

## 5. Abide

The word translated “abide” in the New Testament, with few exceptions, is some form of *meno*. It occurs approximately 120 times. And since the New Testament is addressed chiefly to believers, it contains primarily exhortations for Christians to abide in the faith.

The word *meno* is particularly prevalent in the Johannine writings: forty-one times in the Gospel, with eleven of those in the first eleven verses of the great “Vine and Branches” chapter (John 15). It is also found twenty-three times in 1 John and three times in 2 John, for a total of sixty-seven times in John’s writings, more than half of the total for the entire New Testament. This contrasts with only twelve times in the three Synoptic Gospels and seventeen times in the Pauline epistles. It is also found fourteen times in Acts, six times in Hebrews, and two times in 1 Peter for a total of 118 times in the New Testament.

John and Paul had some favorite words. In addition to “abide,” other favorites of John were “life,” “light,” “love,” and “send.” The last two are subjects for chapters in this book. Because of the prevalence of *meno* or “abide” in the Gospel of John and in his first epistle, practically all references in this chapter will be to those two books.

This limitation will mean that we will not make any comments regarding such great references as the following from the Psalms:

O LORD, who may *abide* in Your tent?  
Who may dwell on Your holy hill?  
(Psalm 15:1, NASB)<sup>1</sup>

In what sounds almost like an answer to this question, the psalmist elsewhere says:

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High,  
who *abides* in the shadow of the Almighty . . . .  
(Psalm 91:1)<sup>2</sup>

## Meaning

A few examples of translations other than “abide” for *meno* in John’s Gospel are “remain” (John 1:32; 33; 21:22-23); “stay” (John 1:38, 39); “endures” (John 6:27); “continue” (John 8:31); and “dwells” (John 14:10). There are also various prefixes such as *epi*, *kata*, *para*, and *hupo* with different shades of meaning.

Versions of the New Testament vary considerably from time to time regarding the translation of *meno*. For example, some form of *meno* is found three times in 1 John 2:24. The old King James Version, which is not true of the New King James Version, translated it three different ways: “abide,” “remain,” and “continue,” while other versions in all three places translate it the same, as here: “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.” “From the beginning” in this verse was possibly meant to be in contrast to recent false teachings of the Gnostics.

This verse has been paraphrased as follows: “Let the truths which you were first taught have a home in your

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<sup>1</sup> Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>2</sup> Italics added for emphasis.

hearts: if these have a home in you, ye also shall have a home in the Son and in the Father” (CBSC). Here, and frequently in John’s writings, *meno* carries the idea of a vital, mystical union of the believer with Christ. This is clearly the idea in the concept of the vine and the branches (John 15). The branches are an integral part of the vine. Christ is the vine; we, His disciples, are the branches.

## **Nature**

What is the nature of this vital union of the disciple with his Lord? It involves much more than mere public profession of one’s faith in Christ. One can go through all the formalities of going to church and yet not be joined to the resurrected Christ. In other words, we cannot abide in Him and in the Father unless we have had a genuinely deep experience that breathed new life into us. That vital mystical experience can and should be so real that we become new creations in Christ Jesus.

Paul expressed the depth of this experience in Christ as follows: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). Again, he says, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). Death for Paul, as is true for any child of God, cannot break the union with Christ; it can only complete and enrich it. At that time we will awake in His likeness. For Paul, and as we are persuaded also for John, living was “so full of Christ, so preoccupied with Him and for Him, that ‘Christ’ sums it up” (CBSC). We doubtlessly cannot say that of ourselves, but that should be the goal of our lives.

It is true, of course, that we were born babes in Christ, and some of us, unfortunately, continue to be babes.

But our being “in Christ”<sup>3</sup> assures us of some growth and maturity. The extent and nature of that growth will depend on us. If we have been really born again, the potential for growth in Him is unlimited. The goal of our lives should be that we will permit Him to live more fully in us and increasingly let Him express Himself through us. This is a challenge that should continue with us until the end of life’s journey.

The preceding means that there may be and will be degrees of abiding in Him. Also, there will be from time to time variations in our consciousness of His presence in and with us. In other words, there will be occasions when He will seem far removed from us. On the other hand, as we mature in our relation to Him, there will be occasions—and we can and should hope that these occasions will be increasingly frequent, if not constant—when we are deeply conscious of His presence with us and in us. At times we may find ourselves more or less unconsciously calling His name, “Jesus,” as if He were actually bodily present.

We can be sure that any time we fail to be conscious of His presence, the responsibility is ours and not His. He is the predictable one; we, the unpredictable ones. Unforgiven sin, which can include the meditations of the mind as well as outward acts or spoken words, can cause us to feel far away from Him. Also, many of us have not cultivated the capacity to communicate with Him. Such communication is necessary if we are to be conscious of His presence in us.

John’s reference to a meaningful mystical union of the child of God with the resurrected Christ is comparable to Paul’s “in Christ,” which is a key if not the key to Paul’s thought. John over and over again exhorted those to whom

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<sup>3</sup> Maston’s understanding of being “in Christ” was not to be considered only as a ticket to heaven but as the expression of character in life that emulated the character of Jesus.

he wrote to “abide in Christ,” which at times carried the idea of “remain,” or “continue.”

There are places where John stresses the mutuality of the abiding. For example, he reported Jesus as saying, “*Abide* in me, and I in you,” or “Remain in me, and I will remain in you” (NIV 1984). Williams translates the verse as follows: “You must remain in union with me, and I will remain in union with you” (John 15:4, WMS). Our relation to Him is comparable to our relation to the air: the air is in us, and we are in the air. Just as the vine and the branches belong to one another and find the fulfillment of their purpose through their vital union with one another, so the Christian and his Lord belong to or are in one another and will find their fulfillment in and through one another.

Kittel (TDNT) sums up the mutuality of the abiding as found in the Johannine writings as follows: “Believers abide in Christ (John 5:34; 15:4-7; 1 John 2:6, 27; 3:6, 24) and Christ in them (John 15:4-7 and 1 John 3:24); God abides in believers (1 John 4:16) and believers in God (1 John 2:24, 4:16).”

There is a close relation between abiding in Him and abiding in love. How could it be otherwise when God is love (1 John 4:8, 16)? God is also equated with “light” (1 John 1:5). John says, “He who loves his brother *abides* in the light” (1 John 2:10).<sup>4</sup> Again he says, “He who does not love *abides* in death” (1 John 3:14).<sup>5</sup> He asks a probing question: “But if any one has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love *abide* in him” (1 John 3:17).<sup>6</sup> This could refer to love *for* God or love *from* God—the love that comes from God and seeks to reach out through us to those in need. The New English

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<sup>4</sup> Italics added for emphasis.

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Bible translates it as follows: “. . . How can it be said that the divine love dwells in him?” And we should never forget that if God’s love does not abide or dwell in us then there is no evidence that God himself abides in us. John plainly says, “God is love, and he who *abides* in love *abides* in God, and God *abides* in him” (1 John 4:16).<sup>7</sup>

## **Purpose**

The most specifically stated and most natural purpose for abiding in Christ is fruit bearing. This is stressed with particular emphasis and clarity in the vine and branches chapter (John 15). For example, Jesus pointedly said, “As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it *abides* in the vine, neither can you, unless you *abide* in me” (John 15:4).<sup>8</sup> The stock of a grape vine, for example, does not bear fruit. Grapes are produced on the branches. On the other hand, the branches not only will not bear fruit except as they are attached to the vine, they cannot and will not live unless they receive sustaining life from the vine. In other words, the life of the vine flows into the branches.

Jesus further said, “He who *abides* in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit.” He concludes this thought by saying, “For apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Later Jesus added this statement: “By this my Father is glorified, that you bear [“keep on bearing,” WP] much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples” (John 15:8). In other words, we prove that we abide in Him and hence are His disciples by the fruit we bear.

In a summary statement, Jesus said, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go [“keep on going,” WP] and bear fruit [“keep on bearing fruit,” WP] and that your fruit should abide [“keep on abiding,” WP]” (John 15:16). Bringing out the verb tense,

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<sup>7</sup> Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>8</sup> Italics added for emphasis.

Robertson comments that Jesus' statement calls for "not a mere spurt, but permanent growth and fruit bearing" (WP). The disciples were left in the world to do His work. They and we can be united in Him as surely as the branch is united to the vine. We still bear fruit only as we abide in Him. His life flows into and through us. Our bearing of fruit will be permanent or continuing as long as our abiding in Him is a continuing and vital experience.

It should be remembered that fruit bearing is a process, not a single act. It can and does increase and flows more naturally and inevitably as our union with the resurrected Christ is deeper and more central and increasingly more vital in our lives. The preceding correctly implies that there are degrees of abiding and hence degrees of fruit bearing—some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, and some a hundredfold.

Let us never forget, however, that the purpose and proof that we abide in Him and hence are His disciples is the fruit we bear. And the fruit we should bear for Him is the fruit that He would bear if He were present in the flesh. In other words, if we want to know what it means to bear fruit, all we need to do is to examine or study the kind of life He lived while He walked among men. No one statement summarizes it better than the words of Peter in the house of Cornelius: "He [Jesus] went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). We cannot take the space to spell out what He did. You can visualize the kind of life He lived. It is most important for us to remember that if we say that we abide in Him—and we do if we claim to be Christians—then we ought to "walk in the same way in which he walked" (1 John 2:6). The latter is a verse and an idea that we will examine more fully later. It is

also the key verse for my book recently released, *To Walk as He Walked*.<sup>9</sup>

## Results

John speaks in a specific way concerning some results in the Christian's life that will give him assurance that Christ abides in him and he in Christ. One of those results, mentioned previously, is love. Immediately after Jesus had said, "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples" (John 15:8), He added: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; *abide* in my love" (John 15:9).<sup>10</sup> Robertson comments, "in the love that I have for you" (WP). Another statement by Jesus was, "If you keep my commandments, you will *abide* in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and *abide* in his love" (John 15:10).<sup>11</sup>

If we abide in God, we abide in love, since He is love (1 John 4:8, 16). The love we have for Him and also for those He loves, which is inclusive of all people, is a proof that we abide in Him and He in us. Love characterizes our lives as His children because He first loved us. And plainspoken John says, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar" (1 John 4:20). And then possibly remembering either the general summary of the commandments<sup>12</sup> or a specific statement by Jesus, he says,

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<sup>9</sup> Maston told the story regarding the development and writing of *To Walk as He Walked* that he awoke one night and began writing down an outline. He always kept paper and pen/pencil on his bedside table. The outline remained through publication essentially intact from the awakening and jotting down the framework. Reviewers have considered the book could be called Maston's *magnum opus* as it distilled his life's work into a book not that large, really.

<sup>10</sup> Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>11</sup> Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>12</sup> See Mark 12:28-31.



“This commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also” (1 John 4:21).

Pascal has been quoted as saying that we must know men in order to love them, but we must love God in order to know Him. At least our knowledge of God will never go any deeper than our love for Him.

Another result of our being in Him and He in us is the fact that “He has given us of his own Spirit” (1 John 4:13). In 1 John 3:24, John relates the Spirit to the keeping of God’s commandments; “All who keep his commandments abide in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he *abides* in us, by the Spirit which he has given us.”<sup>13</sup> Notice again the mutuality of the abiding. “This mutual abiding expresses union of the strongest and closest kind” (CBSC). Furthermore, keeping the commandments of God is manifested by the Spirit, and in turn the indwelling Spirit is evidence that we abide in God and He in us.

Possibly it should be said that the results of abiding in Him are so inevitable that they become the proofs that the purposes for the abiding have been fulfilled. Still another result that is proof we abide in Him is our relation to and attitude toward sin. John had said, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). Yet John also said, “No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him” (1 John 3:6). Again, John says, “No one born of God commits sin; . . . he cannot sin because he is born of God” (1 John 3:9).

How can we explain what appears to be a contradiction between 1 John 1:8 and the statements in chapter 3? The personal experience of each child of God verifies the truthfulness of 1 John 1:8. We acknowledge that we have sinned and come short of the glory of God. We

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<sup>13</sup> Italics added for emphasis.

continue to be deeply conscious of an inner conflict. The difference is that since we have opened our lives to the indwelling Christ, we have a source of help that was unknown previously.

In light of 1 John 1:8 and our own personal experiences, how could John say, “No one who *abides* in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him” (1 John 3:6)?<sup>14</sup> Some of the translations, all of which are commentaries to some degree, may help us understand the seeming contradiction. For example, Williams translates 1 John 3:6 as follows: “No one who continues [*menon*] to live in union with Him practices sin” (WMS). Williams translates verse 9 as follows: “No one who is born of God makes a practice of sinning . . . he cannot practice sinning, because he is born of God” (WMS).

It seems that the more serious one is about trying to be a real—and not just a nominal—Christian, the more conscious he becomes of an inner struggle between his two natures—the human and the divine—a struggle for control of his life. Our Brother Paul evidently had some such conflict in his life. To the Romans he wrote: “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. . . . I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” (Romans 7:15, 18-19).

There is some difference of opinion whether Paul was referring to his unregenerate or regenerate life. On Romans 7:15, A. T. Robertson comments, “The dual life pictured here by Paul finds an echo in us all, the struggle after the highest in us . . . and the slipping into doing . . . ‘what I really hate’ . . . and yet sometimes do” (WP). In commenting on 1 John 1:8-10; 2:27; and 3:6, the *Cambridge Bible Commentary* somewhat similarly says, “. . . These

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<sup>14</sup> Italics added for emphasis.

contradictory statements put forth one after another express that internal contradiction of which everyone who is endeavoring to do right is conscious” (CBSC). It is true, however, that the more consistently conscious we are of abiding in Christ and He in us, the more sensitive we will be to sin. Also, the stronger will be our resistance to it and the more frequent will be our victory over it. The direction of our lives will be away from sin rather than toward it.

There is at least one other specifically stated result of abiding in Christ. It is *the promise of answered prayer*: “If you *abide* in me, and my words *abide* in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you” (John 15:7).<sup>15</sup> Again, Jesus said, “You did not choose me, but I chose you . . . that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should *abide*; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give it to you” (John 15:16).<sup>16</sup>

This is not a blanket promise. After all, the promise requires that we abide in *Him*. And it has been suggested that there are degrees of abiding. For one to abide completely in Christ is for *Him* (Christ) to abide fully in the believer, which would mean perfection, and none of us is perfect. Also, verse 16 plainly suggests that our fruit must abide if the Father is to give us what we ask. The asking also is to be in Christ’s name, which is certainly more than a mere form.

Robertson, in commenting on the promise in John 15:7, says, “This astounding command and promise . . . is not without conditions and limitations. It involves such intimate union and harmony with Christ that nothing will be asked out of accord with the mind of Christ and so of the Father” (WP).

Whatever fruit we may be considering, the only dependable assurance of bearing such fruit is our vital union

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<sup>15</sup> Italics added for emphasis.

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with the resurrected Christ, who is the vine. To change the figure or term but not the meaning, it can just as properly be said that just as a stream of water must be fed by the fountain or the spring, so the child of God must be fed by the source of his life—his union with the resurrected Christ. As we abide in Him, something of His life and nature flows into us and through us to touch the lives of family members, neighbors, friends, fellow church members, and people in general, but particularly those who need to feel His touch of love.

### Challenge

Abiding in Christ involves an obligation, a challenge, or an exhortation. This obligation or challenge is stated most pointedly in a verse that has for several years challenged me as much if not more than any one verse of Scripture. I can visualize when it suddenly became alive for me and gripped my life. Since that day, several years ago, I have frequently said, particularly when speaking or talking to young people, “If you will let that verse grip you, it will challenge you to the end of life’s journey.” The verse is as follows: “. . . he who says he *abides* in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” (1 John 2:6).<sup>17</sup> And we say that we abide in Him if we claim to be Christians. The word “walk,” the subject for another chapter in this book, is *peripateo*, which literally means “to walk around.” It is a metaphor for “live” and is frequently so translated (NEB, WMS).

Jesus ministered to people as He walked from place to place. Visualize some of the ways He ministered to people as He “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38). He fed the hungry, healed the sick and afflicted, comforted the sorrowing, instructed the people, and preached good news to the poor.

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<sup>17</sup> Italics added for emphasis.

Now some final questions: How do we measure up in our daily walk? Do we minister to and touch helpfully the lives of those He ministered to when He was on the earth? Do they sense in our lives something of His love and compassion? Let us repeat: How thoroughly we walk as He walked will be determined by how vitally we abide in Him and He in us. We cannot walk or live as we should in our own strength. We need to hear Him say, “. . . Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). But we need also to hear and heed the words of Paul, “I can do all things in him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). Since He is the Resurrected One, His resources are available for and to us if we will appropriate them.<sup>18</sup>

## Discussion Questions

1. Do you use the term *abide* in everyday conversation? Why or why not? Are there any contemporary synonyms that convey the idea of *abide*?
2. What do you think of the New Testament references to *abide* that Maston cited? Does the sense of *abide* depend on context?
3. New Testament writers tended to use vocabulary that was more common and popular to convey their theological perspectives rather than using academic language. Does Maston’s approach with *abide* and all the

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<sup>18</sup> In the last decade, some Christian theologians have made renewed calls for a cultivation of Christology, especially in those parts of the Evangelical movement that project a gospel that lacks Christological substance or even a focus on Jesus. This was an emphasis throughout Maston’s career. With this book being prepared for publication in 1986, he appears in retrospect to have been prophetic for these decades later.

other terms he wrote about provide more of an open window, through popular language, to understanding theological ideas?

4. In Maston's section "Meaning," does his lack of development on the prefixes that might be added to *meno* confuse you? How do those prefixes change the meaning of *meno* for you?
5. Can you recall any experience of hearing, being educated, about the concept "in Christ"? How does the concept strike you regarding your sense of spirituality or character formation?
6. Maston wrote about fruit bearing under the heading "Purpose," but he did not go into specific descriptions of its meaning. What does it mean for you?
7. How have you responded to Maston's final paragraph of questions?