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FRUITFULNESS: A MATTER OF CHOICE

by Dan Trygg

The results of the abiding walk are promised to be many: victory over sin (I Jn. 3:6; Gal. 5:16); true communion and fellowship with one another and with God (I Jn. 1:3-7); Christlikeness in lifestyle (I Jn. 2:8; Gal. 5:22,23); effectual prayer (Jn. 15:7; I Jn. 5:13-17); and assurance of our salvation (I Jn. 2:5,6,24-28; 3:24; 5:5-13; Rom. 8:15-17; Gal. 4:6,7), to name but a few. In order to "abide", we must know what our "abiding place" is. In other words, if we are to continue or stay in something, we must be able to identify it from its unprofitable alternatives. If abiding is God's methodology for our maturity in Christ and our enjoyment of Him, and if, unlike the plant world, it requires the action of informed choices from us, then **we must find out *what we must be choosing, as well as when and how those choices are to be made.*** Beyond just identifying the goal from other distractions or deceptions, **we must also discern how to enter that relationship, how to renew that relationship, and how to maintain that relationship in our daily decisions.**

Abiding, while taking advantage of a natural process of life in order to produce fruit, does *not* itself happen naturally. That is, while the fruit develops as a natural result of a living life-link with the Vine, that open channel for the flow of life is not maintained by itself. Here is one place where the analogy of Jn. 15 breaks down. In nature, the branch does not have to choose to remain attached to the vine. In fact, a natural branch does not have the capacity of choice at all. With mankind, however, it is different. **Freedom of choice is one of the basic ingredients of our human nature.** God has designed us with this capacity in His likeness and for His glory. Thus, He will not short-circuit nor circumvent our faculty of choice, but encourages us to use it. **Because it is a fundamental quality of our nature, it is also *essential that we exercise it, in order to fulfill what God has designed us to be.*** Therefore, the "branches" can only draw life from the Vine when they choose to be dependent upon Him. Furthermore, they only *continue* to draw life from Him when they volitionally confirm the expressions of life that come from His Spirit. **The very fact that we are commanded and exhorted to abide in Christ is proof that the will plays a critical role in keeping us in that life-link relationship** (e.g., Jn. 15:4,9; Gal. 5:16).

The foundation for there being any life-link at all is that this death/life transaction with Jesus *really occurred* -- past completed action -- at some point in time/space history (Rom. 6:3-11; II Cor. 5:17; Col. 2:9-15). **By faith, we *were* joined to Jesus and made new.** This is the bottom line for all the rest. **Without that new spiritual identity, there can be no practical ethical exhortations. The power to perform them would not be available.** However, this truth must be applied in present experience on a daily basis. The apostle Paul's exhortation in this matter is that since you were made new, put off the old man with its evil practices, and put on the new man (Eph. 4:20-24). "Consider the members of your earthly bodies as dead to [sin] ...since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices" (Col. 3:5,9). In other words, there are daily choices that we all must face which are either in accordance with our new nature, or contrary to it. **Since we *did* die with Christ, and *have been* made new, let us live in accordance with this fact by rejecting the old nature and its desires. Let us, instead, follow the leadings of the new life within us.** As Paul said in I Cor. 15:31, "I die daily". He describes the present Christian experience as "...always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live [in Christ] are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our

mortal flesh; ...our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day" (II Cor. 4:10,11,16). **This is where the abiding life is. It is in making daily decisions by returning to that original historical event of transaction and transformation, and facing the present situation in light of that fundamental change of identity.** *We have been* made new creatures (II Cor. 5:17). Let's live like it!

Father, we understand that You desire us to walk with You. The mature spiritual life is not being pulled around in a wagon by our Father, nor being pushed in a wheelchair by our Heavenly Nursemaid. You have made us new in Jesus. We can overcome the limitations and shortsightedness of immaturity. We can overcome the crippling bondages of our past that continue to "dog" our present experiences of life. Father, help us face our responsibilities. Give us wisdom to see what is *our* work, and what is *Yours*. Enlighten our eyes to see what we must do, what choices we must make, in order to abide more fully in Jesus moment by moment, ...and give us the courage to make change happen by responding to Your leading.

FOR MEDITATION: Luke 9: 23; Ephesians 5: 8.

"And He was saying to them all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, let Him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.'"

"For you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light..."

The Kingdom Of God Is The Kingdom Of Right Relationships

"We are told to bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2), admonish one another (I Thess. 5:14), and encourage each other (Heb. 10: 25). Moreover, we are exhorted to confess our sins to and pray for each other (Jas. 5:16), and to stimulate one another to good works (Heb. 10:24).

"Yet relatively few Christians are complying with these Biblical commands. Why? One major reason is many believers simply do not know one another well enough to perform such tasks. Essentially, they are strangers. You see, I must draw close to another, go beyond erected walls and *see* his burden before I can possibly bear it. A certain level of trust must exist before I am free to admonish, to correct. A close bond must exist with another believer before I feel comfortable confessing my sins to him. All of which calls for real intimacy created by honest sharing.

"Unfortunately, because of the rigid structure of many churches, people are left with few or no opportunities to draw close enough on a regular basis for these functions to occur. Normally, when gathered together, it is in large group settings where one or a few do most of the speaking. Others are too often cast into the role of a spectator. And before and after such meetings, conversations seldom go below a certain level...

"For several years, my wife and I have interacted in ...small group settings meeting in private homes. And we have found that the interpersonal functions described in Scripture operate best in this context, the result of which has been obvious growth in our lives and those of others. Herein, we have gone beyond being mere strangers, mere spectators, and interacted according to the New Testament's blueprint for personal relationships."

Selection quoted from *The Power of Small Groups* by James Hilt (Chapel of the Air: Wheaton, IL 60189-0030, Pamphlet # 7381).