

Abiding in Christ: Pruned to Bear Fruit and Be Mature

Selected Scriptures

1. **A Branch on the Vine** (Jn. 15:1-2)

The nation of Israel is called the vine in God's vineyard (Ps. 80:8-16), but here Jesus says that He is the *true* vine (Jn. 15:1). All of the life of the plant flows through the vine and into the branches where the fruit will grow. All people who profess faith in Jesus Christ are branches the vine and God Himself deals with us as a careful Gardner tending His vineyard (v.2).

2. **Abiding in the Vine** (Jn. 15:4-5)

Along with unproductive soil (Mk. 4:16-19) and those who only hear the word (Ja. 1:22-23), the unproductive branches represent people who make a profession of faith in Jesus but are unknown to Him and do not possess eternal life (Mt. 7:21-23). The fruit produced by the Christian is observable evidence that one has been born again and is abiding in the vine (v.4), and every branch that abides in the vine will produce fruit (v.5).

3. **Pruning of the Branches**

The Lord will prune His branches if they are orderly and if they are unruly (Hb. 12:5-7). A wise Christian will not seek to test God's patience in disobedience and await His stern discipline, but will seek to grow in his or her understanding of God. In His kindness, God has given instructions for how we might willingly submit ourselves to His good pruning (cf. Ro. 8:28-29; Phil. 2:13).

A. Consuming the Scriptures (Dt. 6:1-9; Jn. 17:17)

God has instructed that His people should learn and know what He has said (Dt. 6:1-9). Knowing what He has said is the first and most vital step in willingly submitting oneself to His gracious pruning (Jn. 17:17).

B. Obeying the Scriptures (Lk. 8:21; Jn. 14:15; Ja. 1:22; 1 Jn. 5:3)

A Christian's knowledge of what God has said brings an obligation to obey what he has said (Ja. 4:17). Knowledge of the truth without obedience to the truth may indicate one does not possess eternal life (1 Jn. 1:6). Those who have been saved by God's grace will strive to obediently respond to God's Word (Ja. 1:25) knowing that God's commands are good (1 Jn. 5:3).

C. Continuing In Prayer (1 Th. 5:16-18; Lk. 11:5-13; 18:1-8)

Jesus encouraged His disciples to pray at all times (Lk. 18:1). Prayer encourages faithful trust in His promises even in the midst of trials (cf. 1 Th. 5:16-18). God also desires to hear and answer our prayers (Lk. 11:5-13).

D. Conforming in Prayer (Matt. 6:9-13; Jn. 14:13-14)

Prayer is not a mechanism by which we change God's mind or change the things which He is purposed to do (cf. Isa. 14:27), but it is a way in which He can work on our hearts and minds as we bring our requests before Him (cf. Jn. 14:13-14). Our most sincere prayers for the deepest desires and needs that we have are always to be offered with the understanding that God's desires and plan are better than our own, and so we are to pray that His will would be accomplished (Mt. 6:9-13).

E. Being in the Fellowship (Acts 2:42; Hb. 10:25)

God has not intended that the branch should live and grow in isolation. The pattern of the church (Acts 2:42) and the command of the Lord (Hb. 10:25) is that believers regularly gather together. One of the many benefits of gathering together as a local church is that God has designed it to be a place where our own sins can be exposed and that we might repent (Mt. 18:15-20).

F. Participate in the Fellowship (1 Co. 12:12; Hb. 10:23-25)

A local church functions as a single body, each person has distinct and necessary gifts and abilities which are crucial for the successful carrying out of the mission of the church (1 Co. 12:12ff). The local church is a unique organism where believers can encourage one another in faithful obedience to what God has commanded (Hb. 10:19-25).