

Spiritual Treasure
The Secret of Abiding

Tom Bradey the New England Patriots' quarterback, has had an amazing career and he's only 30. He's won 3 superbowls and just coming off a perfect 16 + 0 season.

He's rich. He's at the top of his career. He's dating a Brazilian supermodel. You'd think he'd be one of the most satisfied people on the planet.

Listen to Tom Bradey's own words from a *60 Minutes* interview 2 weeks ago.

Video Clip

That is powerful, isn't it? Here's a man who seems to have it all together in life still isn't really living.

Just what is the secret of really living?

Last week we started a 3 week series we're calling *Spiritual Treasure: Secrets of the Book*. What we're doing is looking into John chapter 15 in the New Testament, to see Jesus' explanation about how to really live.

Last week, as we looked at the first 5 verses of chapter 15 where we saw that the secret of living is bearing fruit and the secret of fruitfulness is abiding.

Turn to John 15 page 956

Jesus used the illustration of a vine and the branches. We are the branches, Jesus is the vine, and God the Father is the gardner.

If you think about it the branch of a vine isn't good for anything except producing fruit. If a grape vine doesn't produce grapes it's worthless.

A tree can be cut down, sawed into planks, and used to construct furniture, or to build houses, or any number of things. But a vine is gnarled and twisted. It's no good for planks. A vine is so brittle almost anything you could make with one would crack and break.

The Old Testament symbol of Israel was a vine, and in the 15th chapter of Ezekiel the

prophet was emphasizing the uselessness of Israel at that time because she wasn't bearing fruit for God.

He writes, How is the wood of the vine better than any other wood, the vine branch which is among the trees of the forest? Is wood taken from it to make any object? Or can men make a peg from it to hang any vessel on? Instead, it is thrown into the fire for fuel; the fire devours both ends of it, and its middle is burned. Is it useful for any work? Ezekiel 15:2-4

A vine branch that doesn't bears fruit is useless. The Father, God, is the keeper of the vineyard and His purpose for us that we bear fruit.

We saw last week that the secret of really living is bearing fruit and that fruit includes: sharing the message of Jesus with others, practical holiness in our lives, giving, Christian character, and praising and thanking God.

The people who are really enjoying life are those whose lives are characterized by fruitfulness. The secret of living is bearing fruit and the secret of fruit bearing is abiding or resting in Jesus. That's what we're created for.

Notice what Jesus said in John Chapter 15 verse 5. **Read verse 5**

12 times in John 15 Jesus uses the word "abide." Why? Because abiding is the secret of a productive life. As we mentioned last week, when you go into a vineyard you don't see the branches fighting and struggling to be separated from the vine. Instead, they rest in the vine because that's where the branches draw their life.

If you have trusted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior you are united with Christ. The Bible speaks of those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ and His death on the cross with terms like: children of God, saints, joint heirs with Jesus Christ.

It says that by faith we've died with Christ, are buried with Christ and have risen with Christ to a new life. But there's an important thing to remember and its this. In this Christian life there's a distinction between union and communion. When you trust Jesus Christ for forgiveness the Holy Spirit unites you to Him in a living relationship. You become a branch in the vine and a living union is formed.

But this once-for-all union is the basis for communion, which is maintaining a moment by moment fellowship with Jesus so that His life is shared with you. The branch that tries to go it alone will never bear fruit.

So, so far Jesus has explained to His disciples how the Father deals with branches that don't bear fruit. First He lifts them up, He brings them closer to Himself, and then He

cleanses and purifies by removing habits and attitudes and patterns of life that keep us from fruitfulness. But now notice in verse 6 the tone changes and it seems that Jesus' words become more harsh.

I. Persistent Failure To Abide In Christ Leads To God's Judgment And Loss Of Reward

Read verse 6

Suppose, in spite of the Father's love, we don't abide? Suppose we don't bear any spiritual fruit in our lives? Well, then the vine dresser has to deal with us.

Some people read verse 6 and say that can't be real Christians that Jesus is talking about so they apply verse 6 to "professed believers." In other words to people who might be church members and moral people but who haven't really put their trust in Christ and therefore can't bear fruit.

The problem with that interpretation is that a professed Christian wouldn't be a branch of the vine. Jesus was speaking to his 11 disciples here. Judas had already left.

These guys were genuine believers. Back in verse 3 Jesus had said, *You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.*

Is Jesus telling us then that if we don't bear fruit, we lose our salvation? We won't go to heaven? We get booted out of the family of God? No, He's not, and here is why I say that:

The emphasis of Jesus' teaching about the vine and the branches is on service, not salvation. Jesus isn't teaching His disciples here how to get saved. He's telling them how to live for Him once they are forgiven. The point is communion, not union. It's fellowship and discipleship, not sonship.

In fact, look at verse 15

Jesus is addressing His disciples as servants who are His friends, and He's instructing them how to serve Him. That's clear from this passage. So let's go back and try to understand verse 6.

The idea of fire is often used with hell and the final destination of unbelievers. That's a biblical fact. But, it isn't always used that way. Trying to press a parable beyond its main point can get you in a lot of trouble. One of the main rules when it comes to interpretation of parables is, determine the one central truth the parable is attempting to

teach.

Jesus is saying here that a branch that doesn't bear fruit is useless, and so is a believer who refuses to respond to the Father's care. What do you do with an unproductive branch? You burn it. Why? Because there's no other use for it.

The point Jesus is trying to make is that if we as Christians don't bear fruit we are useless to God in this life. The burning with fire is simply to show the branches' uselessness. This would be obvious to the disciples living in that Palestinian culture.

I'd like you to mark your place in John 15 and look over at I Corinthians 3 to see an example of fire being used with Christians.

I Corinthians 3 page 1014

Read verses 11-15 Here's the tie-in. Both I Corinthians 3 and John 15 are dealing with Christians who don't bear fruit.

Back to John 15:6

There's an interesting change in number between the first part of the sentence and the second. "Anyone" ... "He" ... "is withered" are all singular. Then suddenly we read "gather them" and "cast them." "They are burned."

Most commentaries you read really don't have an answer as to why the sudden change but it could very well be that the "them" and "they" are what issues from the one who is cast forth. In other words, the wood, hay and stubble that they produced with their life rather than fruit that remains.

Compare that to John 15:16 *that your fruit should remain...*

No matter how little fruit you may be producing, it's evidence that you are abiding in Christ. The Father sees fruit and works with you to produce more fruit and much fruit.

The last thing that God wants to do is to take away your opportunity for glorifying Him with your life. But a fruitless branch is a disgrace to the vine keeper and if all else fails God will set you aside and concentrate His work with the branches that are responsive.

II John 8 says *Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward.* This is about rewards in heaven.

Abiding is the key to fruitfulness and fruitfulness is the secret of really living and

enjoying God's blessing. Without it it won't matter how successful we are. We won't really be living. So, the question is, how do we abide in Christ? What does that mean? What does it look like in realtime?

You usually find two different schools of thought on how to abide in Christ. You have "the resters" and "the workers."

The resters say, "You don't do anything. You just yield to Christ and let Him have His way. Christ lives in you and He wants to use you the way a hand uses a glove. All a glove has to do is just surrender and the hand does all the work."

The workers say, "No way. We're not dead gloves, we're living people. God doesn't violate our personality and force Himself on us. We have to yield but we have to obey too. We have to read the Bible, we have to pray, we have to worship, we have to do the stuff God wants us to do."

Well, if you think about it, both answers are true. We have to depend on Jesus and we have to work for Jesus.

But, abiding isn't a passive thing like a hand on a glove. A glove doesn't have intellect, emotions and a will like a person does. A glove can't do anything else but surrender. On the other hand, abiding isn't just "do this, this and this and you're ok."

I think that the verses that really hit the nail on the head are in Philippians 2. **Turn there page 1043 Read verses 12 & 13**

The New Living Translation says, *Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.*

God's working in us, and because of that we are to work out what is already in. God doesn't say work for your salvation, salvation is by grace through faith, but He says work it out. You a child of God now live like it. Live up to your position as a member of the body of Christ but do it on God's strength. Abiding involves keeping in fellowship with the vine so that God can work in us.

I. Persistent Failure To Abide In Christ Leads To God's Judgment And Loss Of Reward
II. Abiding In Christ Involves Prayer, Purity, And A Desire To Do God's Will

Back to John 15 Read verses 7-9

Notice prayer is a part of abiding. The better we know the Bible the better we can pray. The Bible is the vehicle by which we know the will of God. I John 5:14 *Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.*

And asking is only part of what prayer is all about. It also involves giving thanks, expressing love, and worship.

A second criteria for abiding is confession of sin. Sin always breaks our communion with God. I John 1:6 *If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.*

Part of abiding is confessing our known sin to God. But then in Psalm 119 David even asked to be cleansed from hidden sins. There are sins that we commit that we aren't even aware of. Confession to God keeps us abiding in Christ. If you let sin encroach in your life what happens? You don't feel comfortable around Jesus! You won't rest in Him.

A third factor in abiding is a desire to do His will. Psalm 40:8 *I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your law is within my heart.*

God's will for us is that we bear fruit and glorify Him. He works that out in different ways for different people so the important thing is that we be willing to do His will.

The Holy Spirit teaches us the Bible, enables us to pray, reveals our sins to us, gives us an inward desire to obey God and uses the Bible and prayer to strength our communion with Christ.

- I. Persistent Failure To Abide In Christ Leads To God's Judgment And Loss Of Reward*
- II. Abiding In Christ Involves Prayer, Purity, And A Desire To Do God's Will*
- III. The Secret of Abiding Is Obeying*

It's a fundamental law of the universe, ordained of God that obedience leads to abiding. The person who obeys the laws of health will abide in health. The farmer who obeys the laws of nature will abide and enjoy the fruits of his labor. The scientist who obeys the laws of science will abide and be able to accomplish things. God has written certain laws and principles into this world, and we cannot disobey them without suffering.

Everything in the universe obeys God except people, and people have the most to gain by obeying and the most to lose by disobeying. The biggest stars and the tiniest subatomic particles all obey God's will. The nucleus of every atom is composed of neutrons (which are neutral in charge) and protons (which are positive in charge). Why don't all

the positively charged protons repel each other since like charges don't attract and all atoms explode? Science doesn't know, but I do. Col. 1:17 *By Him all things consist* (the word there literally means stick together). That's what keeps the universe together.

You know if you took all the atoms that make up your human body and compress them until you were solid matter with no space in between you'd fit on the head of a pin. That would be the ultimate reducing plan. Why doesn't this whole universe just fall apart? "He upholds all things by the word of His power."

No part of natural creation would ever think of questioning God's will, let alone disobeying it. Only people question and disobey God's will because by God's grace we were given a will of our own. We were created with the ability to make decisions and we can decide to disobey God.

Obedience is the secret of abiding because obedience involves the will.

Read verses 10-14

You don't abide when you simply have thoughts about God's will or even feelings about God's will. You abide when you obey God's will and that means submitting your will to His.

Some Christians settle for an intellectual experience. They study the Bible, they learn the facts and definitions, they can explain doctrines but they have trouble obeying what God tells them to do.

Then on the other extreme you have a great number of people today who want an emotional experience. They go after anything to try and generate and cultivate spiritual feelings. So today we have people being "slain in the spirit" and all kinds of bizarre, supposed manifestations of the Holy Spirit, but without any submission to God's will.

The will is the center of our life. We obey God not because we feel like it, but because it's the right thing to do. And as we grow spiritually we'll graduate from obeying because we have to, to obeying because we want to. Either way though, the key to abiding is obedience.

Jesus uses Himself as an example of obedience in verse 10. Let's go back and see what else He says:

John 4:34 page 942

John 5:30

John 6:38

Because the Son loved the Father, He obeyed His will, no matter what the cost. What a contrast.

How many times do you and I do everything possible to avoid obedience, and yet obedience is the very key to experiencing God's blessing. Jesus Christ isn't asking anything more of us than He has already asked and given of Himself.

The secret of abiding is obeying. Jesus said *You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.*

Are you a friend of Jesus Christ?

Really its good that Jesus explained things like He did. We could come to Him and say " Well, you are showing yourself to be a friend to us, what do you want us to do to be your friends?" Jesus could have answered "You have my example of what a friend is, just follow it."

That would be discouraging, wouldn't it? How could we ever do that? How could we ever love as He loves? How could we ever give ourselves as He gave Himself? Perfectly unreservedly, and in a totally unselfish manner.

If Jesus had required us to do everything that He had done the possibility of becoming His friend would be excluded. But he didn't say that. Instead, He put the requirements in our terms and on our level. "You are my friends, if you do this - whatever I command you." Simple obedience.

There are 3 things that we need to understand about our obedience. It's active, continuous, and total. It's not just if you don't do certain things.

1. active - You are my friends if ye do. do what? Pray, worship, love people, study the Bible.
2. Continuous - Jesus didn't say "If you do what I command when you feel like it" or "If you do what I command on Sundays." 'He said, You are my friends if you do what I command you" He chooses a present tense verb there. If you are doing, today, tomorrow, the next week, next year.

Finally notice it's whatever I command you. All things. It's not picking certain things out of the Christian life that we enjoy and forgetting about the rest. The question we should ask is, "Lord what will you have me to do" and when we find out we should do

it.

Are you a friend of Jesus Christ?

You are a friend if you are obeying. Obeying is the secret of abiding. Abiding is the secret of bearing fruit, and bearing fruit is the secret of really living.

If you are an obedient friend of Jesus Christ then you know what Jesus meant when he said, *These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.*

Listen, I believe that God wants us to do our best in our career. The Bible says, *...whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.* There's nothing wrong with success, unless we make it an end in itself.

If we live for money, or recognition, or fame, or pleasure in the end we're going to come up empty. We're going to reach our goals and say, "God, is this all there is? Maybe the next accomplishment, the next promotion, the next Superbowl ring, whatever, will be what I'm looking for."

Ecclesiastes 5:10 puts it this way, *He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity.*

The Bible doesn't say "He who has silver will not be satisfied," it says "He who loves silver."

Here's a couple of more challenges from the Bible:

Philippians 4:11 One of the apostles writes, *Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content.*

Contentment is learned.

1 Timothy 6:8 *And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.*

What's that about? Be content with the basics and everything else is just icing on the cake.

Hebrews 13:5 *Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." NIV*

There's some examples of some very well to do people in the Bible. Some were content and some were miserable. Some were content for a while but let greed get the best of them.

The secret to really living is to be what you were created to be, a true worshipper of the living God.

The Bible talks about 2 kinds of peace, peace with God and the peace of God.

Peace with God comes when we trust Jesus Christ as Savior. *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* Romans 5:1

When we trust Jesus Christ as our sin bearer we're no longer under the condemnation of God. We have peace with God.

The verb *pisteuo*, which is the verb translated "believe" in the New Testament, is used 96 times in the Gospel of John.

It's God's way of salvation. We deserve the judgment, He did the work, we receive it by faith, He receives the praise, we are humble worshippers.

That's peace with our God. The peace of God comes as we live for God.

Philippians 4:7 says, *The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

That's a peace that comes from being obedient to God. It comes from bearing fruit.

Are you really living this morning? Or are you still wondering what life is all about?

Remember, Jesus said, *If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.*