

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. 2 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. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 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...7 If you remain in me and my words

remain

in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. 9 "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. 3 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).

Gospel and Union with Christ — 3 (Pruning)

Outline

1. The Father is the gardener
2. The Father expects fruit
3. The Father's work as the gardener to produce fruit
 - (a) cutting off false believers — judgment
 - (b) pruning genuine believers — more fruit
4. Our response to the Father's pruning

1. Father is the gardener (John 15:1)

The Father is the Source, the Son is the Means, and the Holy Spirit is the Effector of our salvation. Though the roles differ, the three persons work as One in the Trinity. Jesus obeyed the Father (John 4:34, 5:30, 6:38, 7:16, 8:29, 12:49, 14:10).

After the Last Supper, Jesus begins His extended exit (John 14:31-18:1) from the Upper Room by saying, *I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me. Come now; let us leave*" (John 14:31). Having always put His ministry in the hands of the Father, Jesus does so in the last hours before His crucifixion. In other words, the Father always was and continues to be **the overseer** of Jesus' ministry, even to the end, to accomplish every detail precisely according to the Father's plan.

Immediately after saying John 14:31, Jesus begins a significant chapter in the Bible—John 15, by saying, *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener"* (John 15:1). What He meant is that after His death and resurrection, Jesus becomes the instrument (**the true vine**) of Divine life through whom believers in Jesus partake of this Divine life and become fruitful. And His Father is the gardener. The Father continues to oversee the Divine plan by tending to the branches so that they will bear fruit to the glory of God (*John 15:8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples*).

2. The Father expects fruitfulness in creation, and His chosen people

God is glorified when what He created is fruitful and multiplies (*Gen 1:22,28*).

Jesus taught parables to emphasise that God expects fruitfulness

In the parable of the fig tree (*Luke 13:6-9*)

In the parable of the ten servants with one mina each (*Luke 19:11-26*)

In the parable of three servants and talents (*Matt 25:14-30*).

In the last parable (Matt 25:14-30)—Jesus ends with this statement: Matt 25:28-30 'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents.'

²⁹

For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. 30 And

throw

that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' This parable clearly shows that God expects fruitfulness and rewards it. But He cuts off those who don't produce fruit.

Numerous OT passages refer to Israel as a vineyard: Ps 80:8-16, Isa 5:1-7, Jer 2:21, Ezek 15:1-8, 17:5-10, 19:10-14. The vine became symbolic of Israel. But what

is significant is that every time the OT uses the analogy of the vineyard, it also mentions that Israel, as God's chosen people, failed to produce fruit. Consider: Isa 5:1-2,5 I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. 2 He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit... 5 Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will

take

away its hedge, and it will be destroyed.

Jesus uses this analogy to reveal God's new plan, where He is the *true vine* in the sense of being genuine compared to Israel, which did not produce fruit and was cut off (Isa 5:5). Jesus was the reality of which Israel was only the type.

3. The Father works as the gardener of the vine to produce fruitfulness (John 15:1-3,6)

John 15:1-3,6 I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 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. 3 You are already clean because of the

word I have spoken to you...6 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.

As the gardener and overseer of the vine (Jesus Christ), the Father works on the branches in two ways. One is that the Father cuts off fruitless branches; the other, He prunes the fruitful branches to make them even more fruitful. The Father cuts off the lifeless branches, while Jesus, the true vine, cuts off the fruitless

For example, among the twelve disciples, Judas, who betrayed Jesus, was cut off because he was not clean even after three years with Jesus. While Peter, who thrice denied Jesus, repented and was strengthened to produce fruit after Pentecost. (*John 13:10 Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean [Peter], though not every one of you [Judas]." 11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean*).

(a) The Father's work of cutting off false believers — judgment

John 15:2,6 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit... 6 is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

Jesus expresses the same idea in the parable of the weeds *Matt 13:24-30*.
Notice

that the owner allows the weeds to grow alongside the wheat; otherwise, the natural wheat would be mistaken for the weeds and uprooted. But at the end of the age, the weeds are bundled up and burned.

So, the first work of the gardener in John 15 is **judgment**—some now and some later at the end of the age. Some false believers will fall away when facing persecution now, and some will be exposed after death and judged on the last day.

The question of whether a branch that is in union with Christ, a believer, can lose his salvation and be condemned — the answer is "No". Genuine believers cannot lose their salvation. But false believers are not saved, to begin with. There is a kind of "attachment" to Jesus, a kind of disciple, a kind of believer — that is not genuine and has no salvation. And the difference between true and false believers is that the true abides and bears fruit, whereas the false does not. I have dealt with this subject in greater detail in the previous sermon, *Gospel and Union with Christ—Part 1 (Abiding)*.

(b) The Father's work of pruning genuine believers — more fruit

John 15:2-3 While every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

In the Greek language, in which the NT was written, the word "prune" and "clean" are the same. In other words, the Father cleans every branch that was already cleansed by the "**word**" and was bearing fruit and would bear more fruit by pruning.

Note: The "*word*" here represents the whole message of Jesus. Jesus is the eternal Son of God (John 1:1-3), and became man (John 1:14). He lived without sin (John 8:46), would lay down His life for the sheep (John 3:15; 10:17), and would rise from the dead (John 10:18). In other words, the whole salvation message of the gospel. When people believe the gospel, they are cleansed and born-again, becoming branches of the true vine (Jesus).

In a natural vineyard, the vinedresser (called gardener in John 15) cuts off fruitless branches and prunes the fruitful ones. How does he prune? Snipping undesirable offshoots of a fruit-bearing branch that tends to use the vine's sap for its glory. By snipping here and there with scissors, the vinedresser allows the sap (juice) of the vine to flow fully through the branch to bear bountiful and wholesome good fruit. And there's much snipping, and I suppose it causes much pain to the fruitful branch.

When bringing up a child, a parent disciplines the child for wrong behaviour but also re-directs the vast energy of a child towards wholesome and fruitful use of time. In both cases, children suffer pain and often respond by throwing tantrums only because they lack the perspective of what the parent is doing. Eventually, they trust their parent's wisdom and supervision.

Likewise, in John 15, the Father deals with the genuine branches already bearing fruit by pruning them so that the sap in the vine will flow appropriately through the branch to bear more fruit. The sap is the Divine life of the Holy Spirit that proceeds from Father and Son; the Vine represents our Lord Jesus, and the vinedresser (gardener) is the Father.

The intensity of Divine life in our Union with Christ (as a branch of the Vine) is **increased by external factors** we experience in our life. And the Father controls **all** those external factors. There is also great internal working of the Holy Spirit (sap) in our life as He convicts us, enlightens us etc. But here, the focus is on external factors profoundly affecting our experience of the sap and the vine.

*2 Cor 1:8-9 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters,] about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. **But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.***

Paul's example above is severe, yet believers today in India, China and the Middle East are persecuted for their faith and experience similar conditions. Nevertheless, all Christians will face external provocation, which the Father ordains and controls so that we might rely on God, not ourselves.

The general principle of pruning is to move us to depend on God so that we bear more fruit. It includes discipline when we have sinful attitudes and behaviour

so we bear the fruit of holiness.

Heb 12:5-11 says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son." 7 Endure hardship as discipline;

God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their fathers? 8 If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then

you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. 9 Moreover, we have

all

had human fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! 10 They disciplined us

for

a little while as they thought best, but God disciplines us for our good so that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but

painful.

Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those trained by it.

4. Our response to the Father's pruning

All believers go through pruning. Whenever I faced it, I found great comfort in: *Isa 30:15 "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength.*

Firstly, I examine whether my heart is right with God and others. I check for unconfessed sin, wrong attitudes, careless speech, and haste in me. After clearing

my heart, I rest in the fact that I am a believer in Jesus, and God has saved me. I don't have to make any hasty decisions. Instead, I quietly trust Him and wait upon Him, continue my daily devotions and be diligent in my work. Invariably, the pruning season passes, and I grow deeper in my walk with God.

Sometimes, I don't even know why I am having a hard time. Then I turn to:

Isa 50:10. "Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the word of his servant? Let the one who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the

LORD

Ps 105:17-19 And he sent a man before them — Joseph sold as a slave. 18 They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons, 19 till what he foretold came to pass, till the word of the Lord proved him true.

Jer 12:5 "If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses?"

I believe God is training us for higher purposes when He prunes us. He teaches us to compete with horses! God prepared Joseph and David for a high purpose. He will train us for the last days.

Gospel and Union with Christ — 4 (Fruit, Friend and Enemy)

Outline

1. Fruit (John 15:1-12)
2. Friend (John 15:12-17)
3. Enemy (John 15:18-20)

1. Fruit

We have examined fruit-bearing in *Gospel & Union with Christ* (Parts 1-3). Here we will see some more aspects.

John 15:9-12 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 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. 11 **I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.** 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

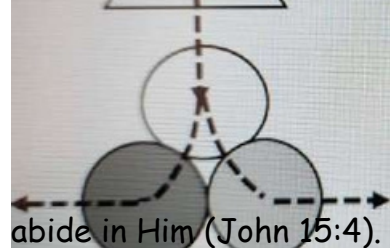
We have seen in Part 2 that we abide in Christ (the true vine) by abiding in God's word and abiding in God's love. It is after the pattern of Jesus, who abides in the Father's word and the Father's love (John 15:10). By such abiding, we are in Union with Christ as a branch is in union with the vine. Then the Divine life flows in and through us, just like the vine's sap flows in and through the branch. All we do is submit to the Father's pruning so that the Divine life flows properly through us without diversion caused by our own desires. Then **His love** (John 15:12) and **His joy** (John 15:11), and **His peace** (John 14:27) flow through us, making our love, our joy and our peace complete.

In the diagram, the triangle represents *GOD*.

The white circle represents the human spirit.

The dark grey circle represents the human body.

The light grey circle represents the human soul.



The dotted line represents the flow of Divine life in and through a believer who abides in Christ—which enables us to bear the fruit of Divine love, Divine joy and Divine peace because Jesus abides in us as we

abide in Him (John 15:4).

(Note: Human beings have body, soul and spirit — 1 Thess 5:23).

Fruit of Prayer

John 15:7-8 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

The mutual indwelling (John 15:4 *Remain in me, and I will remain in you*) is not meant to be "mystical". It is our responsibility to remain or abide in Jesus by **obeying God's word** after the pattern of Jesus with the Father (John 15:10 *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*). Jesus is the word of God made flesh. We

cannot

say Jesus is Lord and not obey His word. We can't have one without the other. So, obedience to God's word is a visible sign of the invisible spiritual vitality of our union with Christ. Such obedient believers are **genuine disciples**. Their prayers are effective since all they ask for is according to God's will (1 John

5:14-

15). Such a fruitful prayer life brings glory to the Father because genuine disciples would pray with genuine faith that God's will be done and His kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven. In other words, **the fruit of prayer from genuine disciples in union with Christ is at the heart of how Jesus brings glory to the Father.**

Fruit of evangelism and making disciples

*John 15:16 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.*

We did not choose Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, nor, to begin with, could we ever have chosen Him because we were sinners; we were His enemies (Rom 5:8, 10). In John 15:16, we see that Jesus chose us before we could. He chose us, and He **appointed** us. When **appointed** is used with the word "**go**", it gives us a sense of mission. This sense is further strengthened when we notice the Greek word (etheka) for *appointed* is elsewhere used in the NT to be set apart for ministry (1 Tim 1:12, Acts 13:47).

Therefore, the words "**go and bear fruit**" refer to evangelism. And **go and fruit that will last** would mean **go and make disciples** who would continue believing in Jesus' teaching (John 8:31 *To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples*). In Matt 28:19, we see "**go and make disciples**" as Jesus' Great Commission given to all believers.

Once again, He promises to answer our prayers for a successful evangelism ministry and make disciples of all nations because it is God's will (John 15:16).

With all these aspects of fruit in mind, our Union with Christ is never meant to be exclusively an inward fruit of faithful worship without an outward fruit of faithful missional discipleship.

2. Friend

John 15:12-15 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 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.

Jesus says, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you" (15:10). Such love between Father and Son is infinite Divine love. Then, in 15:12, Jesus says, "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." Such endless love is not within us. We can only obey His command by allowing His Divine love to flow through us as we abide in Him.

Whereas Jesus loves the whole world and lays down His life for all humanity (John 3:16), only those who believe in His gospel appropriate His Divine love and are born again. To those who believe in His gospel, Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters (Heb 2:11). Elsewhere, He calls them His sheep who hear His voice and follow Him (John 10:15). Here, He calls them His friends (15:13-

15). And His friends must relate with each other with His Divine love and not as how the world relates. This is what I believe is meant by recognising (discerning) the Body of Christ when we receive Holy Communion in a local church (1 Cor 11:29).

We should not look and relate with each other by worldly distinctions of rich and poor, high caste or low caste, well dressed or not, educated and uneducated. But we should look at each other the way Christ looks at us—His family, His sheep, His friends—His Bride (Rev 21:9, Eph 5:25-32) and relate accordingly.

Jesus says, "You are my friends if you do what I command" (15:13) and, "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you" (15:12). But obeying His command is not what makes them His friends because only believing in Him does. But this obedience is the character of His friend—to love what Jesus loves and hate what Jesus hates. Otherwise, you can't walk closely with Him (*Amos 3:3 Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?*).

But if obedience is the character of His friend, what then is the difference between a servant and a friend—for both must obey. The big difference is “revelation”. Masters don’t reveal their plans to servants and yet demand obedience. But God reveals His plans and His heart to His friends. Abraham (2 Chron 20:7; Isa 41:8; James 2:23) and Moses (Exodus 33:11) are the only people in the OT whom God called His friends. And both enjoyed extraordinary revelations of God’s plans. In the NT, Jesus says, I no longer call you servants, but I call you friends, and I will reveal to you everything of the Father’s plans (John 15:15). Jesus continues to show believers His plans and desires through the scriptures and the ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13).

God called Abraham and Moses His friends, but the Bible never called God their friend. In the NT, Jesus refers to Lazarus as His friend (John 11:11), but Jesus is not called the friend of Lazarus. The Bible never refers to God (or Jesus)

as a friend of anyone. While Jesus may call me His friend, I can never say Jesus is my friend and will do whatever I ask of Him. Why not? Because He is Lord. Psalm 45:11, referring to the Bride of Christ, says, “*The King is enthralled by your beauty; honour Him for He is your lord*”. Jesus calls us His friends and reveals His plans so we can partner with Him in prayer to bring His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Our prayers are unanswered if we don’t pray according to His will. But this does not mean that Jesus is cold towards us. He loves us so much that He died for us on the cross. Jesus always obeyed His Father and did everything according to His Father’s plans, and He expects us to do the same. And when we do, He will answer our prayers.

3. Enemy (John 15:18-20)

John 15:18-20 “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 19 If

you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. 20 Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also”.

True disciples will engage in evangelism and making disciples. The world will hate them as their enemy because the world hated Jesus. So, Jesus clarifies to everyone the price to follow Him (Luke 14:25-33). It may even cost them their life. Then, those only with enthusiasm but no faith will drop off, and those with genuine faith in Him will continue to the end (Luke 9:57-62).

Gospel and the Grace of God

Outline

1. The Grace of God is Fundamental to Christianity
2. The Grace of God that brings salvation to all men has appeared & will appear 3. The Grace of God can be refused if we want to live independently of God

1. The Grace of God is Fundamental to Christianity

"The principle of grace is as fundamental to Christianity as that of justice is to Law, or love is to marriage. Christianity cannot be understood apart from an adequate grasp of grace. The doctrine of grace distinguishes the Christian faith from every other religion in the world and the cults. Rightly understood and applied, the doctrine of grace can revolutionise one's Christian life". (Bob Deffinbaugh)

"If your religion isn't a religion of grace, it may be something, but it's not Christianity. Unless you've understood the grace of God in all its truth, you can't call your religion Christianity". (Tim Keller)

John 6: 36-37, 40, 44-45 But as I told you, you have seen me, and still you do not believe. 37 All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away... .. 40 For my Father's will is that everyone who

looks

to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day." 44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent

me

draws them, and I will raise them at the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets:

'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me.

In the passage from John 6 above, Jesus tells the Jewish leaders that He is not surprised if people don't want to believe in Him because no one can become a believer and a follower of Christ unless the Father in heaven draws them within their hearts to be a believer in Jesus (Matt 16:17). In other words, people can be Christian only by the grace of God.

Grace is the undeserved favour of God. We need grace because all humanity has a fundamental problem. By **natural inclination**, we are born sinners and want to live independently of God — by our effort, merit, and standards. And when we live independently, by our understanding, we form religion. So, if you want to be a Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, or faithful follower of any religion, you can become

one. But you can't make yourself a Christian. Because by God's grace alone, only by revelation, can you become a Christian (Matt 16:17).

On the other hand, you cannot take any credit if you are a Christian because you became one only because of grace. By His grace, God put His call in your heart,

and you answered His call by faith and became a follower of Christ. Therefore, you cannot be proud or feel superior if you are a Christian. There is no such thing as a Dalit Christian or a Brahmin Christian. [In the Hindu Caste system, Dalits

are

outcastes, whereas Brahmins are the highest caste].

Grace is fundamental to Christianity because it is God's character. God is gracious when dealing with others, whether good or bad people. Grace is never something that man deserves; God gives us grace because He is gracious.

Because God is gracious in character, He gives grace to the good and the wicked people on earth (Matt 5:45). This is known as **common grace**. The talents of teachers, musicians, scientists, mathematicians, economists, entertainers, and leaders all come from God's common grace. These are the grace gifts of the Father who works all types of workings in all men (1 Cor 12:6). Every single person has been given some grace gift from Father God. Common grace should lead us to appreciate who God is and give Him thanks. This will open us to receiving God's saving grace through Jesus Christ, His Son.

God is gracious; He gives us salvation by His grace, but we must have faith in His grace to be saved. Grace is a gift of God, and so is faith because every good gift comes from God. But faith is the gift that opens the door for the gift of grace to work in our lives. Without faith, it is impossible to please God and receive

anything from Him. We can block faith when we want to live independently of God without understanding His character. We must believe that God is good, that He loves us, and that He sent His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for us.

Eph 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—9 not by works so that no one can boast.

Col 1:6 The gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace.

Grace as Power for living

The Bible uses the word grace 131 times, of which 123 are in the New Testament. And in the NT, Paul uses grace 84 times. So, 64% of all the uses of grace in the Bible are by Paul. No wonder people call him "the apostle of grace."

Paul teaches us that grace is not only the undeserved favour of God for salvation but also an influence or power of God that works in us to change our capacities for **work**, suffering, and **obedience**. God is so gracious that He treats us better than we deserve and is also generous enough to offer us practical help so that we can please Him in our daily life.

2 Cor 9:8 And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times,

having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

2 Cor 12:9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

1 Cor 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

Grace is given to the humble:

James 4:6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble".

Humility is to know we are utterly **unattractive** to God because we are sinful and, therefore, **helpless** to save ourselves. Therefore, it should make us utterly **dependent** on God's grace for our salvation because we utterly **trust** (have faith) in God's goodness and faithfulness — on His terms, which is the gospel.

When it comes to the gospel, generally:

women respond to it before men,

people at the bottom of the social ladder respond to it before those at the top, laypeople respond to it before the priests.

Why so? Because Jesus tries to tell us that success, high social status, power, or wealth will generally draw our focus more towards the world than towards God. It will drive us toward what we can accomplish ourselves rather than our dependency on Him.

Jesus is **not** on the side of the women because they are women.

Jesus is **not** on the side of the poor because they are poor.

Jesus is **not** on the side of the outcast because they are outcasts.

But, the entrance to the kingdom of God and the way of salvation is such that women respond to it before men, people at the bottom of society tend to respond to it before those at the top. Jesus says, "So the last will be first, and the first will be last (Matt 20:16, Mark 10:31, Luke 13:30). Jesus means that those first and highly esteemed by the world are blinded by it and find it hard to be spiritually aware of God's kingdom. At the same time, those who are the least and last in the world are the first to become aware of God's kingdom and salvation. **It will always happen that way everywhere in the world.** It is happening in India right now. The Dalit (outcaste) responds to the kingdom of God before the Brahmin (highest caste). And most high-caste Hindus think that Christianity is a "Dalit" religion. The way of salvation is such that the last (the Dalit) will be the first to see it, and the first (the Brahmin) will be the last to see it. But there are exceptions!

2. The Grace of God that brings salvation to all men has appeared and will appear

Titus 2:11-14 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.

¹² *It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,*

¹⁴ *who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*

There is a past, present and future aspect to note in [the above verses](#).

The past (2:11): The grace of God has appeared. The word "appeared" in Greek is "epifanee", which means "to shine forth as a bright light shines in the darkness" or "a striking appearance or manifestation". That bright light is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ that was made public to humanity living in darkness. The Message Bible translates 2:11 as "*God's readiness to give and forgive is now public.*

Salvation's available for everyone!" [The Message by Eugene Petersen].

The future (2:13): Once again, the word "appearing" (epifanee) is used to signify the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ at His glorious and sudden Second Coming.

The present (2:12 & 14): The grace of God "teaches" (Greek "paideo"), which means trains and disciplines us like the way a parent trains and disciplines a child. The purpose is to purify and present us as a holy people (bride) to Him (v14).

Now,

we look back at the past (v11) with gratitude and look to the future (v13) with the

hope of our reward, and in this way, we motivate ourselves to cooperate with His grace to perfect in all holiness in the present. Therefore, Paul says, "*As God's fellow workers, we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain*" (2 Cor 6:1).

3. The Grace of God can be refused if we want to live independently of God

Read John 18:1-14. A group of Roman soldiers, some officials from the High Priest and some Pharisees came to arrest Jesus. When Jesus asked them who they wanted, they replied Jesus of Nazareth. When Jesus answered, "I am He" (Greek—I AM he—God's Name), battle-hardened Roman soldiers fell to the ground. It was Jesus' final revelation of divinity when He effectively used the words, "I AM he". Yet, they got up, bound Jesus in chains, and eventually led Him to be crucified (John 18-19).

Notice that the group that came to arrest Jesus comprised **Jews and Gentiles, high-caste and commoners** (Jewish officials, Pharisees and rough-tough soldiers). They all bound Jesus in chains. That group, in a way, represents the whole of humanity. And all of them did not want God on His terms. They wanted a God whom they could bind in chains and follow on their terms. They refuse the grace of God's revelation (I AM he) and want to live independently of God.

My non-Christian friends often ask me why I say Jesus is the only way to God. I tell them that God impressed my heart to earnestly seek Him and follow Him **on His terms, with a pledge to follow Him sincerely**. And God revealed Jesus to me. Then, I asked my friends whether they would sincerely pray to God to reveal Himself with a pledge to follow Him **on His terms** when He did. Their answer was either silence or they would say No—the cost is too much.

John 7:17 Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.

Jer 29:13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Read Mark 12:1-11 — the parable of the tenants. A fearsome end awaits those who refuse the grace of God.

Gospel and Wrath of God

Outline

1. God's wrath and the gospel
2. God's wrath revealed in three ways
 - (a) By human death
 - (b) By human misery and suffering
 - (c) By human behaviour growing in depravity
3. God's wrath and the unbeliever
4. God's wrath and the believer

1. God's wrath and the gospel

The gospel is good news. But the good news is eternally so good because it saves us from the eternally bad news of the wrath of God. And we can't understand God's wrath against sinners like us because we don't understand how **wretched** sinners we are. Consequently, we will not hear the sweet sound of amazing God's grace unless we know what a wretch we are.

Rom 1:17-18 For in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

The wretchedness of sin is seen in Rom 1:18. We are not only ungodly and unrighteous, but we also suppress the truth by our unrighteousness. In other words, we are unrighteous and shut the door to the truth in our unrighteousness. We not only shut the door to the truth but crucified truth became man, Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life. So, we are wretched sinners indeed and under **the wrath of God**.

Wrath of God: We can define wrath as anger we experience when others do something wrong and unjust to us. There is a vast difference between God's wrath and man's wrath. God's wrath is holy and always justified; man's is never holy and not often justified. Man's wrath is sinful and opens us to demonic influence. Therefore, the Bible warns us not to repay evil for evil, not take revenge, but to leave room for God's wrath, for He alone can repay.

Rom 12:17, 19 Do not repay anyone evil for evil... ..19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

God's wrath and the Gospel: God's wrath against wretched sinners like us is perfectly justified because God is holy and perfect, so His plan for humanity is also holy and perfect. And we are destroying His plan for humanity by our ungodliness and unrighteousness. But God is also loving, merciful and gracious and provided a way for us to receive His divine favour through the gospel. The gospel came at an infinite price because His Son (Jesus) took God's wrath upon Himself when He died in our place on the cross (Rom 5:8-9). To reject God's perfect plan for our salvation is to reject God's love, mercy, grace and favour. Then all that remains is to receive His righteous wrath on unrepentant sinners whilst on earth (John 3:36) and on the final Day of Judgement (Rom 2:5).

Rom 5:8-9 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since his blood has justified us, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

John 3:36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

Rom 2:5 But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

2. God's wrath is revealed in three ways while we live on earth

(a) By human death

*Rom 5:15-16 For if the many died by the trespass of the one man [Adam]... ..
16 the judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation.*

Human death is God's judgment on the ungodliness and unrighteousness of the human race rooted in Adam and is the manifestation of His wrath on sinful man.

(b) By human misery and suffering

Gen 3:16-19 To the woman, he said, "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labour, you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." 17 To Adam, he said, "Because you listened

to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must

not eat from it,' Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. 18 It will produce thorns and thistles

for

you, and you will eat the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground.

Rom 8:20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope.

At the heart of society, the family, there will be a continuous battle between the husband and wife. The wife desires to control and manipulate her husband, who, in turn, will dominate his wife. And man's survival will always be difficult because nature will be against him. Don't blame the devil when things go wrong because God subjected creation to frustration (Rom 8:20). All this misery manifests God's wrath. But there is still hope in the redemption by God in Jesus Christ.

(c) By human behaviour growing in the depravity of body, heart and mind

Read Romans 1:20-28. Because humanity turned away from the worship of the Creator God and worshipped created things, God, in His wrath, gave humans over to increasing sinful depravity of body, heart and mind. In other words, God reveals His wrath against sin by giving people over to more sin — to unnatural sex, shameful lusts (1:26) and a depraved mind (1:28).

3. God's wrath and the unbeliever

Despite His wrath against sinful humanity, God does not want anyone to perish but everyone to repent, believe the gospel and be saved (2 Pet 3:9, 1 Tim 2:3-4). The grace of God has appeared to all humanity (Titus 2:11), and He made believers

His ambassadors to appeal to them on His behalf to be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:18-20). Furthermore, God is kind to both the just and the wicked, giving them equal treatment with the sun and the rain (Matt 5:45). But above all, God also sends His Holy Spirit to convict humanity of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). So, amid His wrath, there is His kindness which should lead people

to

repent and believe the gospel (Rom 2:4).

2 Peter 3:9 He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

1 Tim 2:3-4 This is good and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Titus 2:11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.

2 Cor 5:18-20 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world

to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are, therefore, Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Matt 5:45 He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

John 16:8 When he (Holy Spirit) comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.

Rom 2:4 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realising that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?

Man is destined to die once, and after death, there is judgment (Heb 9:27). On judgment day, those whose names are not written in the Book of Life were thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:15) — **Hell**.

There is no presence of God in hell. God's love, mercy and kindness will not be there. The Holy Spirit, who brings conviction of sin, is not present in hell. People in hell are unable to repent. They are left with selfishness and sinfulness, in which they can only grow from one degree to another for eternity — making everyone a monster. It's like being in a never-ending horror movie that is real.

4. God's wrath and the believer

1 Thess 5:9-11 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation

through our Lord Jesus Christ. 10 He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as, in fact, you are doing.

If God has not appointed believers to suffer wrath, what is the meaning of our death, misery and sin, which we still face in our lives on earth? The answer is the gospel, the good news that our Saviour and Lord Jesus was crucified on the cross and has borne the wrath of God on our behalf. And He has also completely altered the death, misery and sin we face today. How has He altered them?

(a) Human death: For believers, death is swallowed up in victory

1 Cor 15:20-22, 53-55 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through

a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22 For as in Adam

has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

⁵⁵
"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

(b) Human misery: For believers, misery makes us Christlike.

Rom 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

2 Cor 4:16-18 Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly, we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them

all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Heb 12:5-7, 11 "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." 7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? ... 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

(c) Human sin —For believers, the gospel breaks the power of sin and

replaces

it with love for righteousness and the fruit of the Holy Spirit

Jesus has set us free from the bondage of sin (Rom 6:14-22), which led to the depravity of body, heart and mind. We are now growing in holiness, offering our bodies as a living sacrifice to God and renewing our minds (Rom 12:1-2)

Rom 6:14, 18, For sin, shall no longer be your master because you are not under the law, but under grace... ... 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Rom 12:1-2 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform 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.

Conclusion: The gospel is the power of God to save believers from the wrath to come. If you have not accepted Jesus as your Saviour and Lord, consider seriously

doing so as soon as possible. If you are a believer, thank God for His amazing grace to save a wretch like you.