



Abiding in 1 John

Patrick J. Griffiths

Abiding in 1 John

Revised 11/13/13

Copyright © 2013 Patrick J. Griffiths
Published by Torn Veil Publications

Waukesha Bible Church
553 W24079 Glendale Road
Waukesha, Wisconsin 53189
www.waukeshabible.org

All rights reserved. No part of this booklet may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—except for brief quotations for the purpose of review or comment, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

An Introduction

In the study of the Bible several initial thoughts might prove helpful. First, the Bible came to us from God. It is an inspired book. In fact, it is the only book ever written by God through human instrumentation. Second, the Bible tells a single *Story*. This *Story* has six broad “acts”: God, Creation, Rejection, Redemption, Re-Creation and Joy through Worship. Third, at the center of this *Story* is Jesus. He is God’s means of rescuing the fallen, reversing the curse and restoring everything back to its original design. Fourth, in reading the Bible different approaches can be employed. They are as follows.

1. Historical theology looks at theological thought within its historical **development**. It provides a snapshot of thought. It speaks to what people thought during a specific period within church history.
2. Biblical theology considers thought as presented by a **single book** of the Bible or by a **single author** such as the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts or the 13 Letters written by the Apostle Paul.
3. Systematic theology seeks to take all of the various categories touched on by the various books and **catalogue** common themes.
4. Finally, dogmatic theology gives **labels** to groupings and presuppositions made by Systematic theology such as Dispensational or Covenant Theology and Reformed and Arminian Theologies.

The short readings you are about to encounter focus on biblical theology within the author’s historical context. The

Apostle John wrote the Gospel of John, the three Letters of John and the Book of Revelation. These readings will only focus on his first Letter. Although this is the limitation of the study, it is not inconsistent with anything anyone would read elsewhere. What such a study does do is force us to wrestle with what Pastor John is saying and not read into the text something that is not being said by the Apostle. Each study has a thorough reading of the various passages. Although it might prove daunting initially, the return on this small investment is notable.

So enjoy. May the following readings drive you into the text and then through the text to Jesus. Truly, He is beautiful.

Abiding in 1 John

Is abiding conditioned on something I do, or is abiding in Christ a result of something He does? The thought offered by our title would suggest such a question needs addressing. If abiding in Christ is conditional, then the natural and necessary question to ask is, "What must I do to abide in Christ?" If abiding in Christ is unconditional, then I am naturally and necessarily already abiding because of something or someone else. It is never my intent to be polemically. I do not care that others might disagree with me. I simply wish to journey with Christ and pursue Him. So it is not my desire in any of my studies to show why others are wrong, but rather why Jesus is right. The following quote is common for those who view abiding as conditional.

"Abiding in Christ is the source of the abundant life. This is a HUGE truth to understand. If we are not abiding in Christ, we should not expect to be experiencing the abundant life Jesus promised. However, here is the real truth that we must allow to really pierce our hearts; Abiding in Christ is conditional. We are so used to hearing about God's unconditional love, and we praise God. And we are so used to hearing about our unconditional salvation, and we really praise God. **However, we may be fooling ourselves into thinking that experiencing the abundant life should also be unconditional. The Bible clearly teaches just the opposite.**"¹

Another writer echoes the same sentiment when he penned the following words.

“Christ has already cleansed them so they are in a relationship with God, **but abiding deals with our fellowship and usefulness.** Salvation brings us into a union with Christ, but we have to abide in order to stay in ongoing communion with Him.”²

Once abiding in Christ becomes conditional then the means to abiding must be established. The above author chose the following means of abiding in Christ:

- Confess sin (1 John 1:9)
- Spend time in His presence in worship and prayer
- Set our minds on Christ and heavenly things (Col. 3:1-3)
- Spend time in His Word (John 15:7, see also Psalm 1)
- Walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-26 [I believe this is basically the same thing as abiding in Christ])
- Loving God and others (John 15:9-17)
- Obeying God (John 15:14 [We cannot live in disobedience and stay in fellowship with Christ])

I will be the first to say I agree with those actions, but I will equally add I do not believe such actions result in abiding. I would think such “fruit” as those noted are **a result of abiding not the cause for abiding.**

However, let us consider the idea of abiding in Christ as it is found in Pastor John’s first letter to the churches in Asia Minor. Out of 120 occurrences of the verb **meno** in the New Testament, 69 come from the Johannine tradition (or 57.5%). We will not consider how Pastor John uses the word in his Gospel of John even though the word [**meno**] is used in 34 verses. John uses this word twenty-four times in the five

chapters of his first epistle, and three times in 2 John. Our intent is to note his usage in his Letters.

The first time John uses abide is in 1 John 2:6.

I. To know Him is to abide in Him (2:3-6).

³ “By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. ⁴ The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; ⁵ but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: ⁶ **the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked**” (1 John 2:3-6).

“Abiding in Christ is taught in 1 John 2:5-6, where it is synonymous with ‘knowing’ Christ (verses 2 and 3). Later in the same chapter, John equates ‘remaining’ in the Father and the Son with having the promise of eternal life (verses 24 and 25).”³

From 1 John 2:3-6 we might observe that knowing Him is equal to abiding in Him. Abiding in Him is not equal to commandment keeping or walking in the same manner as He walked. Knowing Him and abiding in Him are causative. They produce the action of keeping and walking which are synonymous. If you do not know Him, you are not a confessor.

II. To love one’s brother is to abide in the Light (2:7-11).

⁷ “Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the

old commandment is the word which you have heard. ⁸ On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining. ⁹ The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. ¹⁰ **The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him.** ¹¹ But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes" (1 John 2:7-11).

In this text the contrast is between abiding in darkness and abiding in Light; of hating one's brother and loving one's brother. Throughout this passage "Light" is capitalized. This polarization between the "Darkness" and the "Light" is the difference between being a non-confessor and being a confessor. If one does not accept one's sin and Jesus as the Savior from sin, they are in darkness. Those who embrace God's record concerning their sin and Jesus as the Savior are in the Light. Being in the Light is the same way of saying one is in Christ or in God.

Pastor John picks up this same theme but uses death and life (3:13-22). To abide in the Light causes one to love one's brother. If one does not love one's brother [i.e. the local church; see the *It's All About Jesus* booklet], then they are not "in Christ." Not to be in Christ is the same as not being saved. Pastor John shows us what the opposite looks like in 1 John 2:18, 19. Those who abide in Christ remain or abide in His church (1 John 2:18, 19).

III. To be a confessor is to have the Word of God abiding in you (1 John 2:14, 24).

¹⁴ “I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and **the word of God abides in you**, and you have overcome the evil one” (1 John 2:14).

²⁴ “As for you, let that **abide** in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning **abides** in you, you also will **abide** in the Son and in the Father” (1 John 2:24).

The Word of God is the truth of the revelation. It is the accepting of God’s witness through the Holy Spirit. Because you agree with God concerning His record of you and Jesus, your sins are forgiven, you know Him, and you have overcome the evil one.

When the confession of Jesus remains/abides in you, you remain/abide in Him. **It is the confession of one’s sin and Jesus as one’s Savior that produces the abiding in the Son and in the Father (2:24).** If that confession is not found in you, then you will not be found in Him.

Although the quote is lengthy, notice how confessing and abiding are working synonyms.

“In the first epistle of John one of the central ways that this term is deployed is in relation to the original proclamation of the gospel that the Johannine Christians have heard. Consistently reference is made to ‘that which you have heard from the beginning’ (1 John 1:1; 2:7; 2:24; 3:11; 2 John 6). The fundamental admonition being that the readers should continue to remain faithful to the message of the gospel that they have had since it was first preached to them. However, the theological twist on this lies in the Johannine concept of the relationship between continuing on in

faithfulness to the gospel and living the koinonial life of the Father and Son. 'Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father' (1 John 2:24). And similarly, 'God abides in those who confess that Jesus in the son of God and they abide in God' (1 John 3:15). So, in first John there is an intricate pattern of lingering indwelling, of ongoing abiding that characterizes the life of discipleship and faithfulness. In remaining faithful to the message of the gospel, we in fact are indwelt by and indwell the life of the Father and Son. First John can in fact be taken as an elaborate reiteration of the dynamics of divine grace. We are liberated into the very life of God in hearing and remaining bound to the Word which has been spoken to us, the gospel of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. Thus, for the elder, we participate in the Trinitarian life of love itself insofar as we abide within the proclamation of the gospel, insofar as we indwell the story of Jesus."⁴

The understanding of God's record is caused by the Holy Spirit (2:27). He assures us of its truth. When this truth abides in us, we are abiding in Him. If this truth is not embraced by us, then we are not abiding in Him.

It is because of this confession that the confessor will have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming (v. 28).

- IV. Those who are in Christ have eternal life. They abide in life (1 John 2:15-17; 5:5-12).

¹⁵ "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that

is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. ¹⁷ The world is passing away, and also its lusts; **but the one who does the will of God lives forever**" (1 John 2:15-17).

¹⁰ "The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. ¹¹ And the testimony is this, that **God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.** ¹² **He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.** ¹³ **These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life**" (1 John 5:10-13).

Those who accept God's record abide or live forever. Those who know Him are in Him and in Him is life. Those who reject God's record are still in the world (2:15-17; 4:4-6). Those who are in the world have no life but continue in death.

Those who know Him have life. Those who do not know Him are in the realm of death (3:13-22). The quality of life depicted is not temporal but eternal. Although I do not wish to pursue this path long, Pastor John's use of life is eternal. This will perhaps shed some light on our understanding of 1 John 5:16, 17 as to what life is being referenced.

- V. To be born of God [i.e. born again/new birth] causes one to continue in the righteous act of confessing one as a sinner and Jesus as the Savior from sin (1 John 2:29-3:10).

To abide in Him is to be born of God. If you are not abiding in Him, then you are not born of God. The "seed"

that abides is the record/testimony of God confirmed by the Holy Spirit in the heart/mind of the confessor (1 John 4:13; 5:5-12).

- VI. If one believes in the name of His son Jesus Christ and loves one another, then they abide in Him and He in him (1 John 3:22-24).

²²“and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. ²³**This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us.** ²⁴**The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us”** (1 John 3:22-24).

Abiding in Him is equivalent to believing in Him. Believing causes the abiding. If you can stop believing, then you can stop abiding. But if you cannot stop believing, then you cannot stop abiding.

“To abide in Christ is to live in Him or remain in Him. When a person is saved, he or she is described as being ‘in Christ’ (Romans 8:1; 2 Corinthians 5:17), held secure in a permanent relationship (John 10:28-29). Therefore, abiding in Christ is not a special level of Christian experience, available only to a few; rather, it is the position of all true believers. The difference between those abiding in Christ and those not abiding in Christ is the difference between the saved and the unsaved.”⁵

This same thought is picked up on 1 John 4:7-14 and 4:15-21. It is the confession [i.e. agreeing with God] that causes God

to abide in him and he in God (4:15). The Holy Spirit confirms this (4:13).

By default Pastor John is saying God does not live in the Gnostics or anyone who denies Jesus is the Son of God. What is believed is stated clearly in 4:9 and 14. Pastor John revisits this idea in 2 John 2 and 9.

So where does this leave us?

To abide carries the idea of **to live**. If one was taking a walk and asked the question by another, “Where do you live?” He would respond by identifying the geographical location of his residency. His wandering does not constitute where he lives. No matter how far he wanders, he lives at a specific location and that location embraces home. For the believer, we live IN CHRIST. He is our address. Regardless as to where one might find us in a moment, our residency is IN CHRIST. He is our home; He is our location. We live, we abide, and we remain IN HIM.

“Over against the attraction of such doctrines, John exhorts his readers to ‘let what you heard in the beginning abide in you.’ This introduces the theme of abiding, which had appeared earlier, almost in passing, in 2:6, 14, and 24. This theme is typically Johannine, for the verb ‘to abide’ appears in this letter more than anywhere else in the New Testament, and the other book in which it also appears several times is the Gospel of John. Although John has used this verb earlier in the Epistle, it is at this point that it comes to the foreground by sheer repetition. Note how often the verb ‘to abide’ appears in the rest of chapter 2: three times in verse 24, twice in 27, and once again in verse 28. From this point

on, this theme will recur, constantly reminding us of its importance. The word that the NRSV translates as 'abiding' has also been translated as "indwelling," or as 'remaining.' Actually, the NRSV itself occasionally translates it as 'remained'—for instance, in 1 Jn 2:19. The combination of these various possible translations gives us a fuller flavor of the meaning of the word. **It means to dwell permanently or to live, as when we say 'I live in Kansas.'** The word 'abide' is somewhat archaic, but it expresses an essential idea in First John. This goes back to the meaning of baptism as an engrafting into Christ, letting us dwell in him, and he in us."⁶

Notice the text of 1 John 2:9-11 and 1 John 3:3-10. To say you live IN JESUS is to say He is your mailing address. But if someone sends you a letter and it is sent to another location and that is where you pick up your mail, this would make you a liar. If you are confused as to where you live or when you can no longer give someone your mailing address, then this would strongly suggest you either do not know where you are going or perhaps it is because your present behavior has blinded your eyes.

Consider this thought as it relates to practicing sin. Practicing sin and living in sin are very different than the sinning mentioned by Pastor John in 1 John 2:1. Practicing sin and living in sin or walking in darkness is how you are identified. It is where people find you. It is what marks your existence. The 1 John 3:4-10 passage is preceded by 1 John 3:1-3. The one who believes Jesus is the incarnate Christ purifies himself even as He is pure. What that looks like is spelled out for us in 1 John 3:4-10. When we give

ourselves to sinning, we are no longer fighting the fight for moral purity and thus we begin practicing sin.

Let us remember Pastor John's larger idea about abiding/living, doing/practicing. Pastor John is specifically calling out those who reject JESUS as the INCARNATE CHRIST. As a consequence of this rejection they deny their sin and the need of a Savior from sin. Thus abiding in 1 John is abiding in the truth of what is said concerning Jesus in 1 John. What abides in you is the confession. It is because of who He is that His children have confidence and need not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. If abiding is conditional, then there are occasions when His abiding seed is no longer abiding. If abiding is conditional then one who is born of God can become unborn of God. This does not make sense.

For Pastor John the issue of continuing in faith or the confession is vital. Everything hinges on this singular idea. **No one can say they are a confessor if they do not continue in the confession. The continuation does not create the confession. Confessing oneself a sinner and Jesus their Savior births a continuation in and commitment to the local church.**

Why is this idea so important to a study of 1 John? The occasion for the Letter was a denial on the part of some concerning their own sin and thus culpability and their need for a Savior and in specific the testimony circulated concerning what was said about Jesus. Their rejection of these two tenants separated them from the testimony and gathering of the local assembly of confessors/believers.

Those who rejected what was said concerning Jesus were either removed through church discipline or they left the assembly voluntarily. Either way they developed a disdain for the assembly they once attended. Their failure to continue in the confession and the assembly were indications they were never true confessors to begin with (1 John 2:18, 19).

The non-confessors did not walk in the light or keep His commandments or practice righteousness and thus did not have fellowship with God or with the local church.

Friend, abiding in Jesus is very much a statement of rest rather than work. If the yoke Jesus invites us to take from Him is easy and the burden we are called upon to bear is light, then abiding must be the most natural state of being because it is the consequence of confessing Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. May you know and rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

ENDNOTES

¹ <http://www.wordbymail.com/blog/abiding-conditional>

² <http://www.thetruelifechurch.com/uploads/MinistryRes/MinNotes/Leadership-Abiding%20In%20Christ.pdf>

³ <http://www.gotquestions.org/abide-in-Christ.html>

⁴ <http://www.inhabitiodei.com/2009/03/05/abiding-in-1-john/>

⁵ <http://www.gotquestions.org/abide-in-Christ.html>

⁶ <http://new.gbgm-umc.org/umw/johnsepistles/1-john-2/abiding-in-1-john/>

Studies in 1 John

8 of 11

Is abiding conditioned on something I do, or is abiding in Christ a result of something He does? The thought offered by our title would suggest such a question needs addressing. If abiding in Christ is conditional, then the natural and necessary question to ask is, "What must I do to abide in Christ?" If abiding in Christ is unconditional, then I am naturally and necessarily already abiding because of something or someone else. It is never my intent to be polemically. I do not care that others might disagree with me. I simply wish to journey with Christ and pursue Him. So it is not my desire in any of my studies to show why others are wrong, but rather why Jesus is right.

Let us remember Pastor John's larger idea about abiding/living, doing/practicing. Pastor John is specifically calling out those who reject JESUS as the INCARNATE CHRIST. As a consequence of this rejection they deny their sin and the need of a Savior from sin. Thus abiding in 1 John is abiding in the truth of what is said concerning Jesus in 1 John. What abides in you is the confession. It is because of who He is His children have confidence and need not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. If abiding is conditional, then there are occasions when His abiding seed is no longer abiding. If abiding is conditional then one who is born of God can become unborn of God. This does not make sense.

Friend, abiding in Jesus is very much a statement of rest rather than work. If the yoke Jesus invites us to take from Him is easy and the burden we are called upon to bear is light, then abiding must be the most natural state of being because it is the consequence of confessing Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. May you know and rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

WAUKESHA BIBLE CHURCH



CHRIST-EXALTING · WORD-CENTERED · GRACE-BASED · GLOBAL-IMPACTING

Waukesha Bible Church (262) 542-7177

www.waukeshabible.org