

***Meno* or Abide in Chapter Fifteen of St John's Gospel**

Some Introductory Words

This is a very short document. Often size does not matter...true in this case...because the subject is of great importance. Furthermore, by reason of its simplicity a lot can be overlooked.

During Easter-tide some Gospels are taken from the Last Supper discourse of St John's Gospel. One Gospel struck me with its emphasis upon the verb *meno* which in Greek is translated in the **RSV** as to remain. It seemed that references with regard to *meno* kept coming on thick, one cascading after the other. There are several translations available, but I'm fond of my own which is to tarry. It has several connotations, notably a lingering in a gentle sort of way. All in all I get the impression that *meno* involves no rush but a presence. It implies spending extra time in a place or being slow in coming or going.

The next step was to make a list of these words, first breaking down the Gospel (St John, Chapter Fifteen) sentence by sentence. That is what we have here with each translation of *meno* as abide in bold. The total number comes to ten. So if Jesus uses *meno* so often, it must have a significance we cannot ignore. Clearly he's telling not just his disciples but others who'll follow something important.

The ten references take place with the image of Christ as vine and the Father as vine-dresser. Such an image was of great importance and easy to grasp at the time. Significant as that happens to be, what I find appealing is that the essence of *meno*—of tarrying (to continue with that rendition)—has considerable bearing on how we relate to Jesus Christ. Hopefully references to that will be brought out in some of the notations that follow below.

Abiding or *meno* focuses upon one thing and one thing only, staying put and not going anywhere. On one hand that's easy to do and on the other, it involves considerable and I might add unexpected discipline. Abiding also intimates the performance of domestic activities, for obviously you have to engage in the nitty-gritty business of maintaining your home. By reason of these less than often glamorous details it's easy to overlook or avoid what is being presented to us. Nothing dramatic or extraordinary is involved. To see that is a genuine gift which

means that often the benefits involved are simply bypassed. Hopefully a close read of the following verses in the spirit of *lectio divina* will offer the opportunity not to hasten by the immeasurable boon which *meno* offers here.

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15.1. I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-dresser.

By using the adjective *alethinos* or true, Jesus is intimating that a vine can not participate in the truth. Also there may be other vines out there not partaking of this quality.

Alethinos doesn't apply to the Father as vine-dresser...“true vine-dresser”...because there can be only one. While that applies equally to Jesus, there's the danger of attributing *alethinos* to other vines by way of imitation. As for a vine-dresser, that's an image that can strike some fear into the reader because such a person trims and cuts the vine, and nobody enjoys that applicable to himself.

2. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

The way this verse is phrased, all branches—those which bear fruit and those who do not bear fruit—belong to Jesus (‘every branch of mine’). Jesus is aware of the branch not bearing fruit but by reason of being a vine, is powerless to remove it. That means, of course, he has to rely upon the Father to remove it. *Kathairo* is the verb for the act of pruning, literally to cleanse. The verb also infers a sweeping motion. And so *kathairo* is more involved than cutting away useless branches. Once that's done, a bandaging up is required over the new wound. Once healed, the branch is capable of bearing more fruit, even more than when it was healthy.

3. You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you.

Here *katharos* = *logos* or clean = word-as-expression. *Logos* is the instrument which has effected this cleansing. Note the cleaning is past tense, as already having been spoken (*laleo*) by Jesus. More accurately, the cleansing takes place literally through or *dia* his *logos*. It parallels the essence of *meno* insofar as nothing dramatic has taken place. Jesus simply speaks a *logos* and *katharos* results, nothing more, nothing less.

4. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you abide in me.

This is the first mention of *meno* in the excerpt at hand. The verse consists of two sentences, the first having one instance of *meno* and the second with two instances. Actually in the first sentence a second *meno* is inferred and would read “and I abide in you.”

A branch must *meno* in the vine to bear fruit. Applied to the disciples, the same applies provided they *meno* in Jesus.

5. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Here Jesus calls himself the vine compared with the true vine in vs. 1. The disciples, of course, are the branches. As for the branches, they are the ones that yield grapes.

The second sentences mentions *meno* one but is implied as being used a second time (‘and I in him’). That is to say, there’s a mutual *meno* between the disciples and Jesus. With regard to the person who abides or *meno* in Jesus, without (*choris*, apart from) him he cannot do anything, *poieo* being the common verb.

6. If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned.

Jesus doesn’t give the reasons why a person doesn’t *meno* in him, just the fact of not doing so. The logic is simple, no *meno* equals *ballo* plus *exo* or to cast from as a branch where he withers, *xairo* meaning to dry out. Such a drying out process is not sudden but slow over a period of time. Once the branches are dried, they are gathered and cast into fire (a second *ballo*) and burned.

7. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you.

A “double if,” as it were: *meno* in Jesus and *meno* of his *rhema* in the disciples. As for the latter, it can be rendered as an utterance or that which is spoken. *Rhema* refers to a specific, timely, and personal word that God speaks to an individual. Armed with this twofold *meno*, a person can ask whatever he wants, and it will be given to him.

8. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples.

Doxazo or to glorify also means to praise as well as to honor. Should a person bear much fruit (*phero* also as to bring, to produce), in a way he will be responsible for this *doxazo*. As a result, he will prove (no Greek verb for this here) to be a disciples of Jesus.

9. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love.

Jesus lays out his relationship with the Father, that is, being loved by him with *agapao* as the verb (cf. *agape*). It is the same relationship Jesus has shown to his disciples. After saying this in a simple yet profound way, he bids his disciples to *meno* in his *agape*. Such *meno* as tarrying with regard to the essence of such a relationship presents it as being easy and almost natural.

10. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

Meno in the *agape* proper to Jesus is conditional. It requires keeping Jesus' commandments, *tereo* and *entole*. The verb infers keeping watch over or guarding with references to a mandate or ordinance. The template for this is the *tereo* by Jesus of his commandments which results in continuing to *meno* in his *agape*.

11. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

The words just communicated to his disciples are intended not just to have Jesus' joy be in his disciples but that this same joy may be full. In other words, such *chara* is not simply to be as such but *pleroo*, to attain the maximum of expression.

12. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Jesus' commandment or *entole*: *apapao* among the disciples as on the same level as his *agapao* for them.

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4