

Abiding in Christ
Chapter 5: A Weak & Passive Church
(Bob & Graham Interview, edited by Bob Clarkson)

Boring, Predictable, Irrelevant and Ineffective

Right now the enemy is doing whatever he wants in society because the church is so passive. We love each other, at least some of the time, that is, while we are behaving in appropriate ways. We take comfort in our mutual beliefs. We help each other. We pray for each other. (Yet our prayers are largely very selfish ones. 'God fix this.' 'God fix that.' 'God take away my pain.' 'God heal my illness.' 'God change my disposition.' 'God fix or heal someone else's problems.' Like that, you think, is unselfish because it is for someone else!)

We do Bible studies that increase, or maybe they don't increase our knowledge of the Bible. But information packing leaves us, anything but, transformed as Romans 12:2 calls for. We are boring and predictable and quite irrelevant in relationship to those we are supposed to be introducing to saving faith in Jesus. Our routines are so habitual, we give out 'gold stars' of approval for perfect attendance or perfect answers to the Bible study questions and so forth.

We come to church. We greet each other in the hallways. We go to Sunday school or other small group. We take attendance, list and pray for selfish ends, we have a lesson, regurgitate the 'correct' answers to the teacher's questions. We shake hands and leave the room. Then we nod at each other on the way to the sanctuary. We reassure each other that what we believe is rock

solid and that we pretty much have all the knowledge we truly need. In the sanctuary, we sing, pray, preach, call for repentance, pray and leave. Yet we are not really changed by the experience.

We may have ecstatic feelings during parts of this, but when we leave, we take up the arguments with our families that were in progress when we arrived at the church or just settle back into our lethargic and anxious thoughts. We have done our duty to God's expectation that we go to church at least once a week. And to be sure, the fire of our desire for God which was kindled that day, if any, is most often gone by the next morning.

Largely, no one outside the church would suspect that we are Christians unless we turn up our Christian music, lay our Bibles on our desk or make some other overt attempt to silently proclaim our allegiance to God. And our allegiance is not at all what God desires of us. (By the way, He will also have our allegiance when He gets what He does desire.) But the passionately intimate love affair He desires above all else only burns hot when we are surrounded by other Christians singing 'Kumbaya.' Our ecstasies are more like shouting for our sports team during an awesome play than tenderly touching someone we love. If anything, at church we are preaching only to the choir.

We are not speaking the words of the Gospel prolifically, fluently and passionately outside the building. Rather, we try to 'buy off' God with our contributions to the social welfare of the needy or tithes to the church. We think that evangelism is the pastors' job. But the truth is that evangelism is what every person

does when they speak proudly of themselves or others of whom they are proud. But listen to the loud sounds of silence with respect to pride in Jesus, expressed by the vast majority of Christians outside the building! Almost deafening, wouldn't you say? And we truly do not understand the message of the Gospel. We preach moral improvement and behavior management, rather than a genuine, loving relationship with God.

We may talk about warfare against Satan and his dark forces. But talk is cheap and action is seldom matching our words. So he has all this free time. One directive of the Church is to resist the devil. But we're not. He shows up with the usual temptations to indulge ourselves and we immediately opt for our comfort over conflict. It as though we are all running away squealing, "Don't hurt me!" Or we don't pose enough of a threat to stir up a fight. We certainly don't know how to fight if we do show up.

Everything Is Useful to God

Everything in your life is useful to God! He allows in His wisdom what He could easily prevent by His power. Every single thing in your life is for your development. It's about your faith being purified. It's about your awareness of the presence of God increasing. It's about your peace increasing. It's about your rest and your joy. It's about your ministry and witness going to a new level of effectiveness. It's about your understanding being developed. It's about wisdom coming into your heart and life and making a difference. Every single thing in your life right now is useful to God! He doesn't waste anything! ... He doesn't waste a thing!

So if you want to abide, you have to abide in that revelation, that everything is useful. Everything is **for** you. So when you don't abide, you actually think everything is **against** you. But the truth is that God purposes everything **for** you. Even the worst of things, if not for **you**, are for **others** in light of God's purposes on a larger scale! Our fighting is not in the usual ways of warfare. We learn how to wait. We learn how to be still with God. We learn how to worship. We practice giving thanks in all things. Even devastating things can be useful because it is about you becoming more of who you should be. Adversity is like the stone mason's chisel which removes every thing that does not belong to the masterpiece. But be assured, the masterpiece of God encompasses every life that becomes a part of His eternal Kingdom and His eternal presence.

God Orchestrates From A Future Perspective

God always knows what's coming. One thing that I love about God is that He is always present, past and future. He is Present-Future in how He sees you. You have two relationships with God; one in the present and one in the future that's waiting for you. So God always relates to you in two places. In Genesis 18:17, God comes to Abraham and He has been saying to Abraham, "There's a son coming." And finally on this visit He says, "... the son will be here next year." Then God starts this conversation with these two angels and Abraham is listening in – and He's asking these two angels, "Shall I declare to Abraham what I'm about to do now, since He is going to become a father of many nations. Yeah?"

Key word “since”. “Shall I declare to Abraham My purpose now, since he is going to become this later on?” So God is looking at two Abrahams here: the one that’s present and the one that’s coming. He’s going to become this, so because he is going to become this, he needs to understand this! So, you may only be able to understand your present in the light of your future! And God may not reveal that future to you. All too often we insist on knowing what God is doing with us **right now** when it has nothing to do with right **now**. As we talked about before, the “Why?” question is invalid because the ‘why’ can always be answered, because it serves the purposes of God in the larger context of all things. There is always a better version of you coming! Yeah? Or, as my friend Kim Clement says, “God sees you in the future and you look much better than you are right now.”

So we are learning how to bring the future into today! And how do you do that? If you’ve got a word from God that says, “Five years from now, you’re going to be a warrior, but right now you’re a worrier, something has to change. So all your circumstances are about teaching you courage, strength in adversity, teaching you how to get fit, and how to be strong in the Lord. All of your circumstances are about that. And all those areas of improvement are about you learning to become fruitful in everything. God allows in His wisdom what he could easily prevent by His power. So what is happening is that all the situations we encounter are always for our benefit; always for our development; always for our fruitfulness. God is teaching you how to be fruitful. We learn to be fruitful in both easy and hard times, toward both easy and difficult personalities.

Absolute and Utter Surrender to the Spirit

Only walking in the Spirit, displays the fruit of the Spirit. You're demonstrating Christ-like behavior when you yield to the Holy Spirit. He always responds. He does not react. God wants you to learn sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. He wants you to live **by** Christ's faith and His confidence! He wants you to step out in His will and His plan! He wants you to be fruitful in ministry. Every break through, not just for you, but also for others is the work of the Holy Spirit which is no longer hindered by your lack of trust in God's unchanging character. God wants you to overcome and overwhelm the enemy. He wants you to be productive while under pressure. Be aware that the Fruit of the Spirit is **the Holy Spirit's fruit, not yours**. The only way to stunt the growth of the Fruit of the Spirit is to choke out the sap that comes from the vine or separate from the vine.

A Covenant for Us Not with Us

Abiding does not prevent bad situations from arising. Abiding enables you to stay connected to God's permanent emotions which are love, joy and peace. Abiding enables you to remain centered on God's will and purposes. Abiding enables you to remain clean and fruitful in even the most difficult circumstances and in the face of the greatest temptations! **We are** in Christ by virtue of what the Father has done with the Son.

The Greek word for faithfulness is "hesed" and it means a fixed and determined love. God has a fixed and determined love towards you, and He's not changing! It's a love that God keeps and watches over.

It's a love that preserves the life of the beloved when under attack. It's a covenantal faithfulness that does not desert or abandon another. And God's affection for us is what makes that covenant real. So all the way through scripture we see God faithfully cultivating a relationship with Israel who does nothing but violate the relationship and rebel against Him continuously.

Now Christ is the covenant maker. The covenant is NOT between you and God. It is between Jesus and the Father. Yeah? So, Hebrews 7: 20 states, "... in as much as it was not without an oath for they indeed became priests without an oath, that He with an oath to the one who said to Him, the Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, you are a priest forever, so much the more also, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant."

The covenant that you have with the Father is the fact that you are in Christ and Jesus is the covenant maker. So everything the Father does for you, He doesn't do because of **you**, He does it because of **Jesus**. Yeah? And this arrangement can never change. Jesus said, "No one comes to the Father except by Me, because I'm the covenant maker!" He's the guarantee of a better covenant. The Father therefore is delighted with this agreement and will always honor it. Whoa, ho, ho! Phew! What incredible freedom we have to be loved. We are the Beloved of God. That's the good news!

Turning the Tables on Satan

I sat on a plane going from Chicago to Sacramento and I sat there and I'm reading the New Testament and the guy next to me says, "What's that

you're reading!" I said, "Aye it's a cook book." He said, "No it's not, it's a Bible!" I said "Dude, no getting anything past you, eh?" He starts this conversation with me. "You're a Christian. You actually believe all that God stuff?" His voice is dripping with contempt. And I'm thinking, "Outrageous! What nerve!" So I let him finish and then I said "Hang on a minute. So you're saying to me that you're NOT a Christian? What the heck is wrong with you? I can't believe you're not a Christian? You don't know God? Oh my God – how do you live with yourself?" (Don't mess with me on the plane, because you can't get off!) And so I just let him have it.

"You're not a Christian? Oh my goodness! What do you do for peace? I mean don't you know there's tons of love available? Don't you know what it's like to live in the pleasure of God? To have God in your life, to know what's coming in the future? You don't know any of that? How the heck do you live with yourself? My God! I didn't think people like you existed!" I so ripped him up. Bless his heart. Then people all over the plane are looking at me. It was great! I had so much fun. The guy was like saying, "Okay, Dude. Shut up!" ("You started it boy.")

I was saying to him, "You know what the good news is? The good news is I am incredibly loved by God. You know what the love of God does for me? It makes me amazingly confident about life. God loves me so powerfully and so well, that everything in my life has a purpose! God has dreams about me. He wants me to know what that dream is!" I just liked softened the whole thing and just got into the gospel. "This is why

I'm a Christian, because it's like amazing. It's incredible news. I love God! I love being with God." It seems like everyone around is thinking, "Could you turn the volume up a little bit. Wow. I'd like to know God! Is God interested in me?" Yeah, everyone has a question about that.

A Covenant That Can Never Be Broken

Christ keeps the covenant on our behalf. So the good news just got even better. He is there keeping your covenant for you so that the Father can give you favor. And so we're learning how to live in Christ in that context. ... Yeah? We enter the covenant as participators of His grace. We are the joyful recipients of His favor. And no matter where we go or what we do, God will remain faithful to love us. And He will cultivate the land of our life and the garden of our heart and He will weed out sin. He will plant things in us that will grow.

The Fruit of the Vine

Jesus is the vine and there is no sin in Him. So walking with God powerfully means that sin ceases to have dominion over you. Now your habit patterns cannot be formed by your own carnality. Your habit patterns get to be formed by righteousness and by peace and by holiness.

There are only two reasons for a branch of a good vine not to bear fruit. The first is because it is not actually attached. It's not a part of the vine. It has no spiritual connection. It has no sap connection. This is speaking metaphorically of a religious person who claims to know God, "I'm a believer because I go to

church.” But has never had a salvation experience. If you’re not connected to God in life, you’re not connected in the afterlife and there is absolutely no fruit of the Presence of God in you. The second reason for a branch not bearing fruit is because it’s hanging down. Sap rises. If a branch is hanging down, the sap ceases to reach it. So you can get a part of your life that is not fruitful, because actually it needs to be lifted up.

So what part of your life right now is not fruitful? It just needs to be lifted up. That’s what encouragement is about. If you see someone’s life not bearing fruit, the resolution is to lift that branch up. Sap goes to the highest point so that part of the branch that is not receiving life needs to be lifted up and trained at a higher level. The church actually should be the most encouraging society of people on the face of the earth. It should be a place where no one is shunned. We should be actively looking around for people to encourage.

Some times I think church can be the most discouraging of places, because you’re okay until you have a problem. You’re okay until you sin. And then you’re not okay. {By ‘okay’ I mean **accepted** in the fellowship.} Well the church needs to be encouraging at all times. When you’ve sinned, that’s when you need grace. And somebody in the church needs to be supplying the grace that you need so you can change. So if a part of your life is unfruitful right now the Holy Spirit wants to take that part and lift it into a higher place of relationship.

Maybe your current experience of life has gone beyond your present experience of God. You need to be

lifted up. You're current situation has gone beyond your present experience of who God is for you. So you need to be lifted up. You need to be encouraged into a higher place of relationship. Maybe you need to be encouraged into a higher place of trust or a higher place of peace or a higher place of grace. This is what we are for each other. This is what we do. This is what we should be famous for in the world. This is the very testimony Jesus said His disciples would live out.

Rescuing People from the Occult

I was talking to a Satanist on the plane because he was there to curse me, which is great fun. So he has a seat assignment next to me that his Coven actually got him. So before the wheels even come up into the plane he's introducing himself as a Satanist and "I'm here to curse your ministry." And I'm thinking, "Woohoo, this is gonna be a fun flight, because I won't lose! It sucks to be him right now but he doesn't know it. He's not on a flight to curse me. He's on a flight to listen to the gospel that I am going to give him. Part of my anointing is to rescue people from the occult. So being attacked is just part of the game.

So I said, "Okay! Great! Well, let's hear it." And he said, "What?" and I said, "Well let's see what you've got. Let's hear it!" He started cursing me. I just yawned. I said, "Sorry Dude, Sorry. But I'm actually a little bored. So have you got anything better than that? The last guy who cursed me was way better than this. So how long have you been doing this anyway?" "20 years." "Okay, well are you not disappointed with your performance? Frankly, I am. Don't you feel you should

be further on than you are right now? I mean 20 years of cursing and this is the best you can do?"

So I said, "Look, I'm just going to go to the restroom. Why don't you just gather your thoughts and I'll come back. Do you want anything from the galley? Can I get you a coke or anything?" So, he's like looking at me like you are so weird. And I'm looking at him and thinking, "You have no idea how weird I can get. But you are so going to find out." "You sit there and think. And I'll come back. And we'll just start again. Okay?"

I came back about a half hour later, sat down and said, "Okay. I'm buckled in. I'm ready. Lay it on me." And he starts again. And I said, "Nah, It's not that much better." So I said, "Frankly, I am so disappointed because God has promised me that every curse against me He will turn into a blessing. So like Dude, I'm not gonna get much blessing out of this. Like the last guy was way brilliant and my whole life with God just went off the chart. It was amazing." So I said, "Look, okay, let's just put that aside. Actually, you are not on this plane to curse me. You're on the plane because I have an assignment for you. You have an assignment against me. I have an assignment for you. You're here because, this is the word of the Lord. You're gonna switch sides."

"You're gonna be changing sides. You're gonna be working for a different boss in the next couple of years, because the hound of heaven is going to pursue you and you are not going to be able to settle back into all your occult practices. All the power of it, all the passion of it you felt. Well it's all gonna start draining away and you're gonna start to see through everything

and there's a hunger and thirst for righteousness that will come upon you, because I am so gonna pray for you. And so in terms of the occult you are so dead meat. It's over right now. It's just gonna take you a couple of years for you to realize it. God is pursuing you. He's after you. And He's going to get you! There's nothing you or your boss can do about it. God's gonna visit you with salvation. So how do you like those apples?"

Abiding Saturates Your Soul with Love

You have to know who you are and what you are called to! In that context you can be yourself in the Lord, and it's good fun. Has your current experience of life gone beyond your present experience of God? If so, you need to be lifted up into a higher experience of the agape love of God. Otherwise your lack of presence will be evident in difficult situations. Maybe you're running on empty in your relationship with God. Well, you can come and get filled up and lifted up to a higher place. Take your abiding to the next level. You are the joyful recipient of a heightened awareness of God's presence and peace. When you interact with other people that joy and peace will come out of your heart and touch theirs. You're a testimony in the making. When you abide at a deep level, love comes out of the pores of your skin. Anyone who touches you feels the love of God.

You are God's present (His gift) to somebody else. So, who are you a gift to right now? Who are the people around your life that God wants to bless through you? Make a list. I have a list of people that I know I am a gift to in this current season. I'm the fulfillment of a prayer they offered to God. Everything about God is

intentional. He has so many designs on you. You won't be able to keep up with them. He's got so many things He wants to show you, to be to you! This is the Good News. It's great news. God's intentionality toward us is massive. It's huge, it's enormous.

Right Vision, Right Time

God is always previous, always. He likes to rise up in your awareness just before an event. He likes to put His word into your life before you actually need it. That's why sometimes you get a prophetic word and you wonder what that has to do with now? Well it doesn't. But it is about you. Maybe next year. So when you have a word in your life that you don't understand, live in it anyway. Let your heart soak in it. It's about the next few months or years. God's just been previous with you. If it has no connection with you now, it has a connection with where you're going and who you are becoming.

So this is God! He's always previous! So my question in all of that is; "In your current circumstances right now, has God already said something?" Sometimes it's important just to go over what has God said? Has He already said something? Knowing God, He's already been a bit previous and there's something out there. Maybe some of us need to be lifted up to a higher level today. You know most of our upgrades in the Spirit usually come in the context of a crisis or confrontation. That's why we should never be worried about adversity. **Adversity and crises provide a short cut into a better way of life.**

God gives you an amazing opportunity to grow up really quickly. Every crisis I have is a short cut into a

better anointing. Brilliant! When you see crises for what they are you can really enjoy them, because God's going to speed things up. He is going to bring something to life or reveal something to you and it's powerful. Again, every crisis is a potential shortcut into something marvelous. Go back to Romans 8:28, "What's the purpose?" As long as you stick to God's purposes, He will do amazing things if you abide in Him in the current situation. "I know the plans I have for you ... for your welfare and not for your calamity; to give you a future and a HOPE" " Jeremiah 29:11 (Divine anticipation!)

The Sighing of Mutual Desire

A few months ago, one of my sighs was, "Lord, I just know You are incredibly happy and I would really like that joy to touch my life. You know Lord, I'd really like to experience a greater joy of my salvation." Every time you sigh, or you long for something, it's a sign of what God intends to do. You will not have that emotion unless God is planning to fulfill it by doing something. So every sigh you have about God, is because He's sighing over you. He's thinking, "I so want you to get this." So His sigh just comes out of Heaven and touches you. Then you end up sighing, "Lord, I so want to get this!" It is like the mutual desire of marital mates. He's like standing there smiling, "Ah, you have a connection right now. We're both sighing together. So that's good!" He actually pushes out His longing over you and you pick it up and you start to long for those things because God's desire is reaching out to touch you.

Not even your desire to know God originates in you. It originates in the heart of God. There are clues as

to what God wants to be for you and to do in your life. God is deeply committed to sharing everything that He is and everything He has with you. Many times you will discover that times of hardship bring on a sigh. I have rarely, if ever, made a major change in my life and experience of God without a nearly devastating situation arising in my life. What are some things in which you are unfruitful? Do you desire to become more aware of the presence of God? You can smile because God is so smiling over you. It's time to walk away from misery, sadness, frowning and unhappiness and into a place of living in God's smile. God is saying to each one of us, "I want you to come to Me and in these next few weeks and months we'll work through lifestyle changes that bring you love, joy and peace (emotions of the Spirit) which will produce long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance (expressions of the Spirit) as you release yourself in complete and utter surrender to the Spirit. Now that's walking in the Spirit.

You will learn how to be with God. You'll learn how to approach God. You'll learn how to wait on God. The Holy Spirit will reign supreme as you just let Him live the life of Christ in you. Your life will be like a learning laboratory in which you discover the purposes of God and trust His Heart completely. You will learn how to experience God in the places in your life that you don't value or appreciate. You will learn about the heart of God. And the Holy Spirit is going to comfort you. This doesn't mean that He will always hug you and say, "There, there. It will be okay." He might even tell you a few jokes. He's funny. So you have a treat in store.