


# Abiding in Jesus

1 John 2:28-29

Walking in the Light  
A study through the book of First John

Many of you have heard me say at various times in the past that we human beings like to pendulum swing from one extreme to another. This morning, I want to emphasize two swings of the pendulum as it relates to how many people interact with Christianity. I'm reminded of one of the things Jonathan said in his sermon last Sunday: The Jesus that many people believe in today is so horrific that I would choose about any other religion in the world except that one. . . . He can help me through my sin, but he can't do anything else. He can just give me some palliative care while I'm dying from sin, and that's not the Jesus of the Bible!

This is one extreme that people can embrace: a palliative care Jesus. Or, to put another way, a Jesus who give us "comfort," but doesn't empower people to change to be more godly. For many, as long as Jesus makes you feel good about yourself, then they're "good" with him. In some ways, the false teachers that the apostle John was confronting embrace this. At least in practice, they actually denied that knowing Jesus leads to life change. But John ardently refutes that at the beginning of this letter in 1:6, by saying, "If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth."<sup>1</sup> So, knowing Jesus necessarily leads to following him in obedience.

Now, when some people hear this, they're like, "Yeah, that's right! Obey!" And sadly, they may have swung the pendulum too far the other way. I personally grew up in a context where I think at least a fair number went too far with obedience. Some of you might think, "What? How can you obey too much?" That's not what I mean. What I mean is that the emphasis was on obedience so much so that they missed the point. One's spiritual life almost seemed to boil down to external obedience. Are you doing "this" or "that" thing correctly? How well are you doing it? Did you fail? Demerit. Did you succeed? Well, you should have anyway because God commands it. But, if you do good enough, maybe you'll get a sense of greater acceptance with God. What's missing in this equation of obedience? Jesus, and depending on the Spirit. I love one of the songs we sometimes sing that says, "Now Lord I would be yours alone and live so all might see the strength to follow your commands could never come from me" (*All I Have is Christ*).

So, with one side of the pendulum, we have people who think obedience is optional, and they only love a "comforting" Jesus. On the other hand, we have people who can emphasize a belief that focuses on obedience at the expense of Jesus, and this "obedience" will gain them more acceptance. Which, by the way, was somewhat a part of the false teacher's, too. While they didn't emphasize obedience for acceptance. They did emphasize some kind of "new" knowledge. If you could just gain that new knowledge, you were more spiritual. Yet, as we've been learning, and even Jonathan's text last week emphasized, there's no new, secret knowledge. All who trust in Jesus, are given the essential knowledge, which is Jesus and the gospel! You don't have to go searching for greater acceptance.

---

<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 1:6.

But I wonder how many of us can relate to the false teachers. I know I can. For example, I used to think that the more someone studied theology from books, the more spiritual they were. I wouldn't say that, but in practice, I believed it. That's horrible. I mean, I think studying theology is awesome! Read books. Learn from other believers. But, are you more spiritual if you know the words consubstantiation or transubstantiation? The answer is no.

The only way we are accepted before God is through Jesus – not through obedience, not through denying the necessity of obedience. Not through growth in knowledge. Not through our lack of knowledge. Jesus Christ alone grants us acceptance. But please be careful in listening right now. For the false teachers, they viewed Christianity almost as a self-help religion. It was self-focused. Many people today view religions (and Christianity) that way. But Christianity is altogether different. Christianity is about a reconciled relationship with God. Do you hear this? Relationship. You don't know Christianity if you are not communing and fellowshiping with God on the basis of Jesus, by the grace of the Spirit. On either pendulum swing, relationship really isn't essential. We either just want comfort or we want approval for our works. But the question we ought to be asking is, "Do you want Jesus?"

As we will discover more today, if Jesus is central in our lives, we will be compelled to obey. So, before going further this morning, I want to give you the main idea of the sermon, which is to **Continue to abide in Jesus**. This is relational, and we'll discover more what this means in just a few minutes. But, in these two verses we're looking at today, that is the only command. But, actually, John just commanded it in verse 27, too. After saying that we're anointed, and taught the essential truths for salvation, he states we must abide in Jesus. Why? Because the essential, saving truths focus on Jesus and what he did in living the perfect life in the place of sinners, dying in the place of sinners, and rising from the dead to conquer sin and death. Now, we have been anointed (which, as we learned a few weeks ago, refers to the Holy Spirit in us). Since the Spirit opened our eyes to Jesus, and Jesus is our salvation, we need him not just in the past. We need him in the present. We must abide.

**What does it mean to "abide?"** Before I answer that, I want to clarify why the main idea is "continue to abide." The reason for this is because John wrote this in the present tense. This is an action that must continue on. You don't abide *once* and done. No. If you have turned from your sins and turned to God for forgiveness of your sins and reconciliation with him on the basis of Jesus, you are reconciled in relationship – which means you are now always welcomed into the presence of God. You're welcomed in the arms of the Savior! Abide isn't past tense. It's present. Now we can ask what that means.

Well, let me read from another one of the apostle John's writings. In John 15:5, we read the following: **I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.**<sup>2</sup> The illustration is clear, right? We have a vine and we have branches. The word "abide" can also be translated as "remain." But the idea is to stay somewhere for a prolonged period of time. That's why we use the word "abide." What we also discover with this word is that it doesn't merely refer to our location, but it emphasizes our union with Jesus. As the branches, we are utterly dependent on the vine for all nourishment and strength. No good fruit will come from us if we are detached from Jesus.

---

<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 15:4–5.

So, to “abide” highlights our communion with Jesus. Think of that word “communion.” We have the word “union,” and then the prefix “com” means with. We are with (or, in) union with Jesus. **To abide involves relational intimacy.** Everything we have is his. Our hearts beat with his. Our lives flow from his.

Let’s get practical with this, Ventura. Do you fellowship with the Lord daily? Do you commune with him throughout your days? Notice that I didn’t ask if you read your Bibles everyday. I do believe it’s critical to know God’s Word – whether you’re reading it, listening to it, being taught it by others. The Psalms are replete with statements saying that a follower of the Lord fills themselves with God’s Word. Read Psalm 1. Read Psalm 119. But I also know that we can read our Bibles with no life. We can read it to gain acceptance or make us smarter or simply to help us not feel guilty for “ignoring” God – all the while we’re ignoring God because we’re really not communing with him.

Christian, are you abiding in Jesus? Literally nothing else matters in your life if you are not abiding. Did you hear Jesus’ words in John 15? Apart from him, you can do nothing. That doesn’t mean you can’t accomplish things in this life, but Jesus is saying that what you do in this life has no eternal value or meaning if you’re not abiding in him. If you’re not living on the basis of your relationship with Jesus. If you’re not living in communion with Christ, his life is not flowing through you. Therefore, no “fruit” – not eternal value – is coming out of you. Oh, but communing with Jesus is life-giving and receiving! How glorious Jesus is. He is worth abiding in. What a glorious Savior. Do you know him? I pray you do. I remember when I was younger, I used to think that Jesus was great, but there were a lot of other things I wanted to do or try before Jesus came back someday. Now, God has stripped me of so much of those longings, and my longing has only increased more and more to see my Savior face-to-face. Oh, how I want Jesus. Oh, how I want to live for Jesus. Oh, how good and gracious and glorious and satisfying Jesus is! Do you know him?

Ventura, do you understand this? Don’t pendulum swing here. What I’m saying here is foreign to pendulum-swingers because they miss Jesus every time. But the center of the pendulum is abiding in Jesus. Knowing him, knowing his love. Savoring the Savior. If you today say that your life is devoid of abiding, it would be no wonder why you might feel so drained and devoid of hope or life. You are either not attached to the vine (meaning, you aren’t a genuine Christian) or you’re forgotten your first love and you’re hanging by a thread. Either way, what should your response be today? Turn back to the Lord! Abide in him. Ask him for forgiveness for how you’ve been living in your own strength and your own ways. You’ve not been depending on him and communing with him. Maybe you’ve just “played church” and done externally good moral actions, but you’ve been missing Jesus. Oh, how I pray that you’d turn from that trivial, dead way of living and you would turn to the loving arms of Jesus and experience his life-giving grace through the Spirit. To turn from that dead way to Jesus *is* repentance. Will you turn today? I pray you will.

**...so that we will be confident at his coming.** John moves on in these verses by giving two results of abiding in Jesus. The first is found at the end of verse of verse 28: so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.<sup>3</sup> The “so that” gives us a reason why we ought to abide. What’s John’s concern for the Christ-followers to which he’s writing? He doesn’t want them to shrink in shame when Jesus returns again someday. Notice here that John uses two different words to refer to Jesus coming again. He uses “appears” and then he uses “coming.” In this verse, I believe John is using these words to refer to one event. They have a subtle nuanced difference, but the point is that the One whom we do not see today will someday be seen. And when he comes, we will

---

<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 2:28.

remain with him forever. This *is* going to happen someday, Ventura. But John has a hope for those of us who follow Jesus. He has a desire for something to take place the first time we meet Jesus face-to-face.

Oh, just think of it, Ventura. There is going to be a day when you *first* meet Jesus. I can hardly think about it without tears welling up in my eyes. My Savior will look into my eyes and I'll gaze into his. What will that first interaction be like? This is what John is commenting on here. As I think about John's statement here, I'm reminded of the many times when the Lord reveals himself to the Old Testament believers. What is the most common response at their first sight of him? Falling down to the dust. Even Isaiah, who was called to be a prophet pronounces God's wrath on himself because the holiness of God is so terrifyingly glorious.

John anticipates a different response for us who know Jesus. He says that the Holy, Holy, Holy Lord of Isaiah 6 is going to come back someday, and he longs that instead of us shrinking back in fear that we would have confidence when he returns! Do you know that your first interaction with Jesus, believer, can be confident hope?

Now, how does this connect with the command to abide in Jesus? Let's go back to Jesus' teaching in John 15. After Jesus says that apart from him we can do nothing, he then states, **"If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers. . ."**<sup>4</sup> This is what I think John is meaning when he says "shrink back in fear." Let's add to this. In another one of John's writings, in the book of Revelation, we read how some people *will* respond when Jesus comes again. In Revelation 6:15-17, we discover this: **Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"**<sup>5</sup> That sounds terrifying, and someday it really will happen. People will shrink back in fear when Jesus returns. Why? Because they never genuinely trusted him. They refer to him as the Lamb (meaning, they probably know he was the One who died for them, but they didn't trust him for forgiveness. The Lamb who took wrath in the place of sinners – and you could turn to him today if you haven't – he will come someday to bring just judgment to all who choose to have reject the Lamb and thus take the judgment on themselves). What a tragedy.

So, let's get back to 1 John 2. I don't believe that the apostle John is saying here in chapter 2 that you can either be an abiding Christian who will have confidence or an unabiding Christian who will shrink back. I don't find any example like that elsewhere in the New Testament. Instead, I think John has been clear that someone who says they're a Christian, but never abides, to use John's earlier phraseology, is a liar and the truth isn't in you.

Right now, some of you might be thinking, "Wait. I haven't been abiding. Does that mean I'm not a Christian." I can't answer that. What I can say is that the New Testament often gives warnings to Christians to spur them on. We do sin (as John said earlier). But the question is whether or not you'll turn from your sin to Jesus. What I mean by that is that *if* you are a Christian, you'll listen to these warnings! If you're not a Christian, you might feel guilty for a time, but you'll go back to the old patterns. John is calling the Christians to *continue to abide*. Will you stop? Will you remain unabiding? Or will you turn to the loving, open arms of Jesus and say, "I want to know you more! I need you"?

---

<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 15:6.

<sup>5</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Re 6:15–17.

Isn't the future hope a glorious motivation? To not have one tinge of fear or guilt or shame at Jesus' appearing. To be completely free from our sinful desires and ways. To be completely transformed and formed to perfection and welcomed into the arms of our Savior. Each day you wake up. Each evening you lay your head on the pillow. Remind yourself to savor the Savior. Anticipate his goodness and grace and guidance each day. Continue abiding in him until (and after) you see him for the first time.

So, John (by the Spirit's leading) calls us to continue to abide so that we won't shrink back like those who don't genuinely trust Jesus. But then we have verse 29. Read verse 29 with me: If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.<sup>6</sup>

**...because then you will grow in practicing righteousness.** What does verse 29 have to do with abiding and having confidence when we see him face-to-face? I think it's this: Continue to abide in Jesus *because then you will grow in practicing righteousness*. If you are growing in relational intimacy with Jesus, communing with him, you'll look forward to seeing him someday. As you commune with Jesus, and ponder his return, you'll know that Jesus himself is righteous. Would we all agree he's righteous? That doesn't simply mean he does externally good things. That means that he is right and just in all his ways and that he himself is the standard of what is right and just. We know he's righteous. We know he never sins. We know he is good in all his ways. We know this. And we will only increase in knowing these things as we commune with him.

Therefore, as we grow in a relationship with Jesus, knowing who he is, we will want to imitate him in our behavior. We will practice righteousness. I've heard people through the years try to make arguments that you can be a Christian and not care about obedience whatsoever the entirety of your life. This one verse (among the myriads of Scriptures) contradict that. Plus, I just don't know how that can be at all possible. As the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 3:18, **"And we all. . . , beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."**<sup>7</sup> You can't behold Jesus and not be changed. He is that powerful. Just like when Jesus touched people and immediately the sickness left them; so, looking at Jesus in faith, changes us! Have you experienced that? Are you growing in righteousness? Are you growing in following in his footsteps in praying to God, in loving your enemies, in lamenting over injustices in this world and caring for the weak and needy? If you can say yes, then praise the Lord!

Now again, John isn't saying we're perfect because earlier he said that if we say we have no sin, we're liars. But that's not a reason to then say, "Well then, it doesn't matter how I live!" No. Here John is giving an example of subjective assurance. Meaning, our assurance of our salvation grows when we see God's work through us in these ways. He ends the sentence by saying that those who practice righteousness are "born of him." The "him" must be referring either to God the Father or the Spirit because in every other place this phrase is used, it's either referencing the Father or the Spirit. Personally, I don't think we have to come to a conclusion here because the emphasis is on God's miraculous power to save us and give us new birth. And while we can have assurance we are saved because Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead, we can also experience increasing assurance as we see obedience grow in us. As we see that obedience grow, we say, "Whoa! There's a sign I'm a child of God!"

---

<sup>6</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 2:29.

<sup>7</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 2 Co 3:18.

I still remember one occasion where this type of assurance grew in me. God had made me aware to my anger that I'd express if someone woke me up or annoyed me while I was trying to take a nap." Then I remember one time where I was resting on a couch at a family member's house, and people were all noisy. I never once got angry, and I didn't even think about it until hours later, and I thought to myself, "Whoa! That was a miracle! God did that in me!"

I don't give this example to say that obedience is always easy. But I do hope you would rejoice in the Lord when you actually obey him. I remember a teacher I had once said that it seems many times when we Christians do something bad, we act shocked, like we "can't believe we did that." He went on to say that when we do godly things, we actually should say, "I can't believe I did that!" To live unrighteously is part of the fall. We've been doing that from birth. To live righteously is a miracle of grace, and if we're living that miracle of grace based on our restored relationship with our glorious Savior, then we have yet another evidence that we have been born of God by his sovereign grace.

**So, Ventura, continue to abide in Jesus. May our assurance grow in knowing we are a child of God. Meditate on, and live in the hope of seeing the Savior face-to-face. Rejoice in every act of righteousness the Spirit works through you.**