



**Week 3: 1 John 2:8-3:8**

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**Remaining in Jesus**

## 1 John 2:18-27 — Guarding Against False Teachers.

In Jesus' final days, he prayed for the unity of his followers. **Psalm 133:1** celebrates how good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity. But what happens when the unity of the church is put to test by a new teaching that contradicts a foundational tenet of the Gospel message itself?

Should the church pursue unity even if it means sacrificing the integrity of its teachings? Or is there a point when breaking fellowship with other Christians is allowed—or even encouraged?

These are the questions John is wrestling with in his letter to the church in 1 John. In fact, Roberts calls this “the real occasion” for writing the letters a whole--dealing with the threat of a group of false teachers.

In this section of scripture, there are three major themes, all tied to the question of unity: **Antichrists** who deny that Jesus is God's chosen Messiah, the importance of **Remaining in Jesus**, and function of the **Anointing** we have received from God.

We will see that for John, false teachers represent a clear threat to the spiritual lives of the remaining Christians, and as such, he is calling them to remain rooted in Jesus and his teachings, and to trust in the anointing they have already received from God--rather than something new from this group of false prophets.

### Anti-Christ

When you hear or read the word antichrist, what comes to your mind? A picture of a devil-like creature, armed with a red pitchfork?

John has something a little less demonic in mind when he uses the term antichrist (singular, **1 John 2:18, 22**) or antichrists (plural, **1 John 2:18**):

1 John 2:22 (NIV), “Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. **Such a person is the antichrist**—denying the Father and the Son.”

For John, the antichrist is exactly what is sounds like: someone who is against (anti) God's chosen one (Christ). Christ is the Greek word for the Hebrew word Messiah. Both words mean the anointed one, the one chosen by God. To deny that Jesus is the Christ sent by God is to be anti-Christ.

You might wonder how a Christian could ever fall into the category of denying that Jesus was the Christ. One early Christian called docetism (from a Greek word “to seem”) posited that Jesus was an ordinary man like any other, but God's Christ was a purely spiritual being who came and resided within Jesus at his baptism. Under this view, Christ departed from Jesus prior to the crucifixion.

This was all an elaborate way to explain how a good and perfect God could take on the form of a human being, which was



widely seen as immoral and unbecoming of a holy God.

For John, the problem with this group of antichrists was that they were rather persuasive, and they were attempting to drag faithful Christians away from the genuine Gospel into their false teachings.

On multiple occasions in 1 John, the apostle warns the church against false teachers and prophets who would lead them astray (e.g. **2:26**, **3:7**, and **4:1**).

The consequences of abandoning the Gospel for this false teaching involved losing fellowship with the church (**2:19**), being a liar (**2:22**), losing your relationship with God the Father (**2:23**), all of which makes a person lost and astray (**2:26**).

***“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”***

**Ephesians 4:2-3 (NIV)**



## **Church Splits**

These were significant consequences, and they are the result of a serious theological error. The church today often splits about issues of relatively minor importance. This church was arguing about an issue that was a key tenet of Christianity itself: was Jesus truly the chosen Messiah from God? Their willingness to split over this foundational issue should not be taken a license for future churches to split over every minor detail, preference, or opinion.

Thomas Campbell, one of the founders of the Restoration Movement (from which the Churches of Christ began), once wrote against the practice of using our preferences and specific interpretations of scriptures as a test of whether or not another believer was a true Christian:

*“That although inferences and deductions from scripture premises, which fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God’s holy word: yet they are not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so; for their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men; but in the power and veracity of God—therefore no such deductions can be made terms of communion, but do properly belong to the after and progressive edification of the church. Hence it is evident that no such deductions or inferential truths ought to have any place in the church’s confession.”*

Thomas Campbell, Declaration and Address (1809)

John records Jesus’ prayer for unity in his Gospel, but he nevertheless warns the church against this heresy because it is by definition impossible to achieve Christian unity with those who deny that Jesus is the Christ:

*“Even with the desire for unity, the early church did not lose sight go the value of holding fast to what had been taught from the beginning. John teaches that apostasy is possible and that it is to be guarded against.”*

Roberts, 64.

## ***Remaining in Jesus***

With the threat of false teachers in mind, John urges the church to remain in Jesus and in his teachings. Remaining involves steadfast commitment, staying, and abiding. A hot coal from a charcoal fire quickly cools when it is removed from the flames. But it stays hot and and burns brightly when it remains connected to the fire. Likewise, believers find strength when they remain connected to the source of eternal life: Jesus Christ.

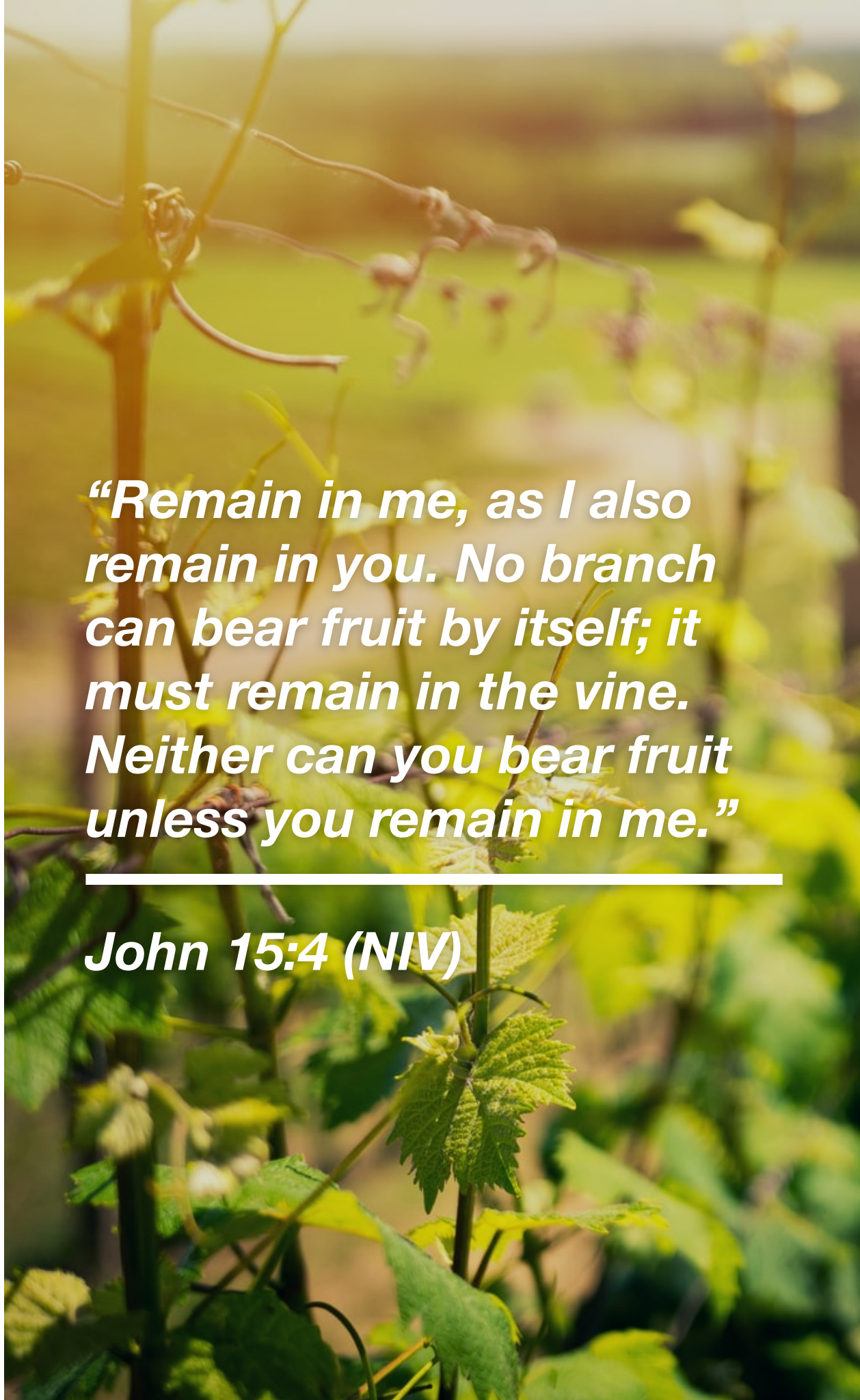
In **John 15**, Jesus uses the analogy of a vine and its branches to teach about the importance of remaining connected to him. We can never hope to bear fruit if we don't remain in Jesus, the true vine. Remaining in Jesus involves remaining in his words (**John 15:7**), in his love (**John 15:9**), and obedience to his commands (**John 15:10**).

**John 14:10-14** gives us an illustration what it means to remain in Jesus (and have him remain in us), because Jesus uses the same language to describe his relationship with God the Father. The key features of that relationship are that Jesus speaks God's words and does God's work. Jesus is a vessel through which God accomplishes his will on earth. Remaining in Jesus involves taking the same posture: allowing Jesus to speak and work through us in our lives. We remain in Jesus as we echo his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane: *"Not my will, but yours be done,"* (**Luke 22:42**, NIV).

The blessings of staying connected to Jesus involve bearing fruit (**John 15:4-5**), being saved from destruction (**John 15:6**), and having our prayers answered (**John 15:7**). As the church remains in Jesus and in his teachings, they are protected against the threat of false teachers dragging them off into Christological apostasy.

## ***Anointing***

The last major theme in this section is the anointing that believers have received from God. This anointing connected believers to Jesus Christ in a practical way. Jesus is God's Messiah (i.e. anointed one), and Jesus promised we would receive an anointing



***“Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”***

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***John 15:4 (NIV)***

from the Holy Spirit. The anointing we receive teaches us and leads us to truth (**1 John 2:27 and 2:20**, respectively). These two functions directly correspond to the role of the Holy Spirit, which Jesus teaches about in John **14:25-26 and John 16:13**.

For John, the threat of false teachers is mitigated by a believer's commitment to remain in Jesus as well as the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which leads them to truth and guides their thinking.

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## 1 John 2:28-29— Confidence at Jesus' Coming

One of the benefits of remaining in Jesus is that it leads to confidence in our relationship with God. In 1 John 2:28, John says that our relationship with Christ gives us confidence (Greek: *Parresia*) at the coming of Jesus (Greek: *Parousia*). This play on words highlights how Christians do not need to fear the return of Jesus, as fearful of a day that might be. Because of Jesus living in us, his return will be a glorious celebration in which we can be confident of our hope and future.

But this hope and confidence is only possible through remaining in Jesus, the son of God: *"If Christians are to have boldness at the coming of Jesus, they must abide in Christ."* Roberts, 60.



## 1 John 3:1-3— Children of God

The most important question of identity isn't *Who am I*, but *Whose am I*? Disciples of Jesus derive their purpose, value, and identity from the God who created them, loves them, and calls them his children.

### ***Just Like Dad (Or Mom)***

Young kids tend to view their mom and dad as a superhero. They look up to their parents because those parents serve as their primary example of what it means to thrive. It's truly a gift from God that he would choose to call us his children.

Another amazing gift God has given us is spiritual formation, or the ongoing process of being molded into a better reflection of Jesus. In Ephesians 4:22-24, Paul writes that we are to put off our old self, and to put on a new self which is "created to be like God." Through Jesus, we can actually become more and more like God as we grow and mature in faith.

That hope for our future is something that N.T. Wright says we should celebrate!

*"We constantly need to be reminded that there is a glorious future ahead."*

N.T. Wright, *Early Christian Letters for Everyone*, 150.

We can never know every detail of what will happen in our future, but we know that our future involves us coming face-to-face with Jesus, at which point we can rid ourselves of our sinful, broken world and fully embrace an existence that is just like Jesus. Ralph Abernathy put it this way: *"I don't know what the future may hold, but I know who holds the future."*

We can be truly confident because we know that God holds our future.

### ***Purified by Jesus***

John writes that our hope for the future involves a decision today to seek purity. **1 John 1:7-9** teaches us that purity is a gift from God that is given through the blood of Jesus. No one can possibly purify themselves, but we nevertheless have a role to play in the purification process: walking in the light and confessing our sins. John's call to purify ourselves in 3:3 is not a call to do enough good works to make up for our sin, if that were even possible, but a call to stay connected to Jesus by walking in the light, which will allow for God to purify us through the blood of his son.

## 1 John 3:4-8— Doing What is Right

John concludes this section of the letter by calling the church to moral living. Religion can sometimes become a stale process of going through particular rites and habits on Sundays without any type of real change or transformation in one's life the rest of the week. John wants the church to remember that those who love God will express their love through obedient living: *"John's main point is that children are like their father; since God is a righteous God, those born of him must be righteous."* Roberts, 75.

### Is There a Contradiction?

In 1 John 3:6, John writes that no one who knows Jesus will continue to sin. But in **1 John 1:8** he says that if we claim to have no sin, we're lying. How do we handle this seeming contradiction?

We know that no one other than Jesus is able to live a perfect life. Sin is an unfortunate reality of our fallen world, so of course everyone will commit sins of various kinds throughout their lives. The question becomes, is sin the exception or the rule? Is sin part of your habitual lifestyle, or is something you are actively fighting against? N.T. Wright summarizes the question in a beautiful way:


*"We should be doing our best to avoid all kinds of sin, all the time, though we shall surely fail; but the failures must take place within a settled habit of life in which sin is no longer setting the tone. We are playing a different piece of music now, and even if our fingers slip sometimes and play some wrong notes, notes that belong to the music we used to play, that doesn't mean we are going back to play that old music for real once more."*

NT Wright, *The Early Christian Letters for Everyone*, 151.

No one who loves Jesus *from the heart* will lead a lifestyle of ongoing sin. A person who genuinely loves God will feel convicted in their heart about unrepentant sin, and will use that conviction as a motivation to get back on the right track—with God's grace and support.

## Application:

1. **Remain in Jesus, our Life-Giving Vine.** We need to stay connected to God through prayer and devotion, and we need to stay connected with the church.
2. **Embrace Your Identity as a Child of God.** You are defined by whose you are, not just who you are.
3. **Don't Take Advantage of God's Grace.** May the love and grace of God motivate you to walk in his light.



***"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."***

**1 John 1:7 (NIV)**