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## Dwelling in Christ

**Key verses:** John 15:1-8; Colossians 1:9-23

**Key personalities:** God as the Trinity, Jesus, and John the Baptist

**Timeline:** The God of Eternity; He enters as a Man, being fully God and fully Man, walks this earth as our Lead, 28-29 A.D.

Before electronic car ignition systems, you had to fine-tune the timing of your engine to control the correct firing of the spark plugs, and the "dwell" was the tiny screw below the distributor you turned to accomplish this. A small component outside of the car's distributor, this would cause the very powerful engine in a very large car to run smoothly and well or else harshly or not at all. All it took was a fraction of a turn of a small screw. Have you considered that you have a "dwell" too (John 5:37-39; Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:9-23; 3:15-17; Rev. 12:12)!

**Key Happenings:** Our Dwelling in Christ, God's Redemption at work!

What does it take to be in Christ and thrive for God's glory and our betterment? Jesus is saying, *I am the vine, the main and the only channel of life and substance, and God is the cultivator; He is the one in charge.* This is about our relationship, responsibilities, uniqueness, gifting, and purpose all flowing from His love to us. John 15 shows God who comes to us, who brings heaven to us, allows us to live in and for Him, and who will grow and cultivate the best in us for His glory and our betterment. This is beyond deep fellowship. It is not just life; it is life itself--abundant and triumphant. We can not only communicate and experience God; we commune and dwell in Him both now and throughout eternity to come. When we are in Him, we glorify God and build a better life, furthering His impacting Kingdom.

As Christians, we are called--even expected--to know our purpose and work it. Jesus expects us to bear fruit and will do what is best for us to be cultivated in Him and for Him to better produce His love and goodness for the furtherance of His kingdom. It is good that He prunes, for we need His cultivation and nourishment. Without Him, we can do nothing. We can't know Him, we can't live in Him, and we can't work in and for Him without His life giving sustenance. So, we must receive and remain in Him, growing and thriving in Him for all the goodness and nourishment to happen and to flow in and out of us.

The true disciple can see his/her role as a child deeply loved, being cared for so growth and faithfulness will result in others coming to Him. If not, we will rot away. Refusing His sustenance and life will only dry us up, burning us away. God wants us to thrive in Him, not be weeds or thorns that will only hurt ourselves and others. Thus, He will do all He can to enable us to thrive and give Him Glory. In Him, this can be so; our only enemy is us, embracing the weeds and pestilence rather than Christ the Vine.

- *True / real.* This means the "final" right one, the place to be. Whereas Israel was the precursor--a shadow of Christ called the garden--the fulfillment is Christ. Our life in Christ is a living relationship, where we are called to not only live and thrive, but be productive and useful, all because we are in communion with Him.
- *Vine.* Referring to a grapevine, this is a metaphor for God's living, salvation-giving sustenance to us His people. This is an "I am" saying of Jesus--a description of His name "to be" and character, meaning Jesus is our prime source of life and nourishment. In the Old Testament, Israel is called God's vineyard and His vine, while God is the vine-grower. This was a symbol of Israel's power and her purpose to produce fruit and glory to God, and His law and love to the nations (Gen. 12:1-3; Ex. 3:14; Psalm 40:1-2; 80:8-16; Isa. 5:1-7; 53:6; Jer. 2:21; 6:9; Ezek. 15; 17:5-10; 19:10-14; Hos. 10:1; 14:8; John 4:24; 6:35; 8:58; Rom. 3:23; 10:9).

- *Gardener / Vine-grower / Vinedresser / Husbandman.* This means the one who works the soil. This is a name for God as the One who wants fruit, so He nourishes, cultivates, protects, and grows His children and then prunes for a greater harvest and life.
- *Cuts off / lifts up.* This is a metaphor for God's righteous judgment and inspection. As we rework a plant so it can be healthier and more productive, God does so with us. God has the right to work and nurture us and to judge like the judge at the county fair looking for the prized fruits and vegetables. This is so He can do what He must do to get rid of the frauds and to teach, inspire, mold, motivate, coach, discipline, and encourage His children to have godly lives that are productive and useful (Matt. 3:8; 7:16-20; Gal 5:22-23; Eph. 2:10; 5:9; Phil 1:11).
- *Branch.* This refers to our relationship in Christ, our being united in Christ, part of His plan and His appendage as He provides the indispensable sap of substance for life and salvation and faithfulness. A branch is a part of the vine with the sole purpose to produce its fruit. If it can't do that because of infection, rot or bad care, it must be fertilized and developed to coax it to thrive and produce. If nothing ever comes from it and it is dead, it never was His Vine stem (like Judas) (Eph. 1:22-23).
- *Bears no fruit.* We cannot be fruitful apart from Jesus. The wonder of God's nourishment has never flowed in the face of one's own erected barriers (Matt. 3:8; 7:16-20; 13:18-23; 24:12; Luke 6:43-45; John 8:31-32; Eph. 5:9; Phil. 1:11; Heb. 3:14-19; 6:4-8; 10:27-31).
- *Bear fruit.* This refers to a growing faith that is fed and focused on our response to Christ that motivates the Fruit of the Spirit resulting in moral and virtuous thinking and action because of God's love to us and our gratitude and love back to Him. This is God's love and work in us that flows in through His Holy Spirit and out of us to others around us--all because we have a personal relationship with Christ. We have God's living presence in us, living in us (Matt. 6:10; Rom. 5:1-5; 12:1-21; 1 Cor. 12:1-14:40; Gal. 5:16-26; Eph. 4:1-6:20; 2 Peter 1:3-9).
- *Prunes.* This refers to the cleansing, fixing and/or removal of what is not good, which is by God's loving, necessary intervention. This is good. All fruit-bearing trees must be cultivated to work well. What is dead must be cut off, or the trees will be overcome by insects and disease. Even when all is well, they will not produce as much as they could have unless there is pruning, feeding, and care. God will remove any hindrance that stagnates our spiritual growth. This can also be a warning about judgment if one does nothing, and this is an image of care. Just like a good parent warning their child, disciplining him/her so he/she can know better, and cultivating better maturity, we have to be pruned so we can grow better. The question is *why would we fear this and not want it* (Isa. 5:1; Heb. 12:3-11)?
- *Fruitful.* This is a call to be obedient, to multiply the seed given to us. We are to make disciples of His Word. We are to point to Christ, never to ourselves! We need disciples of Christ, not of people like ourselves! This is a standard call of God to do something productive and effectual with our life and faith. To have a great gift like salvation, and do nothing with it is a great insult to the gift giver, God, and a proof of ingratitude and nonuse, which would prove that one is either not saved or highly disobedient and foolish (Isa. 27:6; Hos. 14:4-8).
- *Word.* This is God's Word, the Bible, and the work of the Holy Spirit. This is using the Bible's precepts as the template for our nourishment and pruning. It shows us the Gardener and His nourishment along with the sin that needs to be cut off.
- *Remain / abide / dwell in me.* This is stated 11 times in this passage--40 times in this Gospel! It means to preserve and commune with, as in our continual relationship in and with Christ. A branch not attached to the vine is lifeless and useless. If a Christian says he/she knows Christ, but there is no evidence (perhaps even the opposite like stated in Galatians 5 and the sets of rotten fruit as opposed to the Fruit of the Spirit), then it is possible that the person was never saved, had no connection to the Vine, and is therefore destined for hell. This is also a warning to get busy with one's faith!

- *Thrown away.* This, of course, means dead and worthless. There is no use without God's life-giving nourishment, and this refers to those who never accepted Christ as well as those who did but are apostate and thus have lost their rewards and/or opportunities. This does not mean one can lose his/her salvation here, but if one is in Christ and is continually disobedient, he/she will be punished severely and God has the right to do so. God is set to punish those who refuse Him and those who are apostate, who say they know Him, but do nothing with their faith or act contrary to God's precepts (Matt. 3:12; 25:41-46; John 3:16, 36; 5:24; 10:28-29; 15:22-24; Rom. 8:1; 1 Cor. 3:15; Gal. 5; Jude 7; Rev. 20:14:)
- *Fire and burned.* This means to be judged: inspection for Christians and judgment for those who never accepted Christ (John 6:39; 10:27-28).
- *Ask whatever you wish.* This refers to the character of being loyal so as to identify with His purpose, plan, and call. The call here is to expand one's faith and thinking so Christ is all and working in and through us. In Jewish teachings, God provided a call to His pious people and provided for all who served Him because of the intimate relationship they and we have. However, this is always in context to God's Will (not ours) and providence and never an excuse for us to abuse nor some kind of magic formula for success (Luke 11:1-13; John 15:16; 1 John 5:14; 14:1-14).
- *Father's glory.* The Son glorifies the Father and shows us that our purpose in life and ministry is to glorify Christ. We are to not only know Christ and not only make Him known. We are to further His Kingdom and bring Him glory. This is not about results; it is about our communing trust in Him that motivates our obedience and our ability and willingness to please God (John 13:31-32).
- *Showing yourselves.* The prime evidence is loving obedience. How do we live? How are we with people? Do we point to Christ in our ministry or do we succumb to our pride and seek only to serve ourselves? Are we bitter or better, angry or faithful, jealous or kind? The reality of our union in Christ will display our true nature and display our Lord. This is not about salvation; one who is not saved was never a part of the Vine.
- *Disciples.* This refers to the followers and learners. Authentic salvation is verified by obedience and fruit bearing, the mark of a disciple in this passage. Without trust and obedience, we prove ourselves unworthy to be His, and we prove ourselves not to be a Christian. Grace is free for us, beyond the concept of cost for God, and is evidenced by our response (Matt. 7:20; Luke 6:43-45; Heb. 6:9).
- *I and the Father are one.* This is the mutual and reciprocal indwelling of the Triune God Who gives, Who deserves, and Who expects receive love. Jesus is the One who reveals the Father. He relates that faith in Him, in Jesus, is equal to faith in God, thus we will be upheld and be successful. This echoes the "Shema," the prime Jewish confession and declaration of faith that God is One. It is another definitive statement that testifies to the Deity of Christ: He is God! It is also a statement of the Trinity--One God and three magnifications or Persons sharing the same essence and unity (Deut. 6:4; 2 Chron. 20:20; John 1:18; 6:25-51; 10:22, 38; 11:25-26; 14:9-10)!
- *You are gods.* Jesus challenges them with Psalm 82 as being in God's place to represent God's council tradition (seen as tradition in Judaism today). He, being fully God, is even more so to be called God, and He told them so. Jesus is also using this to challenge the religious leaders who used it to justify their pious, fraudulent leadership. This does not mean that as Christians we are "little gods" as some misguided preachers have used this verse to say. There is only One God, and neither you or I, is He (John 1:10-13; 8:17; Rom. 8:21; Phil. 2:15; 1 John 3:1-10; 5:19).

**What does it take to be a faithful and fruitful Christian, to be attached to Christ as His love and work flows in and through us?**

**Key Takeaway:** If you are a person created, bought and paid for with the blood of Christ, forgiven, and saved by your faith in Christ through the Grace of God, you should be extremely grateful. A deep-seated gratitude should be the central theme of your life, flowing from Christ's love, principles, and character and

the Holy Spirit's leading. What comes from us in good times and bad should be indicated by what goes into us. Being led by God and His Word and motivated by our appreciation of His work will enable us to be more filled with the Spirit of God to do the work of God. Living by God's principles, our reverence and thanks are all needed and essential for the healthy Christian and church; they all go together. One cannot be an effective Christ-follower without gratitude or without His lead. You cannot say the Holy Spirit fills you by being emotionally ecstatic while you ignore God's Word. You cannot move closer to Him or lead others when you are a person who is ungrateful. Christ must be our "dwell;" the gauge will be our thankfulness (Col. 1:19-23; 1 Thess. 5:18).

**The Call to the Church?** Our greatest purpose besides our worship is to build relationships with Christ and with others. This is what makes a great church. When we ignore this, we fail in the most important aspects in life, including our personal relationship in Christ! Living and ministering by one's own pride will not do; we cannot do this. Only by knowing and placing the focus on Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, can we live well and lead well.

### **Questions to Ponder**

1. What dwells in you when your life has its setbacks and problems? What controls your thoughts and rules your will? What are your responses and attitudes?
2. What kind of produce comes from you? If you were a fruit tree what would you be like and produce? A crab apple or a honey crisp? A whine or wine grape?
3. We have a great, loving God who seeks to nourish us, so, what do you do with that information?
4. What does it take to be in Christ and thrive for God's glory and our betterment?
5. What does it mean to dwell in the Lord? What do you need to realize to make that more of a fruition in your life?
6. How do you feel that you are dwelling, His love to you? If not, why not?
7. What happens when we refuse His cultivation and nourishment? What does *remain in Him* or *dwell* mean to you? Why is this important?
8. How have you experienced God? What can you do to commune and dwell in Him more? How would this impact your life?
9. Can you see your role as a child, deeply loved and cared for? How does this help you grow and be faithful to produce fruit? What would that fruit be? What can it be?
10. What does it take to be in Christ and flourish for His glory and our betterment? What gets in the way? How can you be better enabled to thrive and give Him Glory? What do you need? What will you do?
11. Do you realize that your prime enemy is you, embracing the weeds and pestilence and not Christ the Vine? What are your weeds?
12. What do you need to thrive in Christ and not be infected by the weeds or thorns of faulty desires and the ways of the world that will only hurt you and others?