

What Does It Mean to Abide in Christ?

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The exhortation to “abide” has been frequently misunderstood, as though it were a special, mystical, and indefinable experience. But Jesus makes clear that it actually involves a number of concrete realities.

First, union with our Lord depends on His grace. Of course we are actively and personally united to Christ by faith ([John 14:12](#)). But faith itself is rooted in the activity of God. It is the Father who, as the divine Gardener, has grafted us into Christ. It is Christ, by His Word, who has cleansed us to fit us for union with Himself (15:3). All is sovereign, all is of grace.

Second, union with Christ means being obedient to Him. Abiding involves our response to the teaching of Jesus, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you” ([John 15:7a](#)). Paul echoes this idea in [Colossians 3:16](#), where he writes, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,” a statement closely related to his parallel exhortation in [Ephesians 5:18](#), “Be filled with the Spirit.”

In a nutshell, abiding in Christ means allowing His Word to fill our minds, direct our wills, and transform our affections. In other words, our relationship to Christ is intimately connected to what we do with our Bibles! Then, of course, as Christ’s Word dwells in us and the Spirit fills us, we will begin to pray in a way consistent with the will of God and discover the truth of our Lord’s often misapplied promise, “You will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you” ([John 15:7b](#)).

Third, Christ underlines a further principle, “Abide in My love” (15:9), and states very clearly what this implies: the believer rests his or her life on the love of Christ (the love of the One who lays down His life for His friends, v. 13).

This love has been proved to us in the cross of Christ. We must never allow ourselves to drift from daily contemplation of the cross as the irrefutable demonstration of that love, or from dependence on the Spirit who sheds it abroad in our hearts ([Rom. 5:5](#)). Furthermore, remaining in Christ’s love comes to very concrete expression: simple obedience rendered to Him is the fruit and evidence of love for Him ([John 15:10–14](#)).

Finally, we are called, as part of the abiding process, to submit to the pruning knife of God in the providences by which He cuts away all disloyalty and sometimes all that is unimportant, in order that we might remain in Christ all the more wholeheartedly.