

Sermon 34, Knowing He Abides in You, 1 John 3:24

Proposition: Mutual abiding is something you know by the Spirit's presence and His fruit.

- I. Abiding Requires Obedience
- II. Abiding Is Mutual
- III. Abiding Is Something You Can Know
- IV. Abiding Is Marked by the Spirit's Presence
 - A. A Subjective Knowledge
 - B. An Objective Presence

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have seen the necessity of abiding over and over already in this book of 1 John. And here, we see it again. At the end of a glorious chapter on how we are children of God and how this totally transforms our relationships and requires us to love each other as brothers and sisters, John reminds us once again about the necessity of abiding in Christ. Specifically, he relates the relationship in which prayers are answered (the relationship of commands on God's part and obedience on ours) to the theme of abiding and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Mutual abiding is something you know by the Spirit's presence and by His fruit.

I. Abiding Requires Obedience

We need to see first that abiding requires obedience. The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him. And you know what? The one who doesn't keep His commandments doesn't abide in Him! That is John's point. If you want to remain connected to Jesus Christ, if you want to be united to Him by faith, if you want to be in Christ, born again, saved, going to Heaven, you need to be doing what He tells you. Now, as we have said, this does not mean that every time you sin you lose your salvation and have to start over from square one. Instead, it means that if you are in Christ, you will want to obey. Your begottenness drives your righteousness. Your status as a born-again child of God is what enables you to keep God's commandments. Without the new birth, it's impossible to keep the commandments from the heart. But once you've been born again and enabled to obey, then you actually want to obey and begin to keep the commandments.

You don't keep the commandments to get in, or even to stay in. You keep them because you're in. And if you're not keeping them, then you're not in. This does not overturn what John said in ch. 1 about all of us sinning. But it does challenge us toward greater obedience, toward greater faithfulness to repent and turn away from sin, toward greater desire to be like Jesus Christ. If you can continue in sin, live there and never seriously make an effort to stop, you're not saved. You're not abiding in Christ, because you aren't in Christ.

II. Abiding Is Mutual

But notice the glorious side of the message: If you are in Christ, then He is in you. Whoever keeps His commands abides in Him, and Christ abides in that person. What does it mean to have Christ abide with you? It means that He won't leave you. It means that He is with you all the time. It means that He is a faithful companion and friend. It means that He will not betray the relationship; He will not stab you in the back or abandon you. Now, there's no guarantee that He will always do what you want. My own mother has told me that she felt like God pulled a bait-and-switch on her. All of us have felt at times like saying, "God, I thought you cared. I thought you loved me. Why did you send this awful thing into my life?" Brothers and sisters, the tough things aren't God's way of showing His spleen or getting you back or betraying the relationship. The tough things are God's way of asking whether you actually trust Him. They are His mode of discipline. Sometimes that discipline is retributive; sometimes it is preemptive. Always it is a mark of His love, a sign that He really cares enough to train you in faith, hope, and love, all of which are founded on the fear of God.

He remains with you. He will never leave you or forsake you. As trite as the "Footprints" poem is, truly, the hard times are exactly when Jesus carried you. He was with you the whole time, even if you had no idea.

III. Abiding Is Something You Can Know

But John doesn't just make the point that you need to obey and that Jesus abides with you every bit as much, indeed more than, you abide with Him. He adds the fundamental truth that abiding is something you can know. You can have a true, justified belief about whether Jesus is abiding with you. You can be certain about it.

Now, we'll talk in just a second about *how* you can be certain of this. At the moment, I just want to emphasize to you that you *can* be certain. It doesn't have to be a mystery. It doesn't have to be something confusing and difficult to understand. You can know.

No more wondering, then, whether Jesus is really with you.

IV. Abiding Is Marked by the Spirit's Presence

How can you know? Well, of course, you can know whether you're keeping the commandments. But you can also know by the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life.

A. A Subjective Knowledge

Yes, in one sense this is a subjective knowledge. It is the Spirit Himself bearing witness with your spirit that you are a child of God. How do you know when your wife is angry? You just know. It's in how she moves. It's in how she talks. It's in how she looks. But, subjective or not, you know. And the same is true for the Spirit's witness. He is the one sent by Christ to abide with you. And when He is with you, you just know it. He tells you, and you hear His voice and know intuitively that it's His. A subjective knowledge is not an inaccurate or faulty knowledge. In many ways, there is nothing more valuable. What do you think someone struggling with assurance would give for a confident but subjective feeling of the Spirit's presence? But, that said, the subjective knowledge is not the whole picture. We know that all too well from the

people who claim that the Spirit told them to do something completely contrary to the law of God. We see it in all the liberal churches who blasphemously credit the Holy Spirit with leading them to endorse abortion and homosexuality. Their subjective feelings are not knowledge at all; they are beliefs, but they are neither true nor justified.

B. An Objective Presence

And so we also recognize the Spirit's abiding as an objective presence. Either He's with you, or He's not — and if He is, then He's growing His fruits in your life. A plastic tree never bears fruit. A dead tree never bears fruit. But a living, growing tree bears fruit by virtue of the life within it. And in the same way, a living, growing Christian bears fruit by virtue of the principle of life within Him. That principle is the Holy Spirit, the channel of life from the Logos in whom is life.

So do you want to know whether Christ is abiding with you in the person of His Spirit? Then do some fruit-picking. Go examine your life, in all its various branches, and see whether love, joy, and peace are growing there. In other words, look for whether you're keeping the commandments. If you are, then you know that the Spirit is abiding in you, because there is no fruit-bearing without Him.

Brothers and sisters, do you want patience, kindness, and goodness? Then you need the Spirit. Those things are His fruit. With them, you will flourish. Without them, you will perish.

So trust Him. Believe Him. Obey Him — and His Spirit will always be with you. Amen.