

Abiding in The Vine – Part 2

The True Vine: Fruitfulness, Pruning, and the Danger of Withering

1. Brief recap from last two meetings.

- We talked about how the "Anointing" mentioned in **1 Jn. 2:20, 27-28** refers to the Holy Spirit and how the Holy Spirit teaches us how to abide in Christ. Vs **2:20** – "You have an "anointing" from the Holy One." **Vs 2:27** "the anointing which you received from Him remains [permanently] in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you." - This parallels with **Jn. 14:26** "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things".
- We talked about how John was writing to believers reminding them that they have been given the Holy Spirit and that the Holy Spirit abides in them and that He (The Holy Spirit) guides and teaches them all they need to know and part of that teaching is how to abide in Christ.
- We discussed **1 Jn. 2:20-28** and how John was warning the believers about false teachers and how the Holy Spirit acts as an internal teacher and guide, protecting against deception and illuminating truth.
- We discussed how believers have received the Holy Spirit that will teach them all things, even how to abide in Christ. **1 Cor. 2:12 (AMP)** "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the [Holy] Spirit who is from God, so that we may know and understand the [wonderful] things freely given to us by God."
- Now we are going to dive into when a believer receives the Holy Spirit and more on abiding in Christ, the true vine. Jesus Christ is the True Vine and the Father is the Vinedresser.

2. When does the believer receive the Holy Spirit?

- When they believe in Christ. **Eph. 1:13-14, Gal. 3:2,5,14, 2 Cor. 1:22, Jn. 14:16-17 (NLT/AMP)**
The above scriptures are for homework: These passages directly show that believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit at the moment they believe in Christ and receive Him as Lord, with the Spirit serving as a permanent guarantee (abiding fully). They teach that the Holy Spirit is received through faith in Christ, tying it to the moment of belief. They teach that God seals believers with the Holy Spirit in their hearts as a guarantee, received upon being established in Christ through faith in Christ. They teach that Jesus promises the Holy Spirit as a permanent Helper who will be in believers forever, abiding fully from reception at salvation. **(See homework below for more on then the believer receives the holy Spirit. There are a couple of passages in Acts that can be confusing.)**
- It is important to understand that we believers are filled with the Holy Spirit and that as we talked about in our last study, the Holy Spirit in us will teach us how to abide in Christ.
- Now let's dive into abiding.

3. Abiding in The Vine

- Let's start with reading about abiding in the True Vine which is Jesus Christ. Let's read **Jn. 15:1-17 (NKJV/AMP)** and then back up and focus on **Jn. 15:1-8 (NKJV/AMP)**.
There is a lot to unpack in this passage. ~ Discuss...
- At first glance, the language of "taking away" unfruitful branches and "pruning" fruitful ones might evoke a sense of judgment or threat—implying rejection for failure (Abide or else God is going to get you!) or painful cutting for the sake of productivity.

However, when viewed through the lens of historical vine dressing practices in the ancient Near East, particularly in springtime (the likely season of Jesus' teaching during Passover), the passage unfolds as a profound encouragement to abide in the Vine. - The Father's role as vinedresser is one of tender, restorative care, aimed at nurturing every branch toward greater fruitfulness, rather than arbitrary condemnation.

- c) As practiced in first-century Galilee, grapevines were not left to sprawl unchecked on the ground. Vines were often trained on trellises or poles to optimize sunlight, airflow, and dew evaporation—essential for healthy growth and fruit production. Weak or nonfruiting branches, which trailed low and were vulnerable to rot, pests, or smothering soil, were not immediately discarded. Instead, a skilled vinedresser would lift them up during the spring growing season, gently tying them to supports with cords or props. This "lifting" (from the Greek *airō*, which can mean both "to take away" and "to lift up") exposed the branches to better conditions, allowing sap to flow freely and encouraging latent buds to sprout and bear fruit in the coming cycles.
- d) Let's look at the encouraging translation of "taking away". **Jn. 15:2** "*Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away.*" Strong/s concordance for "takes away": Greek word: **airw** / Pronounce: **ah'-ee-ro** / Strongs Number: **G142** - A primary root; **to lift up**; by implication, to take up or away; figuratively, to raise (the voice), bear (up), carry, lift up, loose, take (away, up) - To raise up, elevate, lift up. To raise from the ground, take up. This lines up with how the Vinedresser takes care of the grapevine.
- e) But then there is **Jn. 15:6** "*If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.*" This gives the image of something useless to be thrown away. This is the strong encouragement to abide.
- f) **What is abiding?** – **Jn. 15:4** - Abide: Original Word: **μένω** / Pronunciation: **meh'-no** - continue, dwell, endure, be present, remain, stand, tarry for, to continue to be present, to be held, kept, continually, to remain as one, (of a relationship) to exist permanently in, inseparably united.
- g) **How do we Abide in the True Vine (Christ)?** - To abide in the True Vine, Jesus Christ, we must cultivate a deep and intentional life-giving relationship with Him, anchoring our lives in His teachings and presence. This begins with fixing our gaze on Christ, keeping Him as the focal point of our faith and daily walk, just as a runner focuses on the finish line. We prioritize seeking God's Kingdom above all else, aligning our desires with His will. By putting on the full armor of God, we equip ourselves to stand firm against spiritual challenges, while clothing ourselves in Christ—the new self—marked by humility and righteousness. Abiding also involves consistent worship, prayer, immersive Bible study (in full context), and renewing our minds daily to align our thoughts with God's truth. This allows the word of Christ to dwell richly within us. This involves trusting in Christ's sufficiency and relying on His strength rather than our own.
- h) We can abide by laying aside every weight and sin that hinders us, running the race of faith with endurance, while intentionally turning away from distractions to focus on Jesus. Furthermore, we set our hearts and minds on heavenly things, bringing every thought into submission to Christ's authority, ensuring our lives reflect His truth and love. These practices—rooted in devotion and discipline, deepen our connection to the True Vine, enabling us to bear lasting fruit for God's glory. (**Jn. 15:4-5, Heb. 12:1-2, Mat. 6:33, Eph. 6:11, Rom. 13:14, Col. 3:12, 3:16, 2 Cor. 10:5, Rom. 12:2**) Abiding is how we walk in the Spirit. Abiding in Christ (staying connected to the True Vine) is how we progress towards the goal of being conformed into the image of Christ. **2 Cor. 3:18**.

The process of being conformed to His image is ongoing and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Let The Holy Spirit teach you how to abide in Christ. 🔥

- i) **What is the benefit of Abiding in Christ?** - Bearing much fruit. Remaining connected to the vine provides spiritual nourishment and strength to live a Godly life. Christ is the vine; we are the branches... apart from Him we can do nothing". The benefit of abiding is remaining connected to the vine and experiencing Christ's love and joy, the abundant life He promised to believers, growth Through God's Pruning, transformation, and a Renewed Mind. Abiding in Christ is one of the ways we can daily renew our minds. Also note in **Jn. 15:7** "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you."
- j) **What are the consequences of not abiding?** The first thing that jumps out from the passage as a result of not abiding is "Withering." This can be self-imposed disconnection (self-imposed uselessness) which leads to withering and drifting, thus cutting themselves off from the flow of life from the vine, often through neglect of relationship, neglect of prayer and studying/meditating on the Word of God, worldly entanglements that choke fruitfulness (cares of the world, love of the world) and self-reliance (depending on self rather than God - pride). The result? The non-abiding branches become "thrown away" (not uprooted from salvation but set aside as unproductive), gathered like pruned debris, and burned. This imagery draws from ancient vineyard practices, where withered branches were useless for anything but fuel—evoking loss. Not abiding can result in loss of reward and making it into Heaven as [one who barely escapes] through fire. **1 Cor. 3:15 (AMP)** "But if any person's work is burned up [by the test], he will suffer the loss [of his reward]; yet he himself will be saved, but only as [one who has barely escaped] through fire."

I would rather abide in Christ and experience abundant life as a result than not abide and wither and make it into Heaven as one who has barely escaped through fire.

If you abide, there will be pruning for more growth, however pruning can be painful, but it is way better than withering. I'd rather be pruned than wither, cut off, useless and burned.

This question arises: When does it change from the vinedresser tending and "lifting up" the withering branch to being cast out and burned in the fire? This brings up the debate of once saved always saved or you can lose your salvation. Salvation is secure or you could lose it by not abiding. This brings up the Heb 6. A quick summary on Heb 6.

Heb. 6 describes the dire spiritual state of someone who has experienced genuine spiritual blessings—enlightenment, partaking of the Holy Spirit, and tasting the good word of God—but then falls away, leading to an impossible-to-renew state of spiritual death because they've essentially rejected and brought shame upon Christ. While the passage is debated, it functions as a stark warning against spiritual complacency and calls believers to move on to maturity in faith, rather than falling back into a state where there is no further sacrifice for their sin.

There is debate on **Heb. 6** because there are a lot of scriptures that point to our salvation being secure, i.e. "once saved always saved. Worst case for the believer being **1 Cor. 3:15 (AMP)**. A believer being saved but only as [one who has barely escaped] through fire and being without rewards!

k) There are three main interpretations for **Jn. 15:1-17 (Abiding in the Vine)**

- Interpretation 1: Refers to False Professors (Never Truly Saved, Leading to Eternal Judgment)
- Interpretation 2: Refers to Apostate Believers (True Believers Who Fall Away, Losing Salvation)
- Interpretation 3: Refers to Unfruitful Believers (Discipline or Loss of Rewards, Not Salvation)
 - a. I fall into the camp of interpretation 3. (Secure salvation for the true believer)
 - b. This also ties into the parable of the soils: Mat.13:1-23, Mk. 4:1-20, and Lk. 8:4-15.
 - c. This also ties into partaking of the His divine nature in **2 Pet. 1:1-11 (2 Pet. 1:4)**
i.e. Partaking is a choice which is similar to abiding in the vine being a choice.
 - d. This also ties into the building your house on a rock parable found in **Mat. 7:24-25.**

I personally believe in a secure salvation for the true believer: Here are some “permanence of the new birth”, and “the sealing work of the Holy Spirit” scriptures for homework:

Jn 10:27-29, Jn 5:24, Rom 8:38-39, Phil 1:6, Eph 1:13-14, 1 Jn 5:13, Jude 1:24, Jn 6:37, Eph 4:30, Heb 7:25, and Rom 8:1. There are other scriptures that can be interpreted in a way to have different views on this which is why there are three main interpretations as shown above.

Next study: Connection Between Abiding in Christ, Dying to Self, and the process of Sanctification. I'm very excited about this connection!

Homework:

Abiding in the True Vine: **Jn. 15:1-17 (NKJV/AMP)**. Meditate on this passage.

How do we abide? **Jn. 15:4-5, Heb. 12:1-2, Mat. 6:33, Eph. 6:11, Rom. 13:14, Col. 3:12, 3:16, 2 Cor. 10:5, Rom. 12:2, 2 Cor. 3:18 (NLT/AMP)**.

When does the believer receive The Holy Spirit? **Eph. 1:13-14, Gal. 3:2,5,14, 2 Cor. 1:22, Jn. 14:16-17 (NLT/AMP)**.

Deeper Study

I have placed below some extended study on when the believer receives the Holy Spirit.

Note: Below is an A.I. response to my challenging question and is pulling from the entire text of the Bible in these versions AMP, AMPC, ESV, KJV, NASB, NIV, as well as many commentaries, it is always wise to dig into the Word of God yourself and read the scriptures in full context while allowing the Holy Spirit to teach you as you dive in. Ask this same question yourself and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal truth as you dig into the word for the answers. Use the question and answer below for deeper study.

Question:

How do I reconcile Acts 19:2 where the believers did not know about the holy spirit and where then prayed for and received the holy spirit with all of the new covenant scriptures that talk about how when someone believes in Jesus Christ they instantly receive the Holy Spirit the moment they believed such as noted in these passages: Eph. 1:13-14 (NLT, AMP), Gal. 3:2,5,14 (NLT, AMP), 2 Cor. 1:22 (NLT/AMP), 1 Cor. 3:16 (NLT/AMP), 1 Cor. 6:19 (NLT/AMP), 2 Timothy 1:14 (NLT/AMP), 1 Jn. 4:13 (NLT/AMP), 2 Cor. 1:21-22 (NLT/AMP). One theory I have is that in the book of acts we are reading about believers who believed in Christ and were followers of Christ while He was still here on earth when the Holy Spirit had not yet come. In Acts 19:2 we are dealing with followers of John the Baptist, not actual followers of Christ. So when they believed, they had not yet received the Holy Spirit because He had not yet come. What they actually believed in was John the Baptist's message about Christ to come, which was an incomplete message. They were also baptized in John's baptism which is different from believing in Christ and receiving salvation. Because they were disciples of John the Baptist they only had John's teachings about Jesus Christ to come. They had an incomplete teaching of the Gospel and of the Holy Spirit being received upon faith in Christ. Also taking into account that in Acts 18:24–26 there is a similar situation where Apollos also had incomplete knowledge of the gospel because he was a follower of John the Baptist and only had John's teachings to go by. The timing in Acts is very important to take into account while trying to reconcile the Acts references with Eph. 1:13-14 (NLT, AMP), Gal. 3:2,5,14 (NLT, AMP), 2 Cor. 1:22 (NLT/AMP), 1 Cor. 3:16 (NLT/AMP), 1 Cor. 6:19 (NLT/AMP), 2 Timothy 1:14 (NLT/AMP), 1 Jn. 4:13 (NLT/AMP), 2 Cor. 1:21-22 (NLT/AMP) that speak of immediate reception of the Holy Spirit, the moment of belief in Christ, and the Holy Spirit's full, abiding presence in believers from that point onward.

Answer:

The query revolves around harmonizing the account in Acts 19:1-7—where Paul encounters about 12 "disciples" in Ephesus who claim to have believed but haven't received (or even heard of) the Holy Spirit until after further explanation, rebaptism in Jesus' name, and the laying on of hands—with New Covenant passages like Ephesians 1:13-14, Galatians 3:2,5,14, 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 6:19, 2 Timothy 1:14, and 1 John 4:13 (across translations like NLT and AMP). These epistles consistently describe the Holy Spirit's reception as an immediate, sealing, indwelling reality upon genuine faith in Christ, serving as a guarantee of salvation and abiding fully from that moment onward, without any delay or secondary step.

Your expanded theory—that these were disciples influenced by John the Baptist's preparatory ministry, with incomplete knowledge of the full gospel (lacking details on Jesus' death, resurrection, and the post-Pentecost outpouring of the Spirit), baptized only in John's repentance-focused baptism, and possibly holdovers from before the Holy Spirit's arrival at Pentecost—provides a solid framework for

reconciliation. It emphasizes the transitional timing in the Book of Acts, where the early church was still spreading the complete message, and ties directly to the similar case of Apollos in Acts 18:24-26, who "knew only the baptism of John" until Priscilla and Aquila explained "the way of God more accurately." This interpretation avoids contradictions by viewing their initial "belief" as partial or anticipatory, not the full saving faith in Christ that triggers the Spirit's instant indwelling as described in the epistles. Below, I'll outline how this aligns with broader theological perspectives, drawing from a range of scholarly and denominational sources to represent diverse stakeholders.

Evangelical and Reformed Perspective: Incomplete Faith in a Transitional Context

In many evangelical and Reformed traditions, your theory is widely affirmed as the key to reconciliation. These "disciples" are not considered full Christians initially; their faith was rooted in John's messianic expectation but lacked the specifics of Jesus as the fulfillment (Acts 19:4). They were essentially in a pre-Christian or Old Covenant-like state, isolated from the gospel's spread, which explains why they hadn't received the Spirit—mirroring how believers before Pentecost (like the apostles themselves) awaited the Spirit's coming (John 7:39; Acts 1:4-5). Once Paul clarifies the gospel, they believe in Jesus explicitly, are baptized accordingly, and receive the Spirit immediately upon that true faith—perfectly matching the epistles' emphasis on instant sealing (e.g., Ephesians 1:13: "When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit").

- **Timing and Transitional Nature:** Acts documents the historical expansion of the church from Jerusalem outward, capturing unique moments where the Spirit's outpouring confirms new groups entering the faith (Jews at Pentecost, Samaritans in Acts 8, Gentiles in Acts 10). Acts 19 fits this as a "mini-Pentecost" for these fringe disciples, not a normative pattern for post-Acts believers. The laying on of hands and visible signs (tongues, prophecy) authenticate the message in this early era, but the epistles (written later) normalize the Spirit's reception as invisible and concurrent with belief, without such externalities required.
- **No Contradiction with Indwelling:** Passages like Romans 8:9 ("If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ") underscore that all true believers have the Spirit from the start. If these Ephesians were already saved, lacking the Spirit would violate this—hence, their faith was incomplete until Paul's instruction.
- **Link to Apollos:** As you noted, Acts 18:24-26 shows Apollos as "fervent in spirit" but limited to John's teachings, needing correction. This pattern suggests isolated pockets of John's followers persisted, and Acts 19 resolves one such group, reinforcing that full gospel knowledge is essential for the Spirit's reception.

This view prioritizes the doctrinal clarity of the epistles over Acts' narrative descriptions, seeing no need for a "second blessing" and affirming the Spirit's full, abiding presence from conversion onward.

Pentecostal and Charismatic Perspective: A Distinct Subsequent Experience

In contrast, Pentecostal interpretations often see Acts 19 as evidence for the "baptism in the Holy Spirit" as a separate empowerment event after initial salvation, distinct from the indwelling at belief. Here, the Ephesians are viewed as genuine believers (called "disciples" who "believed" in Acts 19:1-2), but they required a subsequent filling, often evidenced by tongues or prophecy, to equip them for ministry. Paul's question ("Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?") implies this could be post-conversion, and

the delay until laying on of hands supports a two-stage process: regeneration (with indwelling) at faith, then empowerment.

- **Reconciliation with Epistles:** The epistles describe the sealing/indwelling at conversion (e.g., Galatians 3:2,14), while Acts highlights a normative but separate "baptism" for all believers today, not just transitional. Critics of this view argue it introduces division not explicit in the epistles, potentially implying incomplete Christians. Your theory partially aligns but is reframed: their incomplete knowledge delayed the full experience, yet the pattern encourages seeking a post-conversion filling.
- **Critique from Other Views:** Evangelicals counter that this overemphasizes Acts' descriptives, risking legalism around signs like tongues.

Catholic Perspective: Linked to Confirmation

Catholic exegesis often connects Acts 19 to the sacrament of Confirmation, where the laying on of hands (by a bishop or apostle-like figure) imparts the Holy Spirit's fuller gifts after baptism. These disciples had a valid but incomplete initiation via John's baptism, requiring Christian baptism and confirmation for the Spirit's reception. This reconciles with the epistles by seeing the Spirit's sealing as tied to the sacraments, immediate in effect but sometimes administered in stages. The timing in Acts reflects apostolic authority in the early church, not a universal delay.

Steps for Personal Application

To reconcile this in your study:

- Compare translations (NLT/AMP highlight immediacy) and contexts: Acts is historical narrative; epistles are doctrinal.
- Read full commentaries representing views, like David Guzik (evangelical) or Pentecostal resources from Assemblies of God.
- Pray for clarity, as the core truth—the Spirit's abiding presence in believers—is unanimous across traditions (John 14:16-17).

Ultimately, your theory holds strong in evangelical circles, resolving any tension by emphasizing Acts' unique historical window, while ensuring the New Covenant's promise of instant, full indwelling remains intact.

A little bit more on the confusion that can arise due to the timing of Acts being historical rather than doctrinal and the teachings of John the Baptist vs. the Teachings of Christ.

Acts. 19:2 is Luke writing about the actions of Paul. Paul was speaking to Twelve men who were disciples of John the Baptist (followers of John the Baptist) but had not yet heard the full Christian message. The disciples in Ephesus did not know about the Holy Spirit because their religious knowledge was incomplete. They were followers of John the Baptist but had not yet heard or understood the message of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Their limited understanding can be explained as follows:

They had only received John's baptism: These men had undergone John's baptism of repentance, which prepared people for the coming Messiah. They knew about the need to turn away from sin and were aware that someone greater was coming.

Their teacher had limited knowledge: The text mentions that Apollos, a powerful Old Testament teacher, had previously been in Ephesus but only knew the "baptism of John" until Priscilla and Aquila explained the way of God more accurately to him (Acts 18:24–26). It is possible that these twelve men were followers of Apollos or other teachers with similarly limited knowledge.

They were unaware of Pentecost: John the Baptist had prophesied that the Messiah would "baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matthew 3:11). These men knew the prophecy but were unaware that it had been fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, which occurred about 20 years earlier. Their statement "We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit" was likely an admission that they were unaware the promised Holy Spirit had arrived in this new, powerful way.

They were "incomplete Christians": Paul's encounter revealed that they had repented but had not yet placed their faith in Jesus as the Messiah. They lacked both sufficient knowledge and saving faith. After Paul explained the gospel of Jesus, they believed and were baptized in the name of Jesus, and subsequently received the Holy Spirit.

They had received "John's baptism": They were baptized for repentance based on John the Baptist's message, which called people to prepare for the coming Messiah. However, this was an incomplete message that did not include the fulfillment of John's promise.

They lacked a full understanding of Jesus: When Paul questioned them, their knowledge of Jesus Christ was incomplete. The Holy Spirit was not given until after Jesus' death and resurrection on the Day of Pentecost. Since the men did not know about Jesus' role as the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit, they lacked both the necessary knowledge and saving faith required for the Spirit to indwell them.

The historical gap: As disciples of John, they were stuck in an earlier stage of redemptive history. They knew about the promised Messiah but were unaware that the events of Pentecost had already occurred, and the promise of the Holy Spirit had been fulfilled through Jesus.

The inadequacy of Apollos's teaching: Some scholars suggest these men may have been influenced by Apollos, an eloquent Jewish believer in Ephesus who had also been baptized only with John's baptism before being taught the complete gospel by Priscilla and Aquila. This would explain how their knowledge of Jesus was incomplete.