

Abiding in Christ, Our All-Sufficient Shepherd

By Dennis Cornish

Jesus, who fed thousands with one boy's lunch, healed the infirmities of countless individuals, and raised many others from the grasp of death, has undeniably demonstrated that He is always more than sufficient to overcome any challenge in our lives. If we subject all authority to Him, we will always be reassured of His loving compassion for our plight. He, as the second person of the Trinity, is from everlasting to everlasting and this same eternality extends to His immutable sufficiency.

Scripture tells us that He is the creator of all things for our good and His glory. His resources are inexhaustible, He is before all things and by His power all things have been made. He is both the Creator and Sustainer of all things and as our Good Shepherd we too have been placed under His Sovereign control and authority. It is He, through the power of the indwelling Spirit, who brings us ever closer to perfection through the process of sanctification. He has forgiven all who have believed on Him from their unrighteousness and forgiven them of their sinfulness. He has justified us through faith, and in His timing, He will bring us to the glory that He has prepared for us.

Romans 8:16-17 reminds us that: *"The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."* By faith we know that this is true, but we also have an acute awareness of the very real tension in the dichotomy that Christians feel, one that theologians have expressed as being in a state of "the already, but not yet". We are co-heirs with Christ, we have been redeemed by His atoning sacrifice, and He has cloaked us in His righteousness as we are being sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and yet the fullness of the glory that we have in Him awaits our transition from this life of corruption to the resplendence that will be ours when we are finally glorified and kneeling before Him in our heavenly home.

Knowing that all of this is true, we still struggle with our sin nature and by the curse of this nature we are prone to slip back into sin, and sometimes grievously so. However, Jesus has promised us that no one that the Father has given Him will be lost. We can take comfort that He who began a good work in us will see it to completion. Our union

with Christ is our steadfast anchor in troubled waters, a strong assurance of our salvation even in times of our temptations and the inevitability of our backsliding. We must always keep at the forefront of our thoughts that Jesus' sacrifice has assuaged God the Father's wrath, He paid the price in its entirety, and He has satisfied the justice of a Holy God from whom we deserve punishment because of the sin we have perpetrated against Him. Praise God, His mercy doesn't stop there, Christ stands as our mediator and whenever Satan points out our failures, Jesus merely holds out His nail scarred hands, evidentiary receipts that He has ransomed us and that our debt has been fully paid.

Not only is Christ ever mediating for us, but He has also sent us the Holy Spirit as a comforter, an indwelling guide leading us ever closer to Christ's likeness. This is another example of God's mercy and grace, that He would initiate our regeneration, giving us the faith to believe as we start on the lifelong journey of sanctification. We are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, but we are to do so in conjunction with the Holy Spirit. Paul teaches us this in Philippians 2:12-13 where we read: *"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."*

This teaches us that the process of sanctification is not a passive experience, although initiated by God, our consecration comes with the personal responsibility to synergistically work with the Holy Spirit as we grow in Christ likeness. God has revealed His will for our lives, and it includes our immersing ourselves in His Word so much so that it permeates our hearts, minds, and souls. John 15:7 teaches us that: *"If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."* Of course, as mature believers we know that abiding in Him and having His Word abide in us precludes any frivolous abuse of our requests because if we are conformed to His will our desires will be kingdom focused and devoid of selfish worldly desires.

To be clear about the matter, to abide in Christ has the meaning of a continual loving relationship with Him, as well as expressing that love to God and to others. The Greek

word that is transliterated into the English word abide is '*meno*' and Strong's Lexicon G3306 has the meaning of being ever present, not to depart from, to be held or kept continually, and to remain as one. It is not a slow cooling of affection or a drift into complacency, it is an ever present and lasting relationship that binds us to our Savior because of His effectual call which has inextricably drawn us to Him. This abiding relationship renews our minds and reforms every aspect of our lives as we grow in Christ.

Abiding in Christ means making Him the object of our faith, we are to build our lives centered upon our relationship with Jesus. To abide in the love of Christ is to follow His commands and all believers will do so, albeit not perfectly. We will ardently desire that His name to be glorified, His will to be done, and His kingdom to come. True faith accepts, receives, and rests upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life. As aids to our Holy Spirit infused strivings, God has given us the ordinary means of grace that we are to adhere to, and those are His Word, the Sacraments of Communion and Baptism, and in the humility of our Prayers as they are each pure expressions of our union with Christ. To ensure clarity, the sacraments do not save anyone, baptism is a public display of our having died to ourselves and risen in Him, and the partaking of communion is in obedience to Christ's command to do so in remembrance of Him. We read in 1 Corinthians 11:24-25 "*...and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."*" To obey God in these things we must also obey His requirement for developing loving relationships with other believers as we fellowship with one another, strengthening each other with much needed encouragement as we consider His Word together, pray together, and share in the joy of partaking the sacraments with one another.

If we truly hunger and thirst for His righteousness, we will become immersed in His Word, devouring Scripture and drinking in every word as we deliberate upon them and proclaim with the Psalmist: "*Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day*" (*Psalms 119:97*). We can also affirm Psalms 34:8 with our own experience that

resonates with the sentiments of this verse when it says: *“Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!”*

Without Christ people remain spiritually dead, they are powerless and without the capacity to bear good fruit. Without Christ’s intervention in our lives, any effort of personal or societal reforms are futile. Our abiding in Jesus is essential to our salvation and any reform or change can only be wrought by our Lord and Savior. In John 15:5-6 Jesus affirms this reality when He declares: *“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.”* One commentator summarized the main point of this metaphor in this way: ‘He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.’

Christ is the source of all life, and without Him, we cannot bear any fruit whatsoever. Without Him there is only condemnation and wrath. The good news is that if we abide in Him, we can find peace in knowing that *“I can do all things through him who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13).”*

Let us praise God together as we worship Him with every fiber of our being.

I would also like to thank God for His inspired Word from which the beliefs written above have been derived, either by myself through the Holy Spirits guidance, or by the many Godly men who have handed down their knowledge and wisdom from contemporary expositors or those from ages past so that we could each benefit from their gifted writings. In the end, it is the truth of God’s revealed Word that must be proclaimed for all to hear for *“faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ (Romans 10:17).”*