

# Abiding in Christ with Unashamed Confidence - 10

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*Series on the Epistles of John*

By Dr. Joel Beeke

**Bible Text:** 1 John 2:28-29

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Our text words this evening you can find in 1 John two and we are picking up where we left off before passion season began, verses 28 and 29, the last two verses of 1 John two.

And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.<sup>1</sup>

With God's help our theme this evening is "Abiding in Christ with Unashamed Confidence."

We will see, first, what that mean; second, why it is important and, third, how it is manifest. "Abiding in Christ with Unashamed Confidence," what it means, why it is important and how it is manifest.

Perhaps you recall that we have been considering at some length this chapter which we conclude tonight in which John has set before us five different tests of self examination. We looked at the moral test of obedience in verses three through six, a social test of love in verses seven through 11, an experiential test in verses 12 through 14 where John spoke to the children, little children, young men and fathers. We then saw, fourthly, a practical test of rejecting worldliness, verses 15 through 17, and finally, a doctrinal test of soundness in the faith in verses 18 through 27.

And John has set all these tests before the Christian believers to whom he is writing so that they could look at themselves and say, "By the grace of God we know these marks," and not be befuddled by the Gnostics who were coming to them and saying, "These are not the marks of grace. These are not the things you need to examine yourself by. But, rather, you need to ask yourself if you have got some kind of secret knowledge, some kind of very special, extraordinary experience, some inner light," as the Gnostics were saying.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 John 2:28-29.

And John was saying to the Christian believers, “No, don’t go by these things, but go by the basic marks of grace and here they are.” And he set them forward in chapter two, one by one.

And so John assumes, as he comes to the end of the chapter, that these dear people whom he knows so well and he knows that they are true Christians from the heart, that they have been able to say yes to these various tests of self examination. And as he concludes this examination in the last two verses, he wants to gently admonish and encourage them not to settle on their lees and relax and rest in passing these tests, but rather, he says, “The conclusion of all this now is not to do what the Gnostics want you to do, deny the faith and say you are not a child of God and I need what they have, nor settle on your lees, but rather, abide in the Lord Jesus Christ. Continue to use the means. Continue in Christ.”

And so John concludes in the opening words of our text tonight, “And now...”

“And now, having examined yourself in all these ways and not able to deny what the Lord has done, little children.”

And here he reverts back to that word “little children” that includes the whole congregation of God’s people, “Little children, you who display these marks, abide in Christ.”

That is the loving, gentle exhortation.

And so we need to ask tonight: What does it mean to abide in Christ? Why is it important? How do I go about abiding in Christ?

Well, I think abiding in Christ means four things. I want to look at them one by one briefly. It means, first of all, to live by faith.

We heard of that this morning again. To abide in Christ means to receive Christ by faith and to continue in Christ by faith. You can’t continue in Christ by faith if you have never been united vitally with Christ by faith. You need to be born again, regenerated, joined to Christ so you will be enabled to continue in Christ. You need to truly believe in Christ, show you have ongoing faith in Christ.

And now some of us, of course, need the first thing first. Some don’t have faith in Christ. And so is not your question tonight: Shall I partake of the Lord’s supper? You are in no position to partake of the Lord’s supper because you don’t have faith to begin with. And your great question should not be: Shall I partake of the Lord’s supper? Your great question should be: How shall I believe the gospel? How shall I find the Savior? How shall I come to him by faith?

So, first of all, we need faith in order to continue by faith in Christ. And, dear friends, true faith is something that we cannot live without. You cannot come to Christ, you cannot find Christ, you cannot abide with Christ without faith. You and I must believe.

You heard that this morning. You heard it from the Confession of Faith tonight, almost the same language as the catechism. You heard it from the text this morning.

“There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”<sup>2</sup>

You have to be saved. You have to have faith.

“Well,” you say, “But what is faith? How can I have faith?”

Well, faith is, of course, first of all, a soul emptying grace. Faith empties me of all my righteousness. And then faith wholeheartedly assents to the truth of the gospel. Faith falls into the open arms of the evangel, the gospel. Faith surrenders to the gospel. It believes by the gospel by the grace of the Spirit. That is what we all need.

And that is not so much a doing as it is a receiving and a surrendering. And in that receiving and surrendering, faith embraces what God gives. It lays hold of Christ and his righteousness and experiences in that righteousness peace and pardon that passes all understanding.

And so that is foundational to abiding in Christ.

The Bible uses lots of adjectives for it speaks of a coming to Christ, a hearing, a seeing, a trusting, a taking, an embracing, a knowing, a rejoicing, a loving of him. All of these words are expressions to say that faith weds the soul to Christ so that when I exercise faith in Christ I am absolutely persuaded that there is nothing of me that is acceptable with God and that everything of Christ is acceptable with God and I trust him alone and I fall on him and I surrender to him and I receive him as my only hope for salvation.

More than that we don't need and less than that we cannot meet God with.

William Grinnell an old Puritan put it this way. He said, “Faith is a two handed thing. With one hand it pulls off all my own righteousness and throws it away. And with the other hand it lays hold of Christ's righteousness and puts it on.” That is what faith does.

But now faith is not something that you just have once. You tell your conversion story. You don't just talk about coming to Christ once. Faith means to live out of Christ, to abide in him, to remain united to him and to have that union evidenced by continuing to abide in him.

What does that mean? Well, to live out of Christ, to abide in Christ means to live in constant dependence upon Christ by faith.

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<sup>2</sup> Acts 4:12.

You see, I don't need Christ once or twice or 10 times or 50 times in my life if I am a true believer. I need him every day. It is a daily thing. It doesn't mean I have a special experience every day. But it does mean that I have a special relationship every day. Every day I am a dependent child upon my Savior. Every day I live by hope in him. Every day I live in a love relationship with him. Every day I must confide in him. Every day I seek to fellowship with him in prayer and through his Word. Every day I need the means of grace. Every day I want to live in union with him to be Christ centered. That is the goal of every believer.

And that is the hallmark of abiding in Christ. Those who abide in Christ are people who live Christ centered lives. They think about Christ. They speak about Christ. They talk to Christ. They read Christ's letter to them, the Bible. They have a relationship, one of communion. That communion is never as great as they want it to be. They always want for more. They want more communion. Oh, that they could always sing with the psalmist in sweet communion, "Lord, with thee I constantly abide. My hand thou holdest in thine own to keep me near thy side."

But that is their goal. That is their desire, preparatory week not only, every week. Oh, that I could live in sweet communion day by day with my Savior and oh that I would be done with sin, that I could put these things away and live sweetly and wholeheartedly in Jesus Christ alone.

Well, that is the first mark of abiding in Christ.

John would say to every believer sitting here tonight as we anticipate the Lord's supper, my dear friend, don't only ask the question: Am I a right participant in the Lord's supper? But ask a question even this very week of preparation: How may I abide in Christ? So that Lord's supper may simply be a wonderful continuation and exultation of that abiding.

But then, secondly, to abide in Christ means to continue in his Word. John talks about that, too, and we saw that actually a few months ago from verse 24 of this chapter. I pointed out to you, again, "Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning."<sup>3</sup>

So not only the read word, but also the preached word.

"If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father."<sup>4</sup>

So, in other words, as you continue in Christ's Word, in his promises, in his truth, in his encouragements, in his warnings, in his threatenings, in his invitations, as you continue to

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<sup>3</sup> 1 John 2:24.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

receive with meekness the engrafted Word, you continue to abide in him, abiding in Christ is abiding in his Word.

That is why the written Word is inseparable from the living Word because the Scriptures are the anchor that keep us bound to Christ.

If you cut yourself loose from the Scriptures, you cut yourself loose from Christ. That is what the author to the Hebrews warns the Hebrew Christians so strongly about. He says, “Don’t...” Literally the Hebrew word means “drift away” from the great high priest by neglecting the means of grace and not receiving with meekness the engrafted Word.

If you receive Christ by faith you abide in him through that Word that anchors you in Christ. That is why the Lord’s supper is so important. Baptism is important, too, of course. But the Lord’s supper has a special relevance here because we continue to come back to the Lord’s supper as a nurturing ordinance.

Baptism refers to regeneration, the initial [?] implications for sanctification as well. But the Lord’s supper is especially designed for a people to encourage God’s people to abide in Christ.

We come back to the supper because we want to continue in Christ. We don’t want to be unmoored from the holy Word of God and from Christ by abandoning the Word of God.

So as the days and weeks and months and years go by since we were first born again, we preserve, yes, we grow in that grace. We draw closer to Christ by being anchored in the Word of Christ, by being built upon that Word. That is so important, congregation, and so forgotten.

I am sure if we were to take a survey tonight and we could look into everyone’s hearts I am sure that almost on a one to one correlation if we had to look at those children of God who are backsliding in our midst, it is precisely those children of God who have drifted away from a daily, serious engagement with the Word of God.

Well, Jesus said the same thing, didn’t he? He said, “Who are the wise builders?”

You remember that, boys and girls, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount.

“They are those who listen to my Word and who do my Word and who build their lives upon my Word. They are the ones who abide in me.”

And so if you want to continue in Christ, dear believer, you have to continue in his Word. If you want to be confident and unashamed as our text says it at the coming, at the second appearing of the Lord Jesus on the clouds of heaven, you must be deep into the Word. Your life must be nourished and touched by the truth of Scripture. That is why we, from this pulpit, both pastors are constantly telling you to search the Scriptures, to read sound literature based upon it, to immerse yourselves in it. Not because we are... we just want

to be hard on you, not just because we want to be... give you duties to do, but because your life depends upon it. Your continuation in grace depends upon it. Your spiritual well being depends upon it.

John says, “You continue by abiding in the Word of God.”

But you also abide in Christ, thirdly, by communing with him in the sacraments. God’s sacrament complement his Word. They point us away, just like the Word, from ourselves. Each sign, the water, the bread, the wine, directs us to faith in Christ and to his sacrifice alone for godly living.

So the sacraments are visible means in which Jesus comes to commune with his people invisibly and in so doing he spurs us to Christ likeness and to holiness.

Now, it doesn’t mean that grace received in the sacrament is any different than grace received through the Word. It is the same grace.

Robert Bruce put it so beautifully, I think. He said, “While we do not get a better Christ in the sacrament than in the Word, sometimes we get Christ better.”

The sacraments are a special season which God comes visibly, condescendingly and does the same things he does in the Word only he gives special promises to buttress that Word, as it were. He says directly to every single participant—and everyone must receive that by faith—“My body is broken for you and my blood is shed for you and for many for the remission of all your sins.”

God comes near with his signs, not only, but also with his sealing promises to assure his people, “As surely as you see the bread, the wine, the water, so surely I am your God. And if you continue in me you shall know the continued joy of fellowship.”

So we use the Word, we use the sacraments to help our poor, weak faith to continue and to abide in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then fourthly, finally, abiding in Christ means to lean on the ministry of the Holy Spirit. That is what John says in verse 27.

“But the anointing which ye have received...”<sup>5</sup> Of course, the anointing is the Holy Spirit, “...which ye have received of him abideth in you.”<sup>6</sup> John doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t come to church, you shouldn’t have teachers. But he means that the Holy Spirit will use the teaching to teach you. It is not dependent on man. It is dependent on the Spirit. “But as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him. And now, little children, abide in him”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> 1 John 2:27.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> 1 John 2:27-28.

Do you see how he brings that together? You need to keep leaning on the Holy Spirit.

What is your faith without the Holy Spirit? What is even the Bible without the Holy Spirit? And what are the sacrament without the Holy Spirit? To abide in Christ you need to lean on that Spirit who is every bit as willing to save you and keep you saved and keep you close to Christ as Christ is to have you be there.

And so we lean hard on the Spirit if we abide in Christ, when we get down on our knees and we cry out to God. We pray for the Spirit to indict our prayers, to groan within us groanings that are unutterable. When we come to the Lord's supper we pray that that Spirit might fill our hearts with sweet thoughts of Jesus and low thoughts of ourselves. When we open the Word of God we pray that the Spirit might enlighten us and show us the things of God and of Christ.

If you want to abide in Christ you have got to lean on the ministry of the Holy Spirit and you have got to heed the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Don't vex him with sin. Don't grieve him with backsliding, but seek him and seek his enlightening and obey his Word. Feed his ministry. Do what he tells you to do. Don't do what he tells you not to do.

Well, that is the way John would tell us to abide in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so I ask you, my dear friends, are we abiding in the Lord Jesus Christ? Are you? Are you living by faith? Are you trusting in Christ alone? Are you continuing in God's Word? Do you heed the ministry of the Spirit?

Well, you say, "But not as I should."

Well, does that grieve you? No child of God ever does it to the degree he should. We always come short in everything. But do you know something of these things? And do you long to know them more and better and more fully? And even as you hear these marks, one by one, can you say tonight, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief"?<sup>8</sup>

"Lord, I know something of them, but give me more."

That is the mark of a child of God.

Well, you say, "But why is this all so important? Isn't it enough just to be saved, to know that I have been born again? Why is it so important to abide in Christ?"

Well, John answers that for us in our second thought tonight. He says, "And now, little children, abide in him; [so] that, when he shall appear [on the clouds], we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Mark 9:24.

<sup>9</sup> 1 John 2:28.

What a remarkable text. John uses two expressions here that point to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. He speaks of it as an appearing and he speaks of it as a coming. And he is telling these Christians and he is telling us through them that history has a destiny. History has a terminal point, an ending point. There is an appointment we all have, congregation, and that appointment on God's calendar is that we will meet God. We will meet Jesus on the great day.

So live is not an unending series of timeless events. Life is not an endless repeating cycle as the Greek philosopher said. Life is not going to be snuffed out in some cosmic cataclysm, some dreadful event that destroys the whole world and all of the sudden all life is gone.

No, history is heading for this God appearing destiny. Jesus will come. Jesus will usher in the end. Our lives are headed for an appointment.

Our text says, "When he shall appear."<sup>10</sup> And the Greek word literally there means when he shall be unveiled, when he shall be set before us at the sound of the trumpet and by the archangels he shall be in the midst. He shall appear. And if we are going to appear before him, unashamed and with confidence in that great day, we want to appear before him with joy and gladness and run to embrace him, we must abide in Christ. That is John's point.

Now this is so important. The whole New Testament is packed full with this.

Did you know that one scholar has counted 318 times in the 260 chapters of the New Testament, more than one a chapter, the Bible speaks about the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ on the day of days.

God has only one event left, congregation, on his calendar that he has not completed, one major redemptive event. And every day he brings us nearer that event. And John says, "Don't you be ashamed in that day. Don't be coward and terrified to meet your Savior in that day."

How not, John? How can we meet him with joy and gladness and confidence?

"Abide in Christ and you shall meet him with unashamed confidence."

Boys and girls, let me picture it this way. Probably nearly all of you have been to a wedding. A wedding is a very special occasion and a bride, especially is preparing for the wedding months in advance, isn't she? She is getting all her plans ready. There is so much to do. But she does everything for that great climactic moment when she may walk down the aisle with her eye on her bridegroom, looking her very best.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

She gets the nicest dress she can find. She comes down the aisle fully prepared. Everything is ready to meet her bridegroom. She looks forward to that day. She counts the days 90, 80, 70, 10, five. And finally the day comes.

Now what would you think of a bride who when the bridegroom was waiting for her and the music began to play, the bride's mother stands up, the whole crowd stands up and the bride comes down. What would you think of the bride if she had on soiled every day clothing and her hair was uncombed and she was unkempt and maybe there was even some food on her face? She was unprepared.

I think everyone would look. They would look at the bridegroom. And the bride groom would look and the bridegroom if he could speak he would probably say, "What have you done? You had all this time to prepare and the day has finally come. Why aren't you prepared? Don't you love me? Don't you love me?"

Well, he would have good question. He would have good reason to ask that question, wouldn't he?

You see, if you come unprepared to something or to someone, it is a sign not just that you are unprepared, but it is a sign of something deeper. It reveals that your love has died or that what you are going to or the person that you are going to is not that important to you because you are unprepared.

A bride unprepared for her husband, her bridegroom, is a travesty. She is a failure.

Now John says, "You are the bride of Christ. You don't want to be unprepared for your bridegroom, do you?"

You want to be... trust in his robe of righteousness on the great day. And you don't know when your wedding day will be. You can't go 90, 80, 70... there the parallel breaks down, of course. But you can say, "My bridegroom is on his way and my bridegroom has said, 'Be ye always ready.'"

And the way to be always ready is to be always abiding in him, always in his Word, always seeking his face, always living to his glory.

The way to be ready is to have on his wedding dress every day.

The bridegroom's robe of righteousness. Oh, John says, "Abide in [Christ]; that, when he shall appear, we may ... not be ashamed before him at his coming."<sup>11</sup>

Continue in him. Adorn and beautify your soul with his graces through the Word, thought he coming Lord's Supper so that at the last day you may meet the bride groom adorned in his beautiful garments of righteousness and holiness without which no bride shall see the bridegroom in peace.

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<sup>11</sup> 1 John 2:28.

Don't be ashamed of him. Don't be unprepared for him. Expect him every day.

John is, of course, just echoing his own language in John 15. The Lord Jesus said:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman... Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine... [so] I am the vine, ye are the branches.<sup>12</sup>

You see, if the branch is separate from the vine it produces nothing but death. If the branch is in the vine, it draws its life from the stalk of the vine. And so John says, "Continue in Christ by drawing through faith out of the vine. Continue in Christ by Christ to the praise of Christ."

Let everything focus on Christ.

Oh, dear friends, are you continuing in Christ today? Are you prepared to meet him were he to come to you today? Can you say with John Calvin who said of this text, "Faith is not a naked and frigid apprehension of Christ, but a lively and real sense of his power which produces confidence"?

You see, the confidence isn't in me or my preparation ability. The confidence is all in Christ and in him. And those who abide in him and those who commune regularly with him, those who have freedom of approach and liberty of speech at the throne of grace, that is really what this means, to abide in him, to have liberty. They will normally have assurance of faith as well. Those who have genuine piety, daily, normally have assurance of faith as well.

And so Calvin concludes, "Hence it is that the godly calmly wait for Christ nor do they dread his coming."

"And now, little children..."<sup>13</sup>

You see, this is what John says,

"No, little children, this is what I want for you. I don't just want you saved. That is wonderful. But I want you abiding in Christ. I want you walking as children of the Father, as brothers of the elder brother. I want you on that great day to be with me when Jesus comes to have confidence with me."

Notice he puts the we, he puts himself in with it.

"Now, little children, abide in him; that when he shall appear, we..."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> John 15:1, 4, 5.

<sup>13</sup> 1 John 2:28.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

“I, your pastor, and you the people may have confidence, that shepherds and sheep together may be aroused by mutual joy and mutual confidence in Christ and not be ashamed on that day.”

Oh, what a day. What a day, congregation. What a day, dear child of God, coming sooner than you think when we shall all appear before him. What a day it would be if all the children of God in this congregation would run to meet the bridegroom with joy, with confidence, having abode with him here, meeting him in the air with joy and gladness, believing, having confidence that we who have embraced the Savior by faith here below through the work of the Spirit will be accepted by him as judge for his own righteousness' sake.

Oh, what a blessing to be his bride and not be ashamed before Christ at his Second Coming, not ashamed of him who is our life, our love, our all, not ashamed of the hope we had in him. Though it often costs us persecution and ridicule and rejection, not ashamed of living for him, not ashamed that we spent our whole life with him, not ashamed of dying for him, not ashamed of the gospel, not ashamed to embrace him as our adorable Savior, as our glorious Lord, as our fatherly elder brother, as our Emmanuel.

Oh, what joy in that day to realize that every sorrow and every sickness and every trial and every hospitalization and every fractured human relationship and every need, he designed to lead us to depend on him and to abide in him so that we might meet him in the great day with his quiet, heartfelt, sure confidence.

All things work together for good. Everything he does with me leads me to the point that I may meet my אלהי (gaw-al') on the clouds in peace.

Blessed are they in our midst tonight who look forward to the Lord's supper with that kind of eternal expectation that just as we gather around the table of the Lord with holy anticipation, so one day we withhold the anticipation, we, as our Belgic confession says it, “With ardent desire long for the appearing and the coming of our Lord.”

Calvin said, “If we do not ardently look forward to his Second Coming we have made little progress in the Christian life.”

And John Cotton, an American Puritan said, “Do you love and pray for his Second Coming? The day of judgment is a day of marriage to the godly and therefore the spouse longs for it.” But to the wicked it is a day of execution. And, therefore, they tremble at the thought of it.

But only, oh, congregation, it is not only a great blessing to be unashamed of him, to look into his face with confidence based on his own work, but he shall look upon you, dear believing sinner, unashamed of his bride.

Oh, that is the wonder of wonders, the sinless one, unashamed of me, unashamed of you, despite all our sins. That is what he says in the Lord's supper, too. "Come, my child. I am not ashamed of you. I want to sup with you."

Hebrews 11:16 shall one day be ultimately fulfilled, but it is foreshadowed in the Lord's supper.

"But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city."<sup>15</sup>

Oh, what a happy day when this mortality shall put on immortality, this corruption, incorruption and we shall ever be with the Lord without shame.

So... so enjoy his presence, so bask in his smile and feast on his presence and be satiated with his glory and bathe in his love without sham and know him and see him and love him and praise him and commune with him without shame.

Do you want these things?

I could say to you tonight in all honesty though I come far short in every single area of my Christian life, I want these things so badly I could feel them almost with pain. This is my greatest desire in life. And it ought to be yours. We want to be in his presence without shame. We want to be in his presence with joy.

Well, John says, "Little children, then abide in him here below."

Christian believers, don't listen to those Gnostics. Don't wallow in the quagmire of unbelief. Don't wallow in the quagmire of self presumption and settle on your lees, but abide in him.

But, on the other hand, if those who profess Christianity refuse to persevere in believing, if they acted like the antichrist back there in verse 19 and turned away from Christ and from his bride the Church, John said, "They went out from us, [because] they were not of us."<sup>16</sup>

And they deserted the means of the grace, the means of perseverance, the means of abiding. If they abandon the Christian profession they have made to follow the world is to follow some false religion, then on the great day of Jesus' appearing our text implies they will shrink from Jesus in terror and horror and shame.

Actually, the original language says it most literally this way. They will be shamed from him. Their guilty consciences will shrink back from him. They will cry out for the mountains and the hills to fall on them. How awful it will be on that day to be ashamed, ashamed of ourselves, ashamed of our neglected privileges, ashamed of our rejected

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<sup>15</sup> Hebrews 11:16.

<sup>16</sup> 1 John 2:19.

overtures of the gospel, ashamed to have no wedding garment, ashamed of living the lie all our life, ashamed of unbelief and pride and self righteousness and selfishness, ashamed that my 10,000 times 10,000 of sins of commission and omission, especially the times I was ashamed to name the name of Christ, and now to meet him and to hear the dreadful words of Mark eight verse 38. You heard them this morning.

“Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words [the Bible] in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”<sup>17</sup>

How shall you meet him, with confidence or with shame?

Little children, abide in Christ.

But there is something more to abiding in Christ. Abiding in Christ isn't only receiving all the means of grace, the Word the preaching, the sacraments. Abiding in Christ also involves doing the Word, living out Christ, being united to him, living by him, but also living out his righteousness.

The Lord our righteousness, that righteousness must be lived out in the world. And so John says in verse 29, “If,” or it could also be translated, “Since.”

“Since you know that he is righteous, since you know he is the pattern, he is righteous in all his attributes, he is the one you must emulate.”

“Ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.”<sup>18</sup>

So John gives us yet one more mark of examination by which we may know if we are a child of God, yes or no. He says “Those who are true children of God not only abide in Christ and yearn to abide in him more and bemoan their shortcomings if they don't, but those who are true children of God do righteousness.”

Doing righteousness—and he is speaking here of sanctification, not justification—is the inevitable fruit of abiding in Christ. You can't abide in Christ and not bear fruit of abiding in Christ. And so the fruit of abiding in Christ is doing what is right, righteousness.

Now, again, John is interfacing, of course, with the Gnostics. The Gnostics said what really count is knowledge, secret, special knowledge.

John says yes, knowledge is important. But knowledge must lead to practice.

How do we know if we are abiding in Christ? We know by our fruits. If you are born of him you will do righteousness.

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<sup>17</sup> Mark 8:38.

<sup>18</sup> 1 John 2:29.

“Everyone that doeth righteousness is born of him.”<sup>19</sup>

So what is John saying? He is saying the parent produces the child. Like produces like. If Jesus is your Savior and he is the righteous one and did nothing but works of righteousness and even though you are a sinner and your record will be stained, there will still be evidence in your life if you belong to him, if you are his child, if you are his younger brother, there will be a family likeness. And people will be able to say of you, “You see, there is some Christian fruit, some Christ like fruit.”

Since Christ is righteous, those born of him must be righteous.

Well, you say, “But what does that mean practically?”

Well, the whole Bible speaks about that, of course. I am sure there’s thousands of texts that speak about it. But I think if you take all the material in Scripture about it, I think you can boil it down to really three things. To do righteousness means, first of all, to live right towards God. It means to love him and to obey him from the heart, to want to do his law and to want to honor him and glorify him and have him be number one in my life because that is what Jesus did. I am about my Father’s... I am about my Father’s business, he says, all the time.

Even 12 year old boy he was when he said when his parents found him in the temple.

“Wist you not? Didn’t you know that I must always be about my Father’s business?”

And so right living, right living toward God means obeying God as Jesus obeyed God out of love. Now, you don’t have that yourself, of course, but the Holy Spirit works that in the believer. So the believer delights to do the law of God, delights to think God honoring thoughts, delights to run in the way of God’s commandments, delights to honor God, delights to speak of God, delights to hear him spoken about.

True righteousness is not mercenary righteousness. A mercenary soldier, boys and girls, is someone who joins an army just to get money. But a true Christian is a δούλος (doo’-los), that is the Greek word for a willing slave, a willing servant, a volunteer soldier in the army of King Jesus.

If we do righteousness it is not so much the act that we do as it is the motive behind it, how we do it. And so the question is: Do you know something of obeying Jesus Christ out of love? Could you say, “I know what it means, even if there were no heaven and no hell and no rewards, I know what it means to serve him out of love”?

You see, that is the doing of righteousness, out of his righteousness, to do what is right out of love to him.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

Secondly, to do righteousness means to live right towards others. And what does that mean? Well, very simply it means to treat them as God and Christ has treated you. Again, it means to be like Christ.

How has Christ treated you? He has brought you his truth. He has showered you with tokens of mercy. Is that what you do with others? Do you exhibit the family likeness of Jesus Christ in your attitude toward others?

Yesterday there was a truck that pulled into our driveway and had some books and a man jumped out of the truck and a girl jumped out of the truck. The girl was maybe 12 years old. I looked at the girl and I looked at the man and I said, "Is that your dad, isn't it?"

You could see it on her face. And, you see, that is what people ought to be able to say when they look at you. You are a Christian, aren't you? And when I see you, when I hear you, when I watch you it reminds me of Christ, family likeness.

To do righteousness is not to say, "Well, I will render evil for evil. He got me. I will get him back."

To do righteousness is to turn the other cheek as Jesus did. To do righteousness is to groan and weep over all my failures when I don't treat others the way Christ treats me.

And then, finally, to do righteousness means to live rightly towards myself. And what do I mean by that? Well, there are many things you could say here, too. Let me say quickly just two things, two words. The first word is mortification. If I live rightly to myself I want to kill sin by the strength of the Holy Spirit. If I am doing righteousness to myself I will say no to sin by the Spirit and that is a fruit that I am born of God when I deny my fleshly lusts and out of love say no to sin.

Paul says that in Romans 8:13-14:

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify [mortification means to kill] the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.<sup>20</sup>

So if you never know what it means to deny yourself and kill sin, not just because you are afraid you will get caught, but out of love for the Lord, if you never know what that means, you are not a Christian.

Everyone who is born of God, says John, seeks to abide in Christ by doing righteousness also towards himself, killing sin, choking it to death, amputating it in our lives, showing God the seriousness with which we take the sin that nailed his son to the cross.

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<sup>20</sup> Romans 8:13-14.

John Owen put it so quaintly, so beautifully. He said, “Be killing sin or sin will be killing you.”

But the second word is, you might call it, recollection, recollection. You see in my everyday life, in my relationship to myself, if I am going to do righteousness, I must daily take the time I need to recollect as a believer that the great Son of God loved me and gave himself for me and died for me. And I must reckon myself therefore dead, indeed, unto sin, Romans 6:11 says, so that may live and be alive to God in Christ.

Every morning I get up I ought to say that to myself. I ought to say to myself, “Today I don’t belong to myself. Today I must remember my Savior has died for me and I must live unto him.”

That is the impetus to right living, not the fear and the shame and the coward terror, mercenary obedience. No. A child like obedience. How can I sin and do this wickedness against my Savior who died for me?

“If ye know that he is righteous, since ye know that he is righteous, you know that everyone that doeth righteousness toward God, toward my neighbor, toward myself, is born of him.”

Now, dear child of God, I know what you are thinking. You are saying, “This is all above me. I do so little of this.”

Well, friend, we must repent. Don’t respond and say, “Because I know so little of it, I will stay away from the Lord’s table and bury my head in the sand and go my own way.” Don’t say that. But repent. I need to repent. You need to repent and turn back to the Savior and ask him for grace to do more and don’t deny what he has given. Don’t deny the small beginning of obedience. Ask him that you may more and more abide in him. And do remember that when he comes he will see past all your failures and all your sins not because he is blind to them, not because he ignores them, but because his blood—thanks be to God—his blood freely and graciously covers and cleanses them so that we may appear before him unashamed despite our sin, our sin having been washed away in his precious blood.

And so the question remains and I close with that tonight. How would you meet Jesus if he were to come tonight on the clouds? Would you be ashamed or would you be confident in his righteousness? Would you bring forth much fruit? Well, then, abide in him, John 15 verse five says.

Would you be kept from sin? Abide in him says 1 John 3:6.

Would you have your prayers answered? Abide in him we read in John 15:7.

Would you have eternal life? “Abide in me,” says Christ in John 15:14-15.

Would you have communion with Christ in the Lord's Supper?

"Little children, abide in Christ."

Amen.