

Benefits of Abiding

1 John 2:28-3:3

I keep in touch with three of my teachers from high school: my math teacher (Mrs. Gregg), my English teacher (Mrs. Nicholson), and my Latin teacher (my mom). Last Wednesday I talked with my English teacher. We like to keep current with each other's lives and to reminisce about my classmates and things that happened 45 years ago. One of the things we talked about happened on May 7, 1975.

I was in 10th grade at the time. Just before noon, in a matter of minutes, dark clouds piled up so thick that it became as dark as night. The street lights came on and it began to rain and hail. The power went out and everybody huddled into the hallways. We were all scared, but one of my classmates started screaming, "It's the end of the world!" Apparently all over the city there were people who thought that this was the end of the world.

Well, it ***wasn't*** the end of the world. But from what we're told in Scripture, that experience was similar in some ways to what we will experience when the final chapter of human history comes to a close. We are told that Christ will return 1) suddenly, 2) unexpectedly (like a thief in the night - 1 Thessalonians 5:1-7), 3) and unmistakably (nobody will miss it; it will be like lightening flashing across the sky from east to west).

The return of Christ is mentioned in 20 of the 27 books in the New Testament, so it's no obscure teaching. Why did the NT authors mention the return of Christ so consistently? What was their point? Their point was that we should live our lives in such a way that we are ready for the return of Christ whether it happens this afternoon or 25 years from now. Jesus told parables about this (see Matthew 24 and 25). In this life we are like servants who have been given responsibilities and put in charge of our master's household. Since the master is returning suddenly and unexpectedly and unmistakably, we need to live as he taught us to live day in and day out. If we do that, we will be ready for Christ's return whenever it is.

In today's passage John mentions one core thing we need to do so that we will have confidence at Christ's return. The main command in this passage is "Abide in him."

28 And now, little children, abide in him . . .

We talked about abiding last week because it's mentioned in the previous paragraph. We abide in Christ by letting his words abide in us. When the gospel and the Scriptures in general occupy a place of prominence in our lives, we remain in close relationship with Jesus. If we abide we're not like the younger brother in the parable of the prodigal son who ran away from the father; we stay home and we love being home. If we abide we aren't like the older brother who was physically home while his heart was far, far away from the father; we stay home and we love being home.

In today's passage John describes three specific benefits of abiding. As we consider each of these three benefits, I want us to keep in mind that everything we're discussing flows from Christ. The more fervently we abide in Christ, the more we will experience these three benefits.

Benefits of Abiding in Christ:

The first benefit John mentions is:

Confidence (not shame) when Christ appears. (1 John 2:28) Notice how John expresses himself in verse 28:

28 And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.

The term "appears" reflects Jesus' teaching that he would return suddenly and at a time when nobody expects. John says that if we abide in Christ we will be confident on that day; we will have nothing to worry about when our Master returns.

Why would that be the case? When Christ appears, we will see him face to face and there will be nowhere to hide. By definition, if we're abiding in him, we aren't hiding from him; we are staying close to him, looking into his face. When Christ appears, we can be confident because it's simply more of the same. We will have a humble confidence because we have lived an integrated, consistent life. Over in chapter 4 John will say that if we abide in God and his love, "we have confidence in the day of judgment" (and not fear)" (1 John 4:15-18).

By contrast, John mentions that if we're not abiding in him, we will "shrink from him in shame at his coming." This will be true in an absolute, catastrophic sense for those who don't believe that Jesus is the Christ and who reject him in this life. But here John is talking to genuine believers. He's saying that our lack of abiding will result in shame when he appears. I would think that our shame will be proportional to our lack of abiding.

Of course there's a type of toxic, unhealthy shame that's fueled by lies ("I'm not enough. . . I'll never be enough. . . Not even God likes me. . ."). But there's also a type of healthy shame that leaves us humble before God. Healthy shame isn't enjoyable, but when we're abiding in Christ and we experience healthy shame because our conscience is in tact, we don't experience crushing condemnation; we experience healing.

Why would it be the case that if we don't abide in Christ we will "shrink from him in shame at his coming"? I think it's basically a relational reality. If, instead of abiding ***in*** Christ, we've been hiding ***from*** Christ, we will experience shame that we've not trusted him and receive from him everything he wanted to give us. In that moment we will see him as he is and all of our excuses and rationalizations will seem trivial. The remedy, John tells us, is to abide in him here and now. Stay home and love being home with God and Jesus and the Spirit.

In the next two verses we see a second benefit of abiding in Christ:

Confidence of being God's children. (1 John 2:29 - 3:1) In these verses John talks about the reality of being "born of God" and being "children of God." Notice that he doesn't give any commands; he simply wants us to be sure of what is already true of us as believers. The more we abide in Christ, the more we will experience what John is describing.

29 If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

What John writes here reflects the reality that being "born of God" is such a miraculous event that it actually changes you. You become a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) with new appetites and capacities. Consequently, you take on the family resemblance; you begin to look like your heavenly Father. One aspect of the family resemblance involves practicing righteousness. Sometimes the term righteousness refers to our right standing before God (Romans 3), but here "practicing righteousness" refers to our right living.

John is rather nuanced in what he writes here: "If you know that God is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness **has been born** of him." Being born into God's family comes first, and then comes righteous living. Our righteous living doesn't make us children of God. Rather it is evidence that we are already children of God. In this life our righteousness is flawed and imperfect, but it is surely observable in those who are born of God. And our practice of righteousness is proportional to our abiding.

1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

The kind of love the Father has given us doesn't merely make us his property or his servants or his foot soldiers. The kind of love the Father has given to us makes us **his children**. Think of what this means in human terms. Let's say you find out about a child who is all alone in this world. You can love that child by showing them kindness, by finding them a place to live, by helping meet their material needs, etc. But perhaps the greatest expression of love would be to say, "I am going to welcome you into my home. All that I have is yours. You are now my child with all the privileges and responsibilities that come with it. You're not a second-class member of my family; you are my child. You are wanted and loved." Some of you have done exactly what I'm describing.

John wants us to see that **that** is the kind of love the Father has given us through Jesus Christ. John makes the point here that we are not only **called** the children of God; he says "**and so we are**"! As we abide in Christ and let his words abide in us, the truth that we are children of God goes from head to heart.

In the last line of verse 1 John acknowledges that people in “the world” (outside the church) don’t acknowledge that we are children of God; they may say that we’re religious or spiritual or devout, but they don’t say, “You are a son/daughter of the Most High God!” John says that we shouldn’t be surprised. If the world didn’t recognize Jesus as the unique Son of God, the world won’t recognize us as children of God.

The third benefit abiding has us consider once again the return of Christ:

Confidence of becoming like Christ when he appears. (1 John 3:2-3) John first mentions what we now **are** and then mentions what we **will be** when Christ appears.

2 Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

We don’t know everything about “what we will be” when Christ returns. But what we do know is amazing: when he appears we shall be like like him, because we shall see him as he is. As we abide in Christ in this life we are progressively conformed to the image of Christ. When he appears, that transformation will be accelerated and in some senses completed. In body (see 1 Corinthians 15:51ff and Philippians 3:20-21) and spirit we will be “like him”! The unholy trinity - the world, the flesh, the devil will be gone, and so our struggle will be over.

When John says that we **know** this, he’s not saying that we know this as information or data. In the next verse he refers to this knowledge as the believer’s **hope**. Hope is a rather weak concept in our day, but in Scripture a hope is a future certainty. When we hope in something we are absolutely counting on it. John says in verse 3:

3 And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

This is what happens to people who are counting on being like Christ when he appears: they purify themselves **as he is pure**. The person who really knows that they will be like Christ thinks like this: “Jesus is pure; he isn’t corrupt or polluted in any way. And when he appears, I am going to be like him - also pure. I am so looking forward to being pure on that day that I will purify myself now in anticipation.”

We won’t think that way unless we abide in Christ and let his words abide in us. Through abiding, facts about Christ become precious truths that nourish our souls and animate our lives. The command in this passage isn’t, “Purify yourself!” The command is “Abide in him,” and you will long for his return. . . and in anticipation you will purify yourself as he is pure.”

Someone who exemplified what John is describing in this passage was Dallas Willard. He died in 2013 after a yearlong battle with pancreatic cancer. In 2012 after he was diagnosed he said, "I think that when I die, it might be some time until I know it." He was so devoted to abiding in Christ that he expected great continuity between this life and

the next. That gave him confidence and hope when he thought about seeing Jesus face to face. That's what I want for myself and for you. Little children, abide in Him.