

A Personal Checklist for Abiding in Christ

By Jay Wegter

What does it mean “to abide” in Christ?” To ABIDE (N.T. Grk. *meno*) is to remain, to continue, to stay on. It is to abide in the sphere of, to dwell, to tarry, to remain in one place with someone. Metaphorically—to hold fast and to remain steadfast. In the Gospel of John, ‘abide’ refers to the closest possible relationship. It alludes to the believer’s mystical union with Christ—that of inner unity and fellowship. Abide, in the context of union with Christ does not mean holding a position, instead the sense is “allowing oneself to be held” (pictured by the branch abiding in the vine, **John 15:2ff.**). To abide in Christ is not merely a spiritual experience, but life itself. It is a statement of Christ’s ownership of the believer—ownership extending right down to the depths of his being.ⁱ

Countless genuine believers admit that their daily abiding in Christ is a haphazard, *hit and miss* affair, without a biblical ‘metric’ or clearly marked target. Movement toward the remedy involves a careful study of the biblical imperatives and promises associated with abiding in Christ. In this current article, the biblical aspects of *abiding in Christ* are fleshed out so that the reader may have **a very useful ‘personal checklist’ for devotion to the Savior:**

1) Abiding involves a willing submission to the Father's pruning. “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit” (**Jn 15:2**). Dead wood is worse than unfruitfulness because it leads to disease, stagnation, and decay. By means of discipline, the Father prunes away the deadness in our lives. Deadness is what is produced by the flesh, even in ministry! Fruit that remains is produced by the Spirit of Christ. After the Father disciplines us, He then directs us into fruitful activity by renewed abiding in Christ.

2) Abiding brings a growing awareness of our utter dependence upon Christ. “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing” (**Jn 15:4, 5**). We must consent to be utterly dependent upon Christ for fruitfulness. The “right kind of fruit” (**Mt 7:16-20**) can only be produced by the believer’s vital connection with Christ who is our life source. When the life of Christ permeates a man or woman as a result of abiding, fruitfulness is the result. This is the only kind of fruit that is acceptable to God. Abiding involves is a *moment to moment* reckoning of Him as our ‘Source Person’ rather than an idolatrous dependency upon created things (see **Phil 3:18-19**).

3) Abiding is maintained by a life of faith, obedience, and prayer. “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and *so* prove to be My disciples” (**Jn 15:7, 8**). Abiding in Christ means that the words of Christ are taken in and heeded. The words of Christ become the controlling dynamic in one’s life—so much so that they dominate exceptionally. Notice it is not just *abide in My words*, but *My words abide in you*. **The one who abides believes Christ’s words and acts in accordance with them** has the promise of effective prayer (**Jn 14:13; 16:23**). Our commitment to have Christ’s Word *dominate exceptionally* in our lives is inseparable from our submission to Him as

Lord. Our prayer requests ought to reflect the will of Christ as revealed in His commandments. He is ready to grant what accomplishes His will for the Church. Our fruitfulness is for the glory of God and the good of the Body of Christ. The fruitful servant, by his fruit-bearing, manifests that he is a true disciple of Christ (see also **Jn 8:31, 32**). The secret in this endeavor is to keep the eyes of faith and reliance upon Christ, and not upon ourselves. Faith is a most self-renouncing and self-denying virtue—it continually looks away from self as a source of adequacy (see also **2 Cor 3:4-6**).

4) Abiding involves *the experience Christ’s love as we seek to please Him by*

obedience. “Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 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. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full” (**Jn 15:9-11**) (See also **2 Cor 5:9** on pleasing Christ as our ambition). When our aim is to please Christ by obedience to Him, we will sense His love. Fruit-bearing and joy are the result of faith-based obedience. Fullness of joy flows from our union with the Lord of love. Our concern about success in ministry ought to be subordinated to our ambition to please Christ and abide in His love. When pleasing Him and abiding in His love is our priority, it ensures success.

5) Abiding issues forth in a *sacrificial concern for the brethren.* “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends” (**Jn 15:12, 13**). In our zeal to be fruitful in ministry, there is the frequent temptation to place our personal goals above the needs of others. We must remember that the quality of our work among the saints depends upon our love to the brethren. At times, meeting a goal will tempt us to rivalry, suspicion, and self-assertion. We need to depend upon the Holy Spirit for the power to exhibit supernatural love. Only a supernatural love will be able to choose unity over rivalry, trust over suspicion, and obedience over self-assertion.

6) Abiding produces a response to Christ’s love of *radical identification with His*

purposes. “You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. This I command you, that you love one another” (**Jn 15:14-17**). Christ’s friendship with us presupposes our committed obedience to Him. As ‘Christ followers’ we are drawn into intimacy with Him as we identify whole-heartedly with His purposes in the world. In the text above, He calls us *friends* and not *slaves*. “A slave does not know what his master is doing” (**v. 15**). In contrast to a slave, the abiding believer shares in the knowledge of his Master’s mission. The abiding believer voluntarily adopts his Master’s purposes as his own. Every true believer can say, “Christ’s cause and mission is my cause and mission.”

7) Abiding in Christ involves the *expectation of persecution from the world for*

Christ’s sake. “If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to

you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sinned, but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates Me hates My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sinned; but now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well. But *they have done this* to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, 'They hated Me without a cause (**Jn 15:18-25**). The world hates Christ and His followers because the Lord and His people are not conformed to the world's lifestyle (**v. 19**). The world hates us because we have been *called out of the world by Christ* and are now radically identified with Him. The world hates Christ because it is ignorant of God, and consequently cannot properly evaluate God's messengers (**v. 21**). The world hates Christ because it resents Christ's claims and standards. The world's hatred is aroused because Christ's words disclose the corruption, hypocrisy, and rebellion of the sinner's heart (**vv. 24, 25**) (See also **John 7:7**).

8) Abiding equips the believer for a Spirit-empowered witness of Christ's Person and work. "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, *that is* the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, and you *will* testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning" (**Jn 15:26, 27**). Those who consistently abide in Christ are most qualified to bear witness of Him because they know Him by experience. The Holy Spirit is pleased to bless their testimony of Christ in a unique manner. For, we are not bearing witness to a salvation 'scheme' or plan, but to a divine Person who is the Redeemer of sinners.

9) Abiding is absolutely essential in order to be ready for Christ's 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. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him" (**1 Jn 3:28, 29**). In addition to deepening our hope and confidence, abiding increasingly conforms us to Christ's holy character. The life of abiding in Christ cultivates a "living hope" that is characterized by desire for Christ's appearing, and confidence at the prospect of meeting Him (see also **Titus 2:11-13; 1 Pet 1:3-9**). How you greet the King of kings at His return will be a powerful revealer of your relationship with Him. The abiding believer has made communing with Christ his lifestyle. Therefore, he will greet his King in confidence, as the very consummation of a life lived fellowshiping with his Savior.

In terms of an experience, what does this abiding look like? First of all it is not merely a dutiful discipline, it is communion with Christ. Arthur Pink notes in his wonderful article, "Experimental Union," it seems too good to be true: that this union with Christ is *for you*. You were called into fellowship with the Son of God (yet we tend to be fixated on our ineligibility and disqualification and often deeply disillusioned about our progress). Experimental union means that personal practical dealings with Him produce joy and confidence. How it would change us if we truly believed He was given for us!ⁱⁱ Are you groaning, sin-harassed, poor in spirit?—to these the gospel brings the news of Christ's perfect suitability, His availability, His virtue and efficacy—meeting you at the point where you are smitten with your wretchedness. You can't trust in His blood too much. He is your sympathetic High Priest for sin-harassed souls. He mediates unending installments of grace and mercy (**Heb 7:26**). Bring Him to your troubled souls amidst disputes of conscience and He will give ample grace and mercy to help in time of need (**Heb 4:16; 9:14**).

The ability to abide in Christ is a God-given gift of grace. God took the initiative in our salvation. Now as “new creatures” in Christ, He has given us the ability to abide. As new creations in Him, we have been *reconstructed* around the Person of Christ (**Col 2:10; 3:4**). The consciousness of that deep mystery of ***Christ in you and you in Him*** (mutuality) is produced by the Holy Spirit “*Christ in you the hope of glory*” (**Col 1:27**). We abide by the power of the indwelling Spirit—but it is our **responsibility** to abide. ***Abiding in Christ means reckoning and living out our union with Christ (Jn 15:1-11).*** God’s act of placing the sinner into union with Christ brings us into all the benefits of His representative death and resurrection (**Rom 6:6**). Calvin said in his Institutes, “The flesh of Christ is like a rich, inexhaustible fountain that pours into us life springing forth from the Godhead.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The legal imputation of Christ’s righteousness produces in every believer a total sense of indebtedness in the very depths of their being. Union sets us apart as His possession. ***We dwell on Christ from the perspective and vantage point of union with Him*** (the vine and branch organically joined—this is the shared life concept). As you receive security and satisfaction in Him—you are having fellowship in Him. This makes us ‘strong in grace’ and thereby equips us for ministry (**2 Tim 2:1**). The discipleship mandate flows out of shared life in Christ REALIZED through abiding.

When we abide in Christ, we “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” as our ‘sphere of life’ (Rom 13:14a, Gal 3:27). The believer has already ***clothed himself with Christ*** (being clothed with Christ is the *indicative* or accomplished fact of **Galatians 3:27**). The imperative in **Romans 13:14**, ‘put on’ is a command to keep putting on Christ. To do so is “to reach and hold [Christ] again and again, in faith and confidence, in grateful loyalty and obedience, [holding] Him to whom we already belong.”^{iv} Thus, to ***put on Christ*** is to live in Christ as our sphere of existence. When you ‘put on’ Christ—you are reckoning Him as your covering, your standing before God, and your completeness in God’s sight.

The priority of abiding is addressed to our will or volition—it involves a daily decision to depend upon Christ as ***the condition of fruitfulness***. Abiding maintains our connection by faith to Christ who is the source of life and fruitfulness (**Jn 14:15, 21**) (See also **John 15:10**). When we live to ***please the Lord by obedience***, we continue in the possession and enjoyment of Christ’s love to us. ***When Christ takes up residence (comes to abide) in a believer, He brings His love with Him—your responsibility is to continue in His love (Jude 21).*** Jesus set the pattern; He kept His Father’s commandments. The believer who is able to influence another spiritually is a person in whom the Word of God is active—transforming, controlling, giving discernment in all things, and producing the ability to abide in Christ. Thus, the believer’s potential for fruit-bearing is by the strength of Another.

To abide in Christ means choosing Him as our soul’s prosperity—consciously going to Him as our soul’s greatest desire. It is to love Christ; to live for Christ; to love the things of God. ***When we abide in Christ we are kept from returning to the world as a source of security, significance, peace, prosperity, comfort, ease, and freedom from suffering.*** When we *put on Christ*, we draw near, finding our identity, our purpose, and our direction in Him—so we won’t ‘go back to Egypt’ (back to the world as a source). Christ (and His imputed righteousness) is ‘deeded’ to the believer in the new covenant. Therefore, as believers we have the perfect covering for our naked, shivering, sinful souls. There is nothing more precious than union with Christ. When your life ends, there is only one thing you will take with you to glory, your relationship with the Lord. The Christian life involves the day by day ***living out*** of your union with Christ by means of abiding in Him—this is how God makes us happy and useful (**2 Pet 1:8**).

The experience of Christ’s love and joy is promised to those who abide in Christ (Jn 15:9-

11). The Father’s love for the Son is a pattern of Christ’s love for us. Jesus’ earthly life was characterized by His abiding in His Father’s love—the Father’s will was His *meat and drink*—His secret “food” (**Jn 4:32-34**). We should exert ourselves to abide in His love (**Jude 21**). We must allow ourselves to be drawn closer and closer to the Savior. Our love to Christ is a *reflexive response* of His love to us first (**1 Jn 4:19**)—we love, because He loved us first. Now, His love is ever active in our love. His love *precedes, accompanies, follows, and creates* our love. When we consent to it, abiding in it, we exercise it in return, and we feel drawn ever closer to Him; and we are fitted for ministry. And, our faith takes ahold of Christ’s total ‘fitness’ for our sin-weakened, fallen condition.

This glorious truth of Christ’s fitness for us is to constantly animate our walk with God.

Christ’s propitiatory sacrifice is so perfectly sufficient that we now “walk in the light as He is in the light and the blood of His Son continually cleanses us from all sin” (**1 Jn 1:7**). We keep going back to the gospel in order to feed on the truth that *Christ gave His life so that we might have an uninterrupted love relationship with the Godhead*. So perfect is this propitiation that Christ has wrought it removes every obstacle to an unimpeded flow of love to the believer. Thus, the gospel clears away disputes in our conscience and allows us to drink in God’s love without our conscience ‘disqualifying us’ from such blessed treatment by our holy God.

Abiding means consciously living upon Another—He saved us by trading places with us (2 Cor 5:21); but that guilt exchange was just the beginning of the exchanged life. This exchange is now to characterize our whole Christian life. The Word of God defines the believer as the *new man complete in Christ*. This new creation is *complete in Him; clothed with Him; full in Him—but never apart from Him*. Christ is the *Architect, Contractor, and Blueprint* of the new man (**Col 3:10**). These gospel realities are revolutionary, and they are appropriated by faith. They will change and revolutionize your walk, **AND, they are perceived and appropriated by abiding in Christ**. Now the secret here is abiding—for in abiding we are **reckoning** the sufficiency of Christ’s work on Calvary. This enables us to be an unhindered channel of divine love back to God and to the brethren. This is God’s will that we function in this way—that all of our love is a reflex to His love for us. “We love because He first loved us” (**1 Jn 4:19**). God’s love flowing through us unhindered is how His love is *perfected in us* (**1 Jn 4:17**). This is inseparable from abiding in Christ and His love.

THUS, by abiding in Him, the new man (created in Christ Jesus for good works) begins to assert himself—manifesting the personality of Christ. This is the answer to a crisis in leadership in the church today; a crisis in fostering male spiritual leadership. The gospel, in enjoining us to abide, calls for a rational abandonment of ourselves to Christ’s glory—the ‘good, acceptable, and perfect’ spoken of in **Romans 12:2** are realized through a life surrendered and ordered as ‘a living sacrifice’.

When completeness in Christ reckoned, capacity in Christ realized. Out of pursuing Christ through abiding in Him comes the power and desire to pursue the brethren in the ministry of discipleship. This issue of pursuing our brethren for the sake of doing spiritual good to them is commonly the weak link in the chain of church ministry. Discipleship can only be perpetuated when the cycle of multiplication is the aim of ministry (**2 Tim 2:2**). But, we hesitate to be the pursuer who takes ministry risks and makes the diligent efforts to nurture relationships for the purpose of discipleship. Abiding in Christ is the “x” factor that answers that reticence to be a pursuer. For, abiding puts us in touch with Christ as ‘Source Person’. He is our sonship, our status, favor, righteousness, wisdom, inheritance, adoption, sealing, access, completeness, etc. Not one of these

blessings functions as an independent spiritual commodity (which can exist apart from union with Him). Each is a benefit that is ours ONLY by virtue of being united to Christ. Abiding lets you see this—that these blessings are a function of our union with Christ. This is so closely tied to our ability and ‘want to’—in regards to being a blessing to others and a pursuer of others. Essentially we can only pass on what we are receiving in our spirit from the Lord. The gospel keeps giving us permission to go to Christ for all we need: *love, grace and mercy, forgiveness, righteousness, power over temptation* (2 Pet 1:3). You cannot consistently receive these blessings from Christ without yearning to see Christ formed in your brethren, and thus making the sacrifices necessary to move them to maturity (Gal 4:19). That is what it means to be fitted for ministry through abiding in Christ. This is why abiding is the “x” factor of ministry. As we consent to be filled by Christ’s fullness, ministry to others is the ‘overflow’. “Now on the last day, the great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water’” (Jn 7:37-38).

CONCLUSION: *We have seen that the power to bear fruit means that you cannot focus on ‘self’ as the primary spiritual resource.* That of course is the central message of John chapter 15. Fruitfulness is predicated on abiding. Fearless confidence in your ministry efforts is directly proportional to seeking your security and satisfaction in Christ. Abiding is to draw near—we might add “*dare to draw near*”—because drawing close to Christ means having His cross applied to your self-life. That is a profound thing—it means that in order to begin to find your all and all in Christ, you will have to experience a degree of disillusionment with self (your self-reliance slain). As Paul said, that is how *God’s power [is] perfected through my weakness* (2 Cor 12:9ff.). Your affinity for self-reliance will have to receive sustained *death blows* from the cross. This is one of the reasons why the gospel is so radically humbling. It tells us that Christ died—not only for our sins—but also for our moral efforts and aspirations (even for our utopian quests). Thus, the only human strength recognized and approved of by God comes through Christ. Paul shocked his Corinthian readers by stating that Christ was crucified because of weakness, and we as believers are ‘weak in Him’ (2 Cor 13:4). In other words, in this gospel age we are to be radically identified with Christ and His cross and His humiliation (His ‘reproach’—Hebrews 13:13). The Corinthian believers had to learn that the heavenly man (glorified and strong) must wait until Christ’s return (1 Cor 1:18-25; 15:45-49).

The evil one knows that he can hamper our ministry efforts by tempting us to engage in self-focus so that we become preoccupied with measuring our performance. Like the predators in the animal kingdom that go for the neck of their prey, the powers of darkness don’t want you communing with Christ your Head and ‘Source Person’. When we contemplate ourselves without Christ in view, we tend to come to conclusions about ourselves that neutralize our ministry zeal: “Who am I to propose to tell another brother how to live?” In a word, we ‘bench’ ourselves—voluntarily taking ourselves out of the game. The answer is to abide, for this soul-edifying privilege persuades our hearts and minds that Christ is the not only the source of our salvation, He is the source of the Christian life.

End Notes:

ⁱ Colin Brown, *Dictionary of N.T. Theology*, pp. 223-226.

ⁱⁱ Arthur W. Pink, “Experimental Union,” Chapel Library, Pensacola, FL.

ⁱⁱⁱ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Institutes*, Inst. IV, 17.9.

^{iv} C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans, a Shorter Commentary*, 335.