

**The Anointing that Belongs to Believers**  
**1 John 2:26–29**  
**May 21, 2017**

Continuing in the Christian faith after professing to believe in the Lord Jesus may be the greatest challenge that we face. It's not that the object of that faith—Jesus Christ—is in anyway unworthy of diligence and consistency. It rather has to do with us and with the substance and reality of our faith. If our faith in Christ does not run heart-deep so that it produces fruit, then the time comes when we slip and fade from following Christ.

Every spiritual awakening has both genuine converts and spurious ones. That reality confronted me during the Jesus Movement of the late 60s and early 70s. We saw massive responses with outward professions of faith to sermons and testimonies—some of which were not very good sermons and not very clear gospel testimonies. Some continue in the faith to this day, giving evidence that the gospel took root in the heart and continues to produce fruit. Yet many of those professing Christ went up like a bottle rocket with sparkles and bangs, but quickly fizzled into a coldness and deadness toward the gospel. They demonstrated they were never converted. How do we explain that scene?

In the parable of the sower (soils), Jesus explains that some outright reject Him despite hearing the gospel. Others give a quick, shallow response to the hearing of the gospel but do not last past the first pressures and opposition to Christ. Still others make profession of believing in Jesus but have never repented of the entanglements of the world, and so do not last. None of these images picture true faith. Instead, Jesus explains that true faith in Him results, ultimately, in fruitfulness. Not all bear the same measure of fruit but the reality of knowing Him works deeply into the life so that there will be ongoing evidence that Jesus Christ is Lord and life to all who truly believe in Him (Matthew 13).

Why do they bear fruit? They abide in the Vine, as Jesus put it (John 15), and that results in gospel fruit. Abiding or continuing in the Vine expresses Christian perseverance. *We're called to persevere in the faith by abiding in Jesus Christ.* But what does that imply? John looks at it in two ways in this passage.

### **I. Abide in Jesus in light of false teachers**

Our text contains two imperatives (commands) that state the same thing: “**abide in Him.**” Surrounding the two commands are a series of statements (indicative moods in the Greek) and certainties that have yet to take place (indicated by the Greek subjunctive mood). But the central focus is on this two-fold command: “**abide in Him,**” with the statements and future certainties helping us see why and how we abide in Him.

John uses “abide” more than any other biblical writer. It's a central theme in his Gospel and used 26 times in his epistles (22 in 1 John). The word “**abide,**” (*meno*) means to continue in or to remain, so it expresses precisely the whole idea of perseverance. For in perseverance we're continuing in relationship to Christ. Furthermore, abiding is not some kind of cold, sterile persistence in duty without the vividness of life. Instead, as John uses the term in John 15 with the image of the branch abiding in the vine, he means that abiding is “continuous dependence on the vine, constant reliance upon him, persistent spiritual imbibing of his life” [D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 516]. The call to “**abide in Him**” means that you find your whole life in Jesus, you live in constant dependence upon Him, you learn to rely upon Him day-after-day, you trust in

His faithfulness and power and grace for continuing as His follower. Just as a branch has its in the vine, even so we have our life as Christians through union with Christ. Yet how do we keep abiding in Him?

### **(1) You can because of the Holy Spirit**

John has already declared, “But you have an anointing from the Holy One” (2:20), referring to the Holy Spirit who indwells all believers. Now he continues that theme but this time he intensifies the reason that we need the Holy Spirit. **“These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.”** The language indicates that the false teachers in Ephesus constantly badgered the church but had not succeeded in deceiving them. The reason was not due to the church’s personal strength or great knowledge but due to the indwelling Spirit. Pride would have us falsely cling to personal ability and power and knowledge as the reason that we continue following Jesus. But one honest look at ourselves debunks that kind of myth! Without God the Spirit working in us we would quickly plummet.

So many times I would have fallen away or been sunk by my sin or given up due to weakness but the Holy Spirit gave me life to continue on in following Jesus. He did it despite me! You may know exactly what I mean. You’ve struggled and wrestled and thought that you had come to the end of your strength. In a sense, you did come to the end of your strength so that you started to learn to depend upon the indwelling Holy Spirit to enable you to continue on in faithfulness. That’s what John means when he states, **“As for you [you who are being threatened by deceitful teachers], the anointing which you received from Him abides in you.”** The reason that you don’t quit is because Jesus gave you the Holy Spirit and He keeps working in you, pressing you forward, urging you on, giving you strength for weakness, giving joy where you thought none existed, filling you with life where you thought only deadness could be found. That’s why Jesus calls Him “the Helper” who abides with you and in you (John 14:16–17).

### **(2) You can because the Spirit brings to life the sufficiency of the gospel**

The Holy Spirit not only enables you but also enlightens you so that you learn to live in the sufficiency of the gospel of Christ. The false teachers bombarded the Ephesian church, just as we find many false voices trying to lure us away toward concepts, philosophies, and worldviews devoid of the cross-centered gospel. But since the Holy Spirit **“abides in you,”** John says, in light of the false teaching, **“you have no need for anyone to teach you.”** Some take this to mean that John eliminates the need for Christian teachers. But if that were the case, why would he be teaching them in his epistle? And why would Paul call “pastors and teachers” ascension gifts of Christ to equip the church? Instead, the context means that due to the indwelling Spirit making the truths of the gospel alive to you, you certainly don’t need the competing voices of false teachers. You don’t need their teaching—it will not profit you but only deceive you. You have the gospel and the gospel is always enough.

So how does this abiding connect so that the enchanting voices of false teachers have no allure to us? Andreas Köstenberger, commenting on the phrase in John 15:7, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you,” explains this as “mutual indwelling” that “involves more than just obedience (though certainly no less); it also *entails a growing absorption of Jesus’ teaching in one’s understanding and life practice* that issues in the

bearing of much fruit in one's own character, one's relationships with other believers, and outreach to those outside the faith" [ECNT: *John*, 455; italics added]. We don't need what false teachers teach because the Spirit makes alive and applicable the gospel of Christ. He enables us to absorb the truths of what Jesus accomplished on our behalf so that those truths work into every aspect of our lives. That gospel truth, then, affects the way that we live, relate to others, and share our faith.

John continues, **"But as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him."** The indwelling Teacher, the Holy Spirit, **"teaches you about all things,"** that is, *all kinds of things*, as the context would indicate. He's not talking about the Holy Spirit teaching you mathematics and physics but the Holy Spirit teaching you the truths of the gospel in contrast to the anti-gospel of the false teachers. One of the strong evidences of the indwelling Spirit is that He keeps bringing you back to the gospel of the crucified and resurrected Incarnate Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus declared that the Holy Spirit would "guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13). He brings you joy in hearing and considering the gospel. He refreshes you in the gospel. He shows you how the gospel applies in the various issues of life.

Now here's the point that John makes that has to do with perseverance. Since the Holy Spirit indwells you and since He is teaching you what you need to understand concerning the gospel in order to not get tripped up by false teaching but to go on living as a Christian, **"you abide in Him."** You can abide in Jesus. You can persevere in Him because the Holy Spirit is present to enable you and to enlighten you as a follower of Christ. Union with Jesus comes to life by the indwelling work of the Spirit.

If you have professed to know the Lord Jesus then the certainty of your perseverance as a Christian rests in abiding in Jesus, and that rest is due to the Holy Spirit at work. As Martyn Lloyd-Jones put it, "Christians are who they are because of the Holy Spirit" [*Walking with God*, 118].

## II. Abide in Jesus in light of His return

John expands the motive for abiding in Christ. **"And now, little children,"** shows tenderness and a new area of application for abiding in Jesus. Jesus will one day return in power and glory. How will He find you on that great day?

### (1) He will return

**"Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming."** The Greek mood in the verb **"appears"** indicates that His appearance has not yet happened but it is certain to happen (subjunctive mood). While the time of His return is uncertain the fact of it happening is sure. So in light of that certainty, **"abide in Him."**

A couple of generations ago, the church seemed to be obsessed with the return of Christ. However, it seemed more focused on signs and theories and date setting rather than the wonder and glory of Jesus returning. Books were written and movies made depicting these theories surrounding His return. But it seems that so little of it brought change in character to those drinking deeply of it. It was just a clean religious sport.

Yet John's point is that if we really believe that Jesus will one day appear, then it affects the way that we continue in the faith. We abide in Him because He secured us for Himself in His death and resurrection, He intercedes for us that we might remain faithful,

and He promises to take us to His home where we will be forever. So that anticipation of seeing Him affects us. John later tells us, “Everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (3:3). A right view of Jesus’ return doesn’t leave us in arguments over theories and fanciful ideas. It changes our behavior. It draws us closer into fellowship with Him.

Our problem may be more of thinking too little of His return. We grow slack in our walks, lazy in spiritual disciplines, and cold in devotion because we think little of the reality of the suddenness of His return. John moves that to the front burner of the mind. Abide in Jesus in light of His return. Think each day, “Could it be today?” And then set and organize your day accordingly. That doesn’t mean that you go and wait on a mountaintop as supposedly some in the ancient world did. Rather it means that whatever your purpose might be in that day—school work, recreation, job, times of service, doing yard work, cooking a meal, cleaning house, visiting with a friend, traveling on vacation—let the consciousness of seeing Jesus affect the way that you live. Abide in Him—persevere in relationship to Him. That prepares you well for His return.

### **(2) Abiding in Jesus gives believers confidence when He returns**

**“So that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.”** *Confidence* can be translated as boldness, courage, frankness, and outspokenness [BDAG]. It doesn’t convey brashness but as the conjunction and clause that follows show, it means that when Jesus returns we’re glad to meet Him. We can boldly welcome Him as those redeemed by His blood and sanctified by His Spirit.

Then, who are those who “**shrink away from Him in shame at His coming**”? The context of those who listen to and follow after the false teachers indicates that John had in mind those who went out from the church to follow false teaching (2:19) and those who might follow them. While they feigned super knowledge and spirituality, the return of Jesus would leave them shrinking away in shame. The term conveys the idea of being disgraced at the appearance of Christ [BDAG]. Why would one be disgraced? Because he had believed a lie and followed after a false gospel or had professed to know Christ but did not abide in Him as a persevering follower of Jesus. John gives a commentary on what he means in 4:15-19. The heart of it is that the result of confessing Jesus as Lord is God abiding in us, and our abiding in Him, so that in this union we come to understand the greatness of His love for us. This love grows and grows “so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world.” The shrinking away is due to not abiding in Jesus for only those born of God can abide in Christ and welcome His coming.

### **(3) Only those practicing righteousness give confident evidence of the new birth**

That’s why verse 29, although seemingly oddly placed at first, makes perfectly good sense to the structure. Who are those who welcome Jesus with confidence? It’s those born of Him. What is the evidence that they have experienced the new birth? Their lives begin little by little, more and more to reflect the righteousness of Christ. **“If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.”** The practice of righteousness is not the means to new birth but rather the resulting evidence of it.

The present tense, expressing the ongoing practice of righteousness, shows that it directly relates to the life of abiding in Christ. His life united to our lives produces the fruit of His life through us. The phrase, “**is born of Him,**” is better rendered, “has been forever born of Him” (perfect passive verb). He has already been born of Him and so practices righteousness. He’s born of Christ—with that relationship starting from God’s supernatural work of grace—and will always be in that relationship to Him. Consequently, when Jesus comes again, the one born of Him doesn’t shrink away in shame. So in light of Jesus’ return, abide in Him.

Perseverance is about the life of abiding in Jesus. What happens when you abide in Jesus? You keep on living each day in dependence upon Him. His life is your life. His joy is your joy. His peace is your peace. His love is your love. His glory is your chief delight. You keep on in the Christian faith because you’re a branch abiding in the Vine. The Holy Spirit keeps you and teaches you so that you might abide in Jesus until He comes.