

## Most Important Thing You Can Do

(May 5, 2022)

For much of my Christian life, I was confused about what it meant to "abide" in Christ and I've discussed this in previous articles. The main reason for the confusion was due to books by Christian mystics like Andrew Murray and A. W. Tozer, instead of focusing primarily on God's Word.

Maybe the problem was with me and how I specifically understood or interpreted what these authors were saying at the time because of my (then) involvement in the Charismatic Movement. It does seem fairly clear to me today that Andrew Murray was not really that clear and often relied on how he *felt* about things. He seemed to constantly pursue Christ at an *emotional* level, as did others. To be clear, this is not to say that knowing Christ increasingly will not affect our emotions at times. I'm simply saying that to *depend* upon our emotions as a guide is wrong thinking. I just recently turned 65 and having been a Christian since I was 13, it's taken me a great deal of time to work through all of what seems to me to have been error in the way I was thinking and in what I was pursuing.

Now, some 50 years later, I'm hopefully seeing things much more clearly, I understand abiding in Christ as something completely different from what I used to think it was when I was younger. A recent sermon by Rev. Danny Jones from Northlake Baptist Church in Gainesville GA also clarifies Scripture, making it very clear and succinct. Jones is easy to understand and puts forth the truth of Scripture in a way that makes great sense.

Essentially, when a person becomes authentically saved, they *begin* to abide in Christ from that point. Some folks become Christians with an emotional release or awareness. Others don't sense much change of anything emotionally, although they begin to see that their inner desires are simply changing. The things they used to do they don't necessarily want to do as the Holy Spirit begins His work in them. In either case, both qualify as new believers.

But the interesting thing about abiding is that the Bible seems to indicate that a person can *stop* abiding. This is where the problem begins because many have taken that to mean that a true Christian who began abiding in Christ with salvation can stop abiding and therefore, lose their salvation. Jones deals with this subject very clearly and concisely. Can a person lose their salvation? Not if the Bible is understood correctly, they can't. So exactly what does *abiding* and *not abiding* mean?

As Jones says (and sufficiently supports with Scripture), it simply means that *fellowship* between God and the Christian can be severed.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RT3tdOwXoBE>

When a Christian severs fellowship with God, it usually occurs due to some type of sin in their life. Sin destroys and as we learn in **Genesis 3**, sin causes physical and spiritual death. When a Christian sins, their relationship with God is impacted. While they do not lose their salvation, their fellowship with God is broken. This is no different from having an argument with another person (friend, loved one, etc.),

and walking away in a huff. The fellowship with that individual stops. Does this mean there is no longer a connection? No, it simply means there is no longer any conversation or camaraderie between the two parties.

As a kid growing up, there were times my sister and I would get into spats. Those spats often occur between siblings and most of the time they are ironed out and dealt with so that the siblings can get beyond it and once again, enjoy the closeness they have always had. The times that my sister and I had spats did not mean that we were no longer brother and sister, did it? Not at all, even though we might have *felt* like that. As far as the law and reason were concerned, the fact that we were brother and sister did not change one iota. However, we tended to *act* toward each other as though we did not even know one another. Eventually, we would each soften up and begin to move toward one another in the hopes of acknowledging our fondness for one another as siblings.

Sadly, there are some folks who have serious falling outs and go their separate ways. I know of family members who treat other family members as though they do not exist and you may know some as well. However, even in those situations, the people remain related by blood family ties. That cannot be changed or dissolved because it occurred due to their births into a specific family.

This is the way it is with God and our relationship with Him once we become spiritually reborn into His family. There is nothing that can or will ever change that relationship. When we become Christians, we are born into God's family thanks to Jesus and the faith He allows us to have and exercise in Him.

But this spiritual birth is only the first step. By faith we gain entrance into His family and our sins are forgiven - past, present and future. Confession of our sins needs to be practiced as the Holy Spirit brings the problem of our sin to our mind and after confession, He applies His forgiveness. This process is what enables and allows us to continue abiding in Christ.

But the big questions for me have always been, *what is the benefit of continual abiding and how is that done?* Rev. Jones summarizes things and points out that the more we *love* God, the greater our fellowship with Him will be. **John 15** deals with the vine and the branches. Anyone who has ever planted a garden knows that a gardener must prepare the soil, plant the seeds and ensure that the seeds have water. But one thing the gardener cannot do is force the seed to grow and mature into a healthy plant. The plant does this all by itself.

What's fascinating is around our home there are all sorts of vines. It is interesting to watch the individual branches of the vines. As long as the branch remains connected to the vine itself, it will grow into a healthy branch. Once disconnected from the main vine, the branch will die. This is where folks get the idea that salvation can be lost, yet this is not what Jesus was teaching. Jesus was simply pointing out that if we are to remain spiritually healthy and continue growing, we must commit ourselves to remaining "in" the vine or abiding in Christ. Once we stop abiding, we shut off the possibility of all the benefits we have in Christ. Spiritual death is the result.

In the past decade, we've seen numerous Christian leaders - some very well known ones at that - fall away from Jesus. Some came out to acknowledge their new reality that they are no longer Christians. Others kept up the charade by outwardly continuing to express Jesus while secretly living a life of

shameful sin. In either case, if the person was indeed actually a Christian, they continued to be one even after they fell so far. If they were not Christians to begin with but used Christianity as a convenient way to amass a following and usually with it, large amounts of money, then they did not lose what they never had.

Rev. Jones goes into [1 John 2:24-37](#) where the apostle John speaks about our abiding in Christ. It is extremely important for us to understand that we need to **work** at abiding. It does not come automatically and as my pastor has said, we don't wander *toward* Christ (my paraphrase). We tend to wander away when we relax our efforts. Our effort must be expended on our part to make this happen, but practically speaking, how does it happen?

It first starts with a desire to do the right thing. We must cultivate it by doing practical things that will affect our spiritual lives. Probably the first and foremost way is to be in His Word. If we are not reading and studying His Word daily, we are not going to be focusing on abiding in Him. It is that simple. To abide in Christ continually means to live lives in such a way that our efforts are focused on how to make this come alive within us. His Word provides truth ([John 17:17](#)). If we are not focusing on God's truth, we are very likely living in error.

And by the way, another sermon from Rev. Jones deals even more conclusively in my opinion regarding this subject, when Jones speaks about the fact that we should probably begin [Preparing for Persecution](#). Both of these sermons explain how to draw close and remain close (abiding) with Jesus. Jones illustrates this with examples from military people who spent time in the Hilton Hanoi as well as much more recently, Christian pastors in other parts of the world who were simply jailed for being Christians. How did they get through their ordeals? What strengthened them? What gave them the ability to overcome? In all cases, it was the Bible verses they had previously memorized and the hymns they sang. The truths they constantly repeated to themselves are what calmed their heart and fears, and overwhelmed them with a great love for God.

In one particular case, a pastor who was jailed started practicing the things he knew would be of help **before** he became incarcerated, like going without food (fasting), just to know and get used to what that felt like. Folks, we might be tempted to say that this type of persecution cannot come to the USA, but we need to think again.

The goal of each Christian is to grow in our love for God. I believe as we grow in love for God we gain a strong desire to not do those things which will *offend* Him, thus we will be living in a way that causes us to fear (offending) the Lord. In essence then, loving God and having a fear of offending Him are really two sides of the same coin. They work hand in hand, in my opinion.

Loving God and the resultant fear of offending Him can only happen when we make the effort. It is effort in this life because of our inherent sin nature that always wants us to move away from God. We must instead use our effort and faculties to move *toward* God.

This is the process. We are born again ([John 3:16](#)), and then learn to live our lives in such a way that love for Him constantly grows within us. This growing love for Him and His ways translates into having a

health fear of (offending) the Lord that keeps us from breaking our fellowship with Him. I don't know any other way of actively being a Christian and I wish I had known about this decades ago.

Please take the time to watch the two videos and then check to see where you are in your relationship with Christ. Like all of us, it could likely always use improvement.