



By Dr. Rosa Shao

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## ABIDE IN ME

Two weeks with our two precious daughters in Los Angeles this summer seemed to go by so quickly. As Joseph and I prepared to leave our girls behind, there seemed to be many unending promptings and more final hugs to give. At last, we found ourselves with these lingering, poignant words at the airport: "Remember to *skype* with us more often, watch your own safety, and love each other . . ."

Bidding good-bye to our loved ones is never easy. I have come to realize that Jesus also found Himself in this situation during the final days of His earthly stay. How did Jesus say "good-bye" to His disciples? What was Jesus' final address to them as the hour of His crucifixion drew near? Biblical scholars regard Chapters 13 to 17 in the Gospel of John as Jesus' parting discourse to His followers. In anticipation of His death and physical absence this farewell address sought to offer comfort and encouraging instruction. However, Jesus' departure was exceptional. In His final charge, Jesus issued an incredible command to "**abide in Him**" since His presence *would continue* through the Holy Spirit, an assuring truth of the heavenly Father's ultimate plan and purposes.

Although there appeared to be various themes in Jesus' farewell discourse, we shall focus on Chapter 15 verses 1 to 17, wherein Jesus uttered His last "I am" statement (the 7th one). The sight of the great golden vine and the

branches that trailed along the path as Jesus and His disciples leave the upper room may have triggered Him to announce the interrelationship of the Persons in the Godhead with His followers.

**Remain in Me.** This is the assurance from our Lord Jesus Christ. In John 14:31, we hear Jesus calling out: "Come now, let us leave." This is swiftly followed by His assuring words: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit... Remain in me... I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (Jn 15:1-5)

The word *abide*, means "to wait for; to bear patiently; to continue in a place; or to remain in a place or fixed in a state." In many translations, the word used is to *remain*, which is simply, to stay, or to live. The mutuality of us remaining in Christ and Christ in us, connotes an **intimate** relationship as that between the vine and its branches. The Greek word for *remain* is *meno* (Jn 15:4, 5, 7, 9, 10). It has the same root word with the words *rooms* (Jn 14:2), *monai* and *home* (Jn 14:23) *mone*. Such a privileged and close relationship is mentioned earlier, wherein Jesus and His followers are to remain with God the Father (Jn 14:2-3); that God the Father and Jesus the Son shall be with those who remain in His teaching (Jn 14:23), and that Jesus the Son remains in His followers when they remain in Him (Jn 15:4).

In the Old Testament, the vine often represents the image of Israel, which has become unfruitful and is under God's judgment.

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Here, Jesus is the true vine that replaces the fruitless Israel; He alone is the right abode for His followers, secured and safe under the Father's care. This care is the **input** of God the Father, who is pruning the branches. The word *pruning* in Greek, *katharos*, means *cleansing* or *purifying*. Father God, the Gardener, in His wisdom and ways, prunes the branches that bear fruits to further fruitfulness. Jesus makes this clearer that His followers are already clean with His teaching, what He has spoken, the *Logos* of God in the person of Christ, has made them clean and pure in God's sight.

Jesus further says, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." (Jn 15:7-8) Embedded in this is Jesus' assurance that anything His followers ask for will be realized in as much as they keep in His steps, with His words impressed in their hearts. The believers' prayers, given in accordance with Jesus' guiding light, will find answers as they match the Father's will. The very **interest** of remaining in Christ brings out the importance of glorifying God through His followers' very proof of bearing much fruit.

**Remain in My Word.** This is the application for us, His followers. This section unlocks the essence of Jesus' charge of what it takes to really remain in Him. In the analogy of the vine, a seed is laid into the soil, then, slowly and surely with the right care and nurture, a bud will appear; later, this will flower into fruits. When applied to our lives, our final claim as Jesus' followers, showing that we are His very own disciples, can only be seen when we actually abide in His love through His Word, that is, His utmost command.

**Open to His love.** Like the very seed-bearing life of a plant, by remaining in Christ, we have identified in the very life of Christ, with His living Word abounding in our hearts. Jesus, the *Logos* of God, came into this world and His entire teaching, the *logos*, also remains in us, His followers. His very words and teaching would empower us, to keep us in His abiding presence and enabling love. Herein, Jesus modeled for us His relationship with God the Father, to be also His relationship with us. "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now, remain in my love." (Jn 15:9)

Recently, a dearly beloved elderly sister in Christ, Catalina Ty, went to be with the Lord at age 95. During her last few days at the hospital, she had these words of confidence to witness to those who visited her: "I want to go home (to be in heaven); in my whole life, I have followed and kept the teaching of my teacher, Tena Holkeboer, a missionary who taught me *we only live to glorify God on earth*, and this is what I always remember to do." Nowadays, the popular song bird Lady Gaga urges her listeners to live for ourselves, because *I was born*

*this way*; but this gracious God-fearing sister, Catalina, had shown us how she had remained in her teacher's teaching from God's Word, that we are born to *live to glorify God*.

Jesus tells us He loves us. Jesus reiterates His love for His followers and for us today, even as He is now with the Father in heaven. His love is even vividly portrayed to us, as He Himself willingly laid down His life for us (Jn 15:13). When we are open to a deeper understanding of His love, we will find Jesus, not only the Living Word in our lives, but even a solid, true Friend, who sticks closer than a brother. His nearness will then be felt and experienced in our daily living.

**Obey His Command.** There is a reciprocating effect of remaining in Christ's love and obeying His command. Jesus sets a great and good precedent for us through His own example. "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in His love." (Jn 15:10) The more we obey Jesus' commands, the more we dwell in His love and fulfill His charge for us to remain in Him. As we remain in Him, the more we find ourselves in His love; therefore, we will be more than able to do His commands. This will bring about the joy that Jesus speaks about, which is actually a complete joy found in Jesus alone (Jn 15:11).

What then is His command? Twice Jesus repeated in this passage, saying: "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." (Jn 15:12, 17) Loving one another is the outward manifestation of our Christian testimony, showing forth to the world that we truly belong to Christ, and not just being His workers. Even so, Jesus empowers us by calling us His friends and choosing us to be such in God's kingdom (Jn 15:14-16). It is indeed by dwelling in His love, through the assurance in His words that we can know what He wants us to do and be able to fulfill the tasks, with the same love that He gives us.

It is never easy to love another person other than ourselves. I was sorting out my valuable belongings and found out I do have a lot of gifts, still nicely packed and laying idly at home. The *Ondoy* flood reminds me that nothing is forever on earth, and that they are bound to wear and tear soon. I then made up my mind to send away these unused good items to people around me. I caught myself having second thoughts and even reasoning that I might need them too! It is only when I read again this command from Jesus, *love each other as I have loved you*, that I gladly released my goods to others!

**Concluding thought:** Jesus assures us, His followers, that by remaining in Him, we will realize the complete