

# Gospel and Union with Christ — 2

## (Abiding)

### Outline

1. What do we mean by Abide or Remain in Christ (or Union with Christ)
2. How we can bear fruit — A (His words must abide in you)
3. How we can bear fruit — B (You must abide in His love)

### 1. What do we mean by Abide or Remain in Christ (or Union with Christ)?

John 15:1-4, 7-9 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> 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...<sup>7</sup> If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you. <sup>8</sup> This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. <sup>9</sup> “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love”.

John 15:1-4 tells us there are two ways we bear fruit—

- In vv 1-2, by pruning, Father God (gardener) does something externally to us.
- In v4, by abiding, Jesus does something internally in us **as we** abide in Him.

In this sermon, I will teach how to abide in Christ. In the following sermon, I will teach about what God the Father does externally to us (He prunes us).

**What does it mean to *abide* in Christ?** In brief, it means to depend on Christ. Just as the branch depends on the vine, we’re supposed to depend on Christ. But, in practice, how does a believer specifically depend on Christ in different circumstances so that he may bear fruit? In two ways.

- a. John 15:7, Jesus says, “*If my words remain in you.*”
- b. John 15:9, Jesus says, “*If you remain in my love.*”

### 2. How we can bear fruit—A (His words must abide in you)

God’s word “*is useful for teaching, correcting, and training in righteousness*” (2 Tim 3:16). But God’s word is much more.

His words are “*spirit and life*” (John 6:63).

“*It is alive and active*” (Heb 4:12).

*It works in you*” as you believe in it (1 Thes 2:13)

Paul says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col 3:16)

The psalmist says, “But his **delight** is in the law of the Lord, and he meditates day and night on his law. <sup>3</sup> He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers”. (Ps 1:2-3)

To abide in His word means you must **meditate** on His words till it becomes part of you and settles as truth in your heart. Then it will influence your preferences, change your views on life, and rule your thinking and actions. Meditating on God’s word is necessary for any spiritual growth in Christianity. Without meditating on God’s word, growing in union with Christ (abiding in Christ) in an evil world is impossible.

How does a person become born again? It is by a process whereby the Holy Spirit draws you to the truth, convinces you, and reveals that Jesus Christ is your only personal Saviour and Lord. You can say the process of drawing you, convincing you and revealing the truth is meditation. After you are born again, every step of spiritual growth will involve meditating on God’s word. Sometimes the process is quick, but often the process is wrestling over a lengthy period. Meditation is a **continual wrestling mental activity**. But with prayer, it will become a **spiritual reality** in your life. Why must we have continual wrestling mental activity? Because unless you **renew your mind** from the set patterns of the world, you will not know God’s perfect will for your life.

*Rom 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the **renewing of your mind**. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Renewing your mind is hard mental work. It is training your mind to think differently from the patterns of the world that are set in your mind, like a deep channel. **Let me give you an illustration**. When heavy rain falls on a mountain, the water flows down the same way it flowed over hundreds of years. It makes a water channel deep and set. Changing that channel would require blocking its mouth and creating a new channel down the mountainside. That is hard work. Similarly, our minds are set on a particular way of thinking. And to renew your mind is hard mental work. Let me give you a personal testimony.

I left my professional job when I was 45 and began planting a church. I had a wife and four children. But God gave me a **gift of faith** that He would provide for me without seeking help from others. And God provided. But when I was nearing 60, I faced two challenging and huge family problems. I was apprehensive about the future. And God did not give me the gift of faith to see me through. Then, Phil 4:6-7 challenged me. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God that transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus”. I meditated and prayed this verse for over three months, all the time wrestling with my mind, until this verse became part of me. Then I got the peace in Christ which is beyond all human understanding. Later, some part of those problems were solved, some are still being solved, and some, I believe, will be solved in the future. But I have peace.

*Isa 26:3 You will keep in perfect peace, him whose mind is steadfast because he trusts in You.*

Many new Christians in India are poor and uneducated. How can they meditate on God’s word? Pastors must help them memorise appropriate words of scripture. Pastors must explain it to them and help them pray it. Then encourage them to meditate on the scriptures. If they don’t meditate, they are oppressed and are open to evil spirits of fear that manifest when they attend church.

**There is no shortcut**. Meditation is a process. The Holy Spirit will make those scriptures come alive in their heart. They will bear fruit. Putting scripture in song helps the process. I have seen five-year-old children memorise scripture in song, and God helps them find the faith to apply His word successfully. God never fails.

### **3. How we can bear fruit—B (You must abide in His love)**

Irrespective of whether a person comes from a Christian or non-Christian background, they need a personal encounter with Jesus that transforms them. The Holy Spirit, impresses on their heart, that they are not right with God because of sin and reveals what Jesus did for them. They say, 'Father God, accept me, receive me, and wipe out my sins, not because of my works but because of what Jesus did on the cross, because of His perfect life and death on my behalf.' When this person says that, their sins are completely wiped out and pardoned. Simultaneously, at that moment, Jesus' perfect life is transferred to their account, they are adopted as a child into God's family, and God loves them as much as He loves His Son, Jesus. He sees them as perfect, radiant and beautiful as His Son Jesus. They are born again and brought into union with Christ, like a branch is attached to the vine. **A branch does not have life in itself; it only lives off the life of the vine.** This truth is fundamental, so let me explain it.

The moment you believe and are born again, God loves you infinitely from that moment onwards. God loves you as much as He loves Jesus. He cannot love you more than that or even less than that. God's love for you knows no increase or decrease. In Christ, you are perfect. God doesn't love you more on a day in which you have been good and loves you less on a day in which you have been bad.

So, God's love for you doesn't grow. But your awareness of His love, appreciation, and enjoyment of His love and grace make you grow. To abide in Jesus' love and live off of His love means you must look at your worries, depression, and envy of others as your failure to live out of His love for you. And Satan loves to dislodge you from abiding in Jesus's love for you.

For example, you compare yourself with others and put yourself down. You may be envious of the other person. But you have to say to yourself that you are jealous because you refuse to see how much Jesus loves you, and His love is the only one that matters in the whole universe.

Or say that you fear something terrible will happen. You become anxious. You have to admit you are trying to find your security in something and refusing to see Jesus as your ultimate Saviour and His love for you is the only love that will make you fully secure.

Here's a scripture that I found helpful to overcome all the challenges Satan throws me. It helps me to abide in Jesus' love for me.

*Ps 16:8 I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.*

When I face any challenge (fear, criticism or shame), my mind goes into an ungodly auto-response mode. This means I react automatically, like I always do, without faith in Jesus' love. For example, my automatic reaction to fear is to retreat or compromise. If I face criticism, my automatic reaction is to give back sharply. If I face shame, my automatic reaction is to deny the cause of the shame by telling a lie. My reactions were ungodly in all cases because I did not remain in Jesus' love for me. But to face these challenges, I must always keep my eyes on Jesus by being aware that His Holy Spirit is in me. Then I yield to His infinite love and respond by facing fear, criticism or shame with love and honesty. I can respond with love and honesty because I know the blood of Jesus saves me and Satan has no hold on me—so I can sincerely declare, "So what can Satan do to me?" I am not afraid of his threats. Satan's ultimate threat is to make me fear death. But Jesus defeated death and rose again. As a Christian, I also will rise from death to eternal life with Jesus. By looking at Jesus and declaring, "So what? I am not afraid of Satan's threats."—I remain in Jesus' love.

*Rev 12:11 They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.*

The only way to grow in maturity and bear fruit is to see your character problems as a Christian, as a failure to rely on Jesus' love for you—a failure to live out the gospel that He gave His life for you. You should ask yourself, "If Jesus perfectly loves me, why am I acting with these defects?"

How should a Christian handle a bad childhood? Or handle their caste, skin colour, lack of education or outward appearance? Or whatever disadvantage? What a Christian must never do is blame others. Blaming

others will never bear godly fruit in life. Instead, Christians must declare the gospel to themselves and live their lives by the truth of the gospel. They must say, "I am a child of God. I belong to God because He redeemed me by the blood of Jesus. I am forever free from condemnation. God loves me. The only love that matters is what I have in Christ. The only family that matters is what I have in Christ, as I belong to God's family." That is how a Christian should handle challenges. That is how a Christian abides in Jesus' love. It requires renewing your mind from an ungodly auto- reaction to a godly response. Then you will bear good fruit.

There are times when we face long periods of problems. It's like being in the valley of the shadow of death. But you don't have to fear evil if you are a Christian, for your good Shepherd is with you. He will protect and see you through (Ps 23:4). In those periods; I found Isa 30:15 to be of great help. *"In repentance and rest is your salvation; in quietness and trust is your strength"*.

God is at work in you, even as you wait on Him.

In conclusion: Everyone faces problems in life, both believers in Christ and unbelievers. But as a believer in Christ, if you let His word abide in you, and you abide in His love, then you bear good fruit in your life. God promises that He will work all things together for good in the life of a believer. *"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose"* (Rom 8:28).