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B0631 – August 6, 2006 – Jn 15:4-6 – The Christian's Fruitbearing - Part 2

INTRODUCTION

Jesus came for two reasons, both of which I would hope that you would hope would be fulfilled in your life. First, He came that you might have life, the possession of eternal life that comes through faith in Him. Second, He came that you might have it abundantly, the enjoyment of eternal life that comes through abiding in Him.

FRUIT-BEARING THROUGH MUTUAL ABIDING

John 15:4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch is not able to bear fruit of itself if it does not abide in the grapevine, so neither can you if you may not abide in Me.

Abide is an imperative, a command. When a command is issued it is assumed that it can either be obeyed or disobeyed. The Greek word *meno* translated **abide** means to “remain or stay”. The question is “Where are the disciples commanded to remain or stay”? The text answers, **in Me**. Does the command mean stay in *union* with Him or to stay in *communion* with Him? Arminian’s take the command to mean that it rests with the believer to stay in *union* with Christ (justification). If the believer fails to stay in *union* with Christ then he loses his salvation. The final state of the believer who fails to stay in *union* with Christ is described in verse 6 which they interpret as hell. In the final analysis Arminian’s claim a “believer” is an “abider” and an “abider” is a “believer”. If one fails to abide he is no longer a believer.





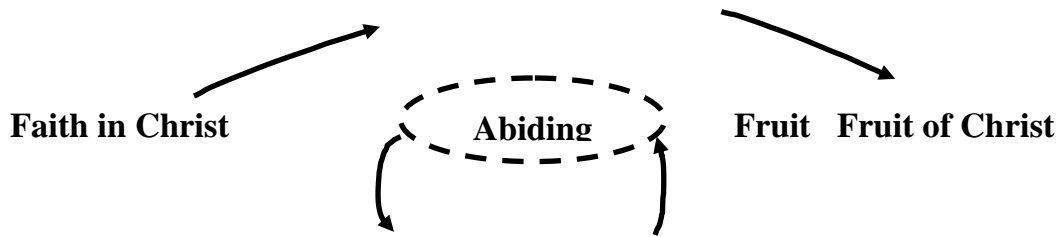
Lose Salvation

We have already shown from 1st century viticulture practices that this interpretation is impossible. In verse 2 there are two branches **in Me**. When John uses the phrase **in Me**, “in Him”, and “in Christ” he means in *communion* with Him, in close contact with Him, remaining in fellowship with Him, abiding in Him. “The phrase 'in Me' is used 16 times in John's Gospel (6:56; 10:38; 14:10 [twice], 11, 20, 30; 15:2, 4 [twice], 5-7; 16:33; 17:21, 23)). In each case it refers to fellowship with Christ. It is inconsistent then to say the phrase in 15:2 refers to a person who merely professes to be saved but is not.”ⁱ A person 'in Me' is always a true Christian.

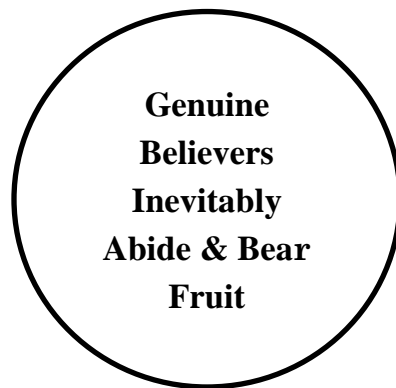
In verse 2 both branches are in abiding in Him, both branches are staying in fellowship with Him. Yet, we notice two different results from these abiding branches. The first does not bear fruit and the second does bear fruit. Why the difference if both are abiding in Him? Who are the branches who abide but don't bear fruit? In 1st century viticulture you had two main branches and one new branch or shoot. The two main branches were fruit bearers. The third branch was a non-fruit-bearer called “the keeper”. It was a new shoot that would bear fruit the next year. While the English translation says that the branch in Him that does not bear fruit He “takes away” this is completely contrary to what 1st century viticulturists did. If they cut them off they would be destroying next years crop. Instead, this word can be translated “lifts up” or “picks up” and it is used this way eight times in the Gospel of John, normally of picking up stones, a pallet or some other object. We know from 1st century viticulture that the vinedresser would lift up “the keeper” shoots off the ground to keep them healthy so the next year they would bear fruit. So, the first branch, “the keeper”, corresponds to a believer who is abiding but has yet to mature to the point of fruit bearing. As with all plants, there is a period of growth before the plant can bear fruit. The parallel is that the Father “lifts up” the fledgling new believer so that he can grow to the point where he is able to bear fruit. He certainly does not take him away to judgment. That is completely contradicted by 1st century viticulture practices which Jesus and His apostles would have been thoroughly aware of. So, this verse cannot be referring to *union* with Christ but staying in *communion* with Christ, in fellowship, abiding. Further, in John 13 when Judas was present Jesus said “You are not all clean”. But after Judas left Jesus said here “you are clean”. The cleanliness referred to is clearly positional cleanliness. Positionally they had been forgiven of all their sins. Clearly they are already in *union* with Christ. The issue is not whether they are in *union* with Him. The issue is whether they are in *communion* with Him.



Genuine Believers



Thus, when Jesus issues the command **Abide in Me** He is telling those already in *union* with Him to “stay in close connection with Him”, to “remain in fellowship with Him”, to “stay intimate with Him”. It is not mere *union* with Christ that results in fruit but *communion* with Christ. There is a difference between being in *union* with Christ and being in *communion* with Him. *Union* is positional but *communion* is experiential. Reformed/Lordship Salvation claim that being in *union* with Christ inevitably results in fruit so that the absence of fruit signals the absence of life. For example, quote, “There is no fruit without faith, and there is no faith without fruit...While Reformation theology affirms that faith alone saves, it affirms with equal conviction that the faith that saves is not alone.”ⁱⁱ



Professing Believers do not abide and do not bear fruit

But the Bible is teaching something very different here. The Bible is teaching that those who already have *union* with Christ (v 3) must meet the condition of abiding (v 4) in order to bear fruit. The Reformed/Lordship Salvation interpretation actually makes

nonsense of the passage. If being a believer inevitably results in bearing fruit then why are these believers being commanded to “abide” in order to bear fruit?

These facts indicate that the passage has nothing to do with determining whether one is a genuine believer or false professor by looking for fruit, nor does it have to do with whether one can lose his salvation. The passage has to do with experiential sanctification, the spiritual life and the sole condition that a believer must meet in order to bear fruit.

Now, there is still a grammatical difficulty with the command **Abide in Me and I in you**. Historically the grammar of verse 4 has been taken in three senses since the present imperative and present indicative take the same Greek form:

1. Abiding in the same manner... Abide in Me, *as* I abide in you.”
2. *kago* in a connective sense making it a mutual abiding...Abide in Me, and I abide in you.
3. *kago* in the apodosis making it a conditional abiding...Abide in Me and I will abide in you.

Option 3 is the best sense of the verse. If you will abide in Me then I will abide in you and this will mean fruit bearing. So, there is a condition here for believers to meet in order to bear fruit. Nowhere does the Bible teach that being a believer inevitably means he will bear fruit. Just as the condition of salvation is faith in Christ so the condition of fruit bearing is abiding in Christ. The believer has the ability to abide but not the ability to produce fruit, only Christ can do that. The implication of this command is that not all believers abide in Him; there are fruitless and fruitful believers.

The command is a constative aorist meaning “make this your top priority?” Why? The only reason believers are on earth is to bear fruit. And the verse goes on to say that a branch cannot bear fruit apart from the vine so the believer cannot bear fruit apart from Christ. *to klema ouv dunatai*, literally, “the branch not able of itself” to bear fruit. *dunatai* is the word which means “ability”. The word is in the middle voice meaning that left to itself the branch has no ability to produce fruit. Likewise the believer, left to himself, has no ability to produce fruit. He must be abiding in the One who has the ability to produce fruit, the vine who is Christ. Now, many of you wondered last week, “What is the fruit that I must produce?” We will get to the fruit in a moment but take note what the focus of the passage is. The focus is on the believer’s obedience to the command **Abide**. The believer is not commanded to bear fruit. In fact, we don’t have the ability to bear fruit. The bearing of fruit is an ability of Christ alone. What believers do have the ability to do is **abide in Him**.

What does that look like? How do I abide in Him? By remaining in fellowship (*koinonia*) with Him. If fellowship is a state that results when the believer admits/acknowledges his sin to God then when we remain in fellowship we are abiding. Usually the emphasis with regard to fellowship is confession and the verse cited is 1 John 1:9. The real issue is the “cleansing” that takes place when we confess (cf 1 John 1:7, 9; John 15:2). We were positionally cleansed at the moment of faith in Christ but we still require experiential cleansing each day of our lives. Note however that confession of sin is not required to come into *union* with Christ but for those who are already in union with Christ to come into *communion* with Him.

Fruit bearing is totally from beginning to end a work of Christ through us. Therefore our top priority should be to **Abide in Him** so that Christ lives through us the fruit which the Father desires may be produced. True fruit can only be produced by abiding in the vine which is Christ, therefore producing the rich fruits of Christ with the great end that the Father, the vinedresser, is glorified (cf. 15:8).

Identification of the Branches

John 15:5 I am the grapevine, you the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him this one bears much fruit, because apart from Me you are not able of yourselves to do anything.

Christ identifies Himself as the vine. Then Christ identifies the eleven disciples as **the branches** (*humeis ta klemata*). This is the first time they are identified as **branches**. They have already been identified as “clean” in verse 3. So, they are already positionally justified. Every branch is positionally justified because of faith in Christ. However, not all branches bear fruit. This is why Christ says **He who abides in Me and I in him this one bears much fruit, because apart from Me you are not able of yourselves to do anything**. So, what is clear is that there are believers that bear fruit and there are believers that do not bear fruit. We already knew about these two believers from verse 2. Now, the main point of this verse is to point out the reason why bearing fruit requires abiding in Christ. The reason is given by the causal *hoti* clause beginning with the word **because**.ⁱⁱⁱ Our Lord’s response is literally “because apart from Me not you are able to do nothing.” Clearly to be **apart from** Him is the opposite of **abiding in** Him. In other words, if believers don’t abide then they are left on their own and in that condition we can’t bear any fruit. So, abiding and not abiding are absolute states. Either you are abiding or you are not abiding but you can’t be partly abiding and partly not abiding at

the same time. Either you are or you are not. If you are abiding then there is much fruit. If you are not abiding there is no fruit. Thus, the fruit is not sourced in us but in Christ, the only one able to bear fruit worthy of reward. If the result of mutual abiding is fruit-bearing then what is the result of not abiding?

The Non-Abiding Branch

John 15:6 Unless anyone may abide in Me, he is thrown out as the branch and withers and they gather them and throw them into the fire and they burn.

The verse begins with either a third class conditional clause or a fifth class conditional clause **unless anyone may abide in Me**. Either way it’s an indicative verb and so this nails down the meaning. “Maybe you will abide and maybe you won’t abide”, that’s a matter of the believers volition, but if you don’t abide then you certainly will be **thrown out, etc...** Obviously the harshness of this language has lead people to think this can’t be referring to believers. I’ll post each of these explanations as well as critiques of them on the internet but I want to leave some time for questions so let me just give you the most contextually accurate explanation. First, from 1st century viticulture practices we know that there was no burning of branches in the spring. All the burning of branches took place in the fall after the harvest. Jesus was speaking this parable in the spring, the evening of His arrest and trial. The viticulture practices described in verse 2 took place in the spring. The viticulture practices in verse 6 occurred during the fall. So, Jesus is talking about mature branches who had the opportunity to bear fruit but didn’t. After the harvest the vinedresser would go through the vineyard and cut off all the dead branches, gather them and thrown them into the fire for burning. The point is that these branches were useless, they did not bear fruit. The parallel for the believer is that it is very serious when a believer does not abide in Christ and bear fruit. The reason is because bearing fruit is the only reason believers exist on planet earth. You exist to bear fruit just like a branch in a vine exists to bear fruit. If you are bearing fruit then you are useful to the vinedresser. If you are not bearing fruit then you are useless to the vinedresser. So, let’s review and then deal finally with the language at the end of this verse.

First, there are three branches in verses 2-6. To even be a branch one must be a believer. So, these verses are all dealing with genuine believers. Second, each branch is treated differently by the Father.

Verse 2a	Believers who abide	but are immature and have yet to bear	the Father “lifts up” so they will
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		fruit	bear fruit
Verse 2b	Believers who abide	are mature and bear fruit	the Father “cleanses” so they will bear more fruit
Verse 6	Believers who do not abide	are mature but bear no fruit	the Father casts into “discipline” so they will restore fellowship

Of course, these final words are ‘hotly’ debated but there are only three options. First, some claim that they are cast into the lake of fire either because the believer lost his salvation or because the person was simply a professing believer. Both of these variations have many problems I have already mentioned. Second, this could refer to the judgment seat of Christ where believers’ works will be cast into the fire (1 Cor 3:12-15). Even though the language of these passages is similar it is not likely that is what Jesus is talking about. For example, in 1 Cor 3 it is the believer’s works cast into the fire and in John 15 it is the believer who is cast into the fire. Also, in John 15 the subject is abiding or not abiding which is an absolute condition in this life. Thus, the judgment for not abiding is also in this life which brings us to the third and best explanation. The phrase **he is thrown out as a branch and withers and they gather them and throw them into the fire and they burn** most likely means that the non-abiding believer is cast into divine discipline. This discipline could end in physical death but the main point here is a warning against unfruitfulness which is useless to the Father. Since Jesus wanted His disciples ministry to bear fruit after He departed they would have to realize that even though their physical abiding with Him would end their spiritual abiding with Him should continue, for apart from Him they could do nothing. God wants the believer to also abide and bear fruit. But that is a matter solely left up to you. The believer who refuses to abide will undergo fiery judgment.

Three believers in view: 1) immature abider but non-fruit-bearer (He lifts up), 2) mature abider fruit-bearer (He cleanses), 3) mature non abider non-fruit-bearer (He disciplines)

How can I abide in Him? Obedience to His commandments (1 John 3:24)

Prayer and abiding (John 15:7)

Doing the will of God and abiding

What is discipleship?

What is fruit?

the one who hates his life bears fruit (John 12:24)
the imparting of spiritual gifts results in fruit (Rom 1:11, 13)
purpose of being joined to Christ is to bear fruit for God (Rom 7:4)
fruit of the Spirit is...(Gal 5:22-23)
fruit of light consists of all goodness and righteousness and truth (Eph 5:8-9)
the gospel bears fruit (Col 1:6)
walking in a manner worthy of the Lord bears fruit (Col 1:10)
engaging in good deeds to meet pressing needs bears fruit (Tit 3:14)
discipline yields the fruit of righteousness (Heb 12:11)
wisdom from above is full of good fruit (James 3:17-18)
increasing of qualities such as moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, love results in fruit (2 Peter 1:5-9)

Bearing much fruit glorifies the Father (John 15:8)

What is my responsibility?

ⁱ Joseph C. Dillow, "Abiding Is Remaining in Fellowship: Another Look at John 15:1-6," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:585 (January-March 1990):44-53.

ⁱⁱ J. Carl Laney, "Abiding is Believing: The Analogy of the Vine in John 15:1-6" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146) January-March 1989): 65-66.

ⁱⁱⁱ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 460-61.

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