caused me to realize that my focusing on the Cross as a paradigm indeed has involved “abiding in Him” but that there is much more of this abiding that I need to and could experience. Another great book on the subject, *Abide in Christ* by Andrew Murray², helped me to see further that this metaphor of the Vine can help us truly to live out the paradigm of the Cross. I invite you to join me in exploring ways that we can further enter in this “abiding in Christ” in order to bring forth abundant fruit—expressions of His glorious nature. As it is impossible in one chapter to summarize much of the wonderful teachings on “abiding in Christ”, please do consider reading the books I mentioned and/or others if you have not much background in this concept.

Conybeare’s translation of Romans 6:5 shows the connection between our positional abiding in Christ and the paradigm of the Cross, “If we have been grafted into the likeness of His death . . .” Note especially his footnote on this verse: “*Literally, have become partakers of a vital union [as that of a graft with the tree into which it is grafted]*”. [emphasis mine] If then we are united with Jesus’ nature shown in His suffering and death, we can consider that the life-giving stream from the main vine has exactly the same characteristics as what we have been calling “the paradigm of the Cross”. Relating this metaphor of the vine specifically to the last couple of chapters of this series, this life-giving sap includes **Jesus’ love shown in His willingness to suffer; and thus our fruit becomes the same willingness to suffer in loving others.** John 15:4 could be paraphrased as follows:

Remain continually focused and depend on my [Jesus’] nature within you—on My willingness to suffer , and My willingness to suffer will remain continually in you and be your fruit.

Other aspects of the paradigm of the Cross could be substituted in the above paraphrase by replacing “suffer” by the following words: “forgive everyone”, “silently take blame/insults”, “look like a failure (to please only God)”, “give up rights for respect, comfort”, “serve as an obedient slave”, “sacrifice unselfishly”, etc.—do paraphrase the above verse inserting these and other aspects of the nature of Jesus. Then read the following whole passage and do more of the

¹Bruce Wilkinson, *Secrets of the Vine: Breaking Through to Abundance* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Pub., Inc., 2001).

²Andrew Murray, *Abide in Christ* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1979).

same kind of paraphrasing wherever you see the emphasized, expanded meanings of the verb *meno*:

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man *remains [abides, lives] in [unity with]* me and I *in [unity with]* him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not *remain [abide, live] in [unity with]* me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; . . . If you *remain [abide, live] in [unity with]* in me and my words *remain [abide, live] in [unity with]* in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now *remain [abide, live] in [unity with]* my love. If you obey my commands, you will *remain [abide, live] in [unity with]* my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and *remain [abide, live] in [unity with]* his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends . . . You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other. (John 15:5-17)

I suggest that you now go back and make each emphasized phrase that you paraphrased into prayers of commitment, of confession of need, and of repentance—inserting different aspects of the paradigm of the Cross.

Abiding in Christ means focusing on and depending on every way Jesus expressed His love in His suffering and death and in every attitude and motive behind every expression of His love—in other words, our union with every aspect of the paradigm of the Cross. Recently, the Lord has been impressing me with one particular glory of Jesus—His willing defencelessness in His response to various kinds of attacks.

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth . . . he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (Isa. 53:7, 12b)

From this passage in Isaiah, we see that the very life of the Vine that we are grafted into includes Jesus' willingness to accept mockery, accusations, and physical abuse without any need to declare His innocence or to complain. Let us meditate much on Jesus being the silent Lamb being shorn and then sacrificed. Let it really "sink in" that our new identity in Christ includes our likeness to His awesome strength of character shown in His response to mockery, false accusations, and persecution. In Christ, we are dead to every need to defend ourselves in any way or seek pity and we are alive to the amazing brokenness and selfless love of Christ shown in His suffering and death.

Next, we have to be totally committed to want this aspect of His life to be the fruit that we are to bear. For me and others whom I know, that will involve considerable change in our attitude towards our own mistakes, our failures, or the exposure of these in some ways by others. In this process, we have to be perfectly willing to have our defensiveness, our self-justification, our tendency to blame others, our give excuses, etc., all exposed as enemies of the Cross and be willing to go through any process to put these things to death.

In another chapter, I may deal with some of the reasons we become so defensive and so afraid of criticism; for now, I encourage you to join me in “declaring war” on everything in our flesh that causes us to be unlike Jesus in this respect. We likely need healing from wounds that opened us up to feel the need to defend ourselves. The same Holy Spirit that convicts us of falling short of the glory of God shown in the Cross leads us to the Cross to find healing for all the pain that contributes to our problems.

As we pray about this subject, we will see more fully how this destructive tendency causes so much difficulty in communication. It causes us to be focused on ourselves and our perceived goodness rather on the Lord and His love for us and others. Much of our self-consciousness is based on an unconscious need to defend ourselves from fears of some kinds of attack. Further, it prevents the Holy Spirit to convict us of the areas that we frantically cover up with denial, excuses, and/or self-righteousness.

Fear of criticism stops us from doing things that we are not confident we will perform perfectly. Often we seem to figure the best form of defense is retreat, avoiding situations where we will not appear totally good. Abiding in Christ involves abiding in His amazing courage. He knew exactly what forms of attack would fall on Him, Instead of avoiding them, Jesus “resolutely set out for Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51):

. . . who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame . . .
 . Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Heb. 12:2)

As we worship and adore Him for His courage, we are abiding in Him and His courage abides in us and thus we are living out the paradigm of the Cross.

Of utmost importance is our confidence and dependence on the unconditional love of Jesus—shown through the Cross. When we are totally sure of His love, we can admit the sin of our defence mechanisms and our fear and allow His love to make us as willing to be as defenceless as He was for us. Most of our trouble comes from looking to others as the source of our love, rather than Jesus Himself.

To help me believe that I am truly abiding in Christ, I sometimes visualize the presence of Christ in me as a vine trunk, along with me as a branch attached to Him, drawing out His sacrificial love and channeling this love into my whole being and then into the fruit of love for others. By doing this, I confess my dependence on His love each day as I prepare to meet others in all kinds of situations; and I am learning to remember this dependence as I speak with them, trusting the Lord that He will cause me increasingly to bear the fruit of the paradigm of the Cross in every situation of daily life.

I am also learning [slowly, I have to say] to see other believers in the same way, as having the Vine—Christ Himself—in them and by faith seeing them totally changed through abiding and being pruned³ so that they bring forth His nature—especially as seen in the paradigm of the Cross. Naturally, I must be willing to be part of the process to see this come to pass in others and thus seek the Lord about what changes He needs to make in me for Him to better accomplish this.

Let me stress that abiding in Christ does not happen automatically just because we are Christians. Secondly, abiding in Christ does not happen just because we go through certain religious liturgies or repeat certain prayers, no matter how good these may be. Further, we do not

³“Pruning” is a extremely important part of teaching on abiding in the Vine, but I do not plan dealing with it at this time. Pruning is covered well in *Secrets of the Vine* by Bruce Wilkinson. Remember that pruning is to remove anything that hinders us bearing the fruit of the paradigm of the Cross.

abide in Christ just because we have all the “right” doctrine or attend the church that we believe is most scriptural.

Our motivations and actions are always affected by what source we are actually abiding in and drawing from—either Christ or some other lesser source in ourselves or from outside of us. As I have done, many Christians experience a degree of abiding in their religiousness rather than in Christ Himself; they attempt to meet their spiritual and emotional needs—their identity, support, and fulfillment from other people and emotional experiences during liturgy, fellowship, and ministry. To a more or lesser degree, corporate religious activity involves Christ Himself and is certainly beneficial to the degree that it truly involves abiding in Him, and thus beneficial in meeting the needs above. However, any world religion or social club can meet some of these needs. The Christian church should always help lead people to abide in a personal Lord—a relationship not just for church services, but 24/7. Each church group needs to continually seek the Holy Spirit to help them evaluate how much its people are focusing on aspects of the church rather than on Christ Himself.

I figure that I have made a fair start at abiding in Christ—only a start, but I am “confident of this, that he who began a good work in [me] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” (Phil 1:6)

To abide in Christ, consider focusing on Him the following ways:

Daily WORSHIP Jesus *specifically* in His suffering and death.

Daily REPENT *specifically* for anything less than the paradigm of the Cross.

Daily COMMIT *specifically* to be changed to bear the fruit of Jesus’ nature.

Daily BELIEVE that He will conform you to His death in *specific* ways.

O Lamb of God still keep me
Close to Thy wounded side;
'Tis only there in safety
And peace I can abide.

—James G. Deck

Abide in Thee! that deep love of Thine,
My Jesus, Lord, Thou Lamb of God divine,
Down, closely down, as living branch with tree,
I would abide, my Lord, my Christ, in Thee.

—J. Denham Smith

Abiding, oh so wondrous sweet,
I’m resting at the Savior’s feet;
I trust in Him, I’m satisfied,
I’m resting in the Crucified.

—C.B.J. Root

[BACK TO CONTENTS](#)