

Abiding

Maintaining Continual Fellowship with the Lord

Introduction

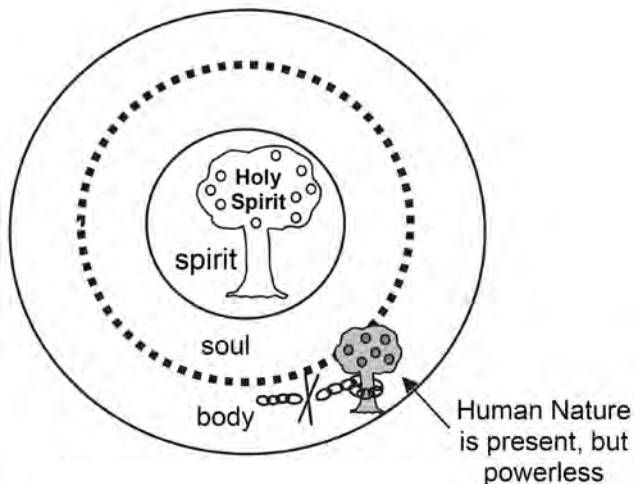
“To Abide” simply refers to the moment-by-moment experience of walking in harmony (communion, fellowship) with the Holy Spirit; that is, without any “unresolved offenses” that are disrupting that communion.

The two diagrams below represent a snapshot of the same believer at two different points in time.

Condition of “Abiding”

The normal Christian Life
“walking in the Spirit”

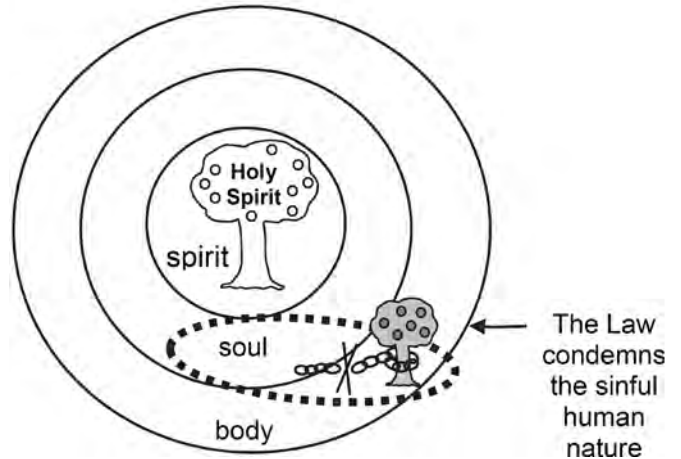
All that I allow the Holy Spirit to do through me is eternal and rewardable at the Tribunal of Christ (judgment seat) (gold, silver, precious stones). I Cor. 3:10-15



Condition of “Not Abiding”

Having unresolved issues(s) with the Holy Spirit
“walking in the flesh”

All that is not motivated by the Holy Spirit is temporal, without His life and not rewardable. (wood, hay, stubble.) I Cor. 3:10-15



NOTE: the circular dotted line represents the “conditional” aspect of abiding.

Explanation of the Conditional Aspect of Abiding: Although I am a believer, I still have the sinful human nature and I can choose at any given moment to remove myself from fellowship with the Holy Spirit by allowing an unresolved issue(s) to come between the Holy Spirit and me.

While the Holy Spirit does not change, my relationship with Him is “conditional” upon my choosing to walk in harmony with the Holy Spirit rather than walk in the flesh.

Abiding Principles

1. Why is it so important for me to abide?

- a. God is looking for available vessels (instruments). God has eternal purposes that He wants to complete in and through my life. While I am abiding in fellowship, the Holy Spirit is free to produce His fruit through me as a usable vessel (conduit).

At any given moment I can allow myself to become unusable through my unwillingness to remain in fellowship with Him. I should picture myself as an instrument, a vessel, a water glass, etc. A vessel's main function is to be available and usable by its owner, not to perform on its own. Is God as the Potter free to use me at any moment as He chooses? (Rom. 6:13,19; 2 Cor. 4:6-7; 2 Tim 2:20-21)

- b. We tend to focus on performance, but this lesson is not about doing, but rather about being. What I do is a result of what I am being. What is the function of a branch? To be, or to do? (Jesus said) *"I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains (abides) in Me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without Me."* (John 15:5)
... *For the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart.* (Matt. 12:34)

- c. It will help to look at this lesson as if it were entitled "How To Live In Continual Harmony With My Spouse or Close Friend," because this is the clearest model God designed and gave us. Examining the husband - wife model (or a close friendship) will give me many insights into my relationship with the Lord.

2. It may help to think of abiding as having three dimensions:

W

Width could refer to the "daily" aspect of abiding. I should view my relationship of abiding in fellowship with the Lord as only encompassing "TODAY." Yesterday's issues should have already been dealt with, and I need to believe God's promises that His grace will take care of tomorrow's issues, when they become "today's" issues. (discussed further in Lesson 1-11)

- a. The Lord promises to meet my "daily" needs.

Matt. 6:8-11 ... Give us this day our daily bread.
Exodus 16:4-30 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day," ... he who had gathered much had no excess, and he who had gathered little had no lack;...
Psalm 68:19 Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears our burden,...

- b. Jesus said to take up my cross daily, anything greater can be overwhelming.

Luke 9:23 ... If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.

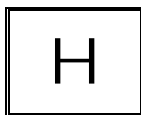
c. Thoughts to consider.

I must pursue the habit of keeping “**short accounts**” with the Holy Spirit, in other words, to consciously choose to acknowledge (confess) **quickly** any unresolved conflict when I have offended Him. The missionary Hudson Taylor stated, “*We should **never** be conscious of **not** abiding in Christ*” (*Hudson Taylor’s Spiritual Secret*). The same holds true for fellowship with my spouse, or a close friend. We are told in Eph. 4:26-27: ... **do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.** Paul stated in Acts. 24:16: ... *I also do my best **to maintain always a blameless conscience** both before God and before men.*

Important: The **Holy Spirit alone** determines when I am being held accountable for offending Him, **not me**. Likewise, **listening** to the offended spouse (or friend) is usually the quickest first step to restoring fellowship.

During the time I am walking out of fellowship with the Holy Spirit I am **forfeiting His intended blessings** (eternal fruit), **and** will probably reap **unintended consequences**. *Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption (worthless fruit),...* Gal. 6:7-8

God promises to meet my needs (Matt. 6:19-21, 25-34). Being prudent and responsible toward the future is appropriate. But if I allow that “concern” to negatively affect my relationship with the Lord, then “worry and anxiety” can easily become sin. He wants His peace to reign in my heart. *Anxiety in a man’s heart weighs it down,...* Prov. 12:25 (see also Col. 3:15)



Height could refer to “**an open line of vertical communication**” between God and me. I should jealously guard our fellowship by monitoring our communication **moment by moment**, being vigilant **not to allow** anything to disrupt it. **I need to form the habit** of not just waiting to check in from time to time at my personal convenience. It is a 24-hour per day, 7-day per week relationship.

a. Thoughts to consider.

I am told to **pray continually**. *Rejoice always; **pray without ceasing**; in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.* (1 Thess. 5:16-18) “Continual” prayer is not necessarily conversation without any interruptions, but prayer that continues whenever possible. The adverb for “**continually**” was used in Greek to describe a hacking cough. Paul was speaking of maintaining continuous fellowship with God as much as possible in the midst of daily living in which concentration is frequently broken. (Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.)

The **husband-wife (or other close) relationship** will also deteriorate unless it is **consciously nurtured**. (Ephesians 5:25-32)

Caution: Busyness can easily be a trap, **causing me to neglect** the Lord. Both the Holy Spirit and my spouse or close friend will be offended if I carelessly disregard or ignore them. Neglect often conveys unimportance. If I will ask Him, **the Holy Spirit will always be faithful to reveal to me any unresolved problems between us**. I should never allow what I am **doing** to become more important than my fellowship with Him.



Depth could refer to my deepening relationship with the Lord, getting to know Him, as in a marriage or close friendship. The concept of “**spiritual growth**” and the “**maturing process**” imply that there are things presently in my life that are displeasing to God. Even though the Lord is aware of those displeasing aspects of my character, He only holds me accountable for those issues that He wants to deal with **today** as He matures me.

a. Illustration.

If I look at the air in a room, it looks relatively pure (my perspective). If a ray of light appears, many dust particles would suddenly be visible (God's perspective). Even though my sinful human nature is totally corrupted and unholy as compared to His holiness, He sees me "in Christ," and He only holds me accountable for the issues (dust particles) that He is presently bringing to my attention. The dust particles existed, even though I was not yet conscious of their existence. My responsibility is to be attentive to the Holy Spirit so that He can easily show me what areas of my understanding and/or behavior He wants to change. He will never burden me with more than I can handle.



God deals with me according to my maturity level (just as good parents do with their children) and my willingness to learn from Him. *He has not dealt with us according to our sins,... He is mindful that we are but dust.* (Psa. 103:10, 14)

b. As I allow Him, God prunes me so that I will bear more eternal fruit.



God's process of making my life more fruitful is described as "pruning," ... *every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.* (John 15:2) Pruning is usually not enjoyable, but always results in more fruitfulness if I allow God to finish His project. An area of my life that appears to me to be beneficial or harmless, may from God's perspective be distracting or harmful, and a hindrance to what He wants to do in my life. God determines what needs to be pruned. My responsibility is to be teachable and attentive to Him, careful not to allow my "good" things to rob me of God's "best." (e.g. Martha – Luke 10:38-42)

c. Caution: I should not be surprised by the sinfulness of my human nature. As I grow spiritually, I will increasingly see my human nature as God sees it. Flaws become more visible as they are more exposed to light. The closer I am to God the more repulsive my human nature will become to me. (*Everything exposed by the light is made clear,*... Eph. 5:13)

3. How do I know if I am not abiding – or out of fellowship with the Holy Spirit? I should ask Him if there are any unresolved issues between us.

Even though I am walking in fellowship with the Lord and have no unresolved issues, not all that I do is motivated by Him, or is even pleasing to Him. As I allow Him to grow and mature me, He will increasingly have more freedom to bear His fruit.

If I find myself out of fellowship with the Holy Spirit, it is by my choice. I do not need to be out of fellowship with the Lord any longer than I choose to be. Restoration to the condition of abiding fellowship will take place immediately upon confession of the offense(s) for which the Holy Spirit is holding me accountable.

How can I know if I'm out of fellowship with the Holy Spirit?

Usually symptoms indicate an ailing body. Similarly look for on-going spiritual symptoms of the sinful nature, such as:

- stumbling
- impatience
- frustration
- dissatisfaction
- worry
- striving
- lack of peace
- sense of defeat
- complaining
- anxiety
- anger
- irritability
- addictive behavior
- critical or judgmental attitude
- other on-going symptoms?

4. Common misconceptions about the condition of abiding.

- a. **Misconception:** As a believer I can keep myself in the condition of abiding **through my own efforts**. **Reality:** **At salvation** I was put into the conditional state of abiding fellowship with the Lord as a result of what Jesus did on the cross, **not because I deserve it**. My goal should be to please Him, and be sensitive to Him so that any issues He brings to my attention do not remain unresolved. Those unresolved issues can disrupt my fellowship with Him, just as in human relationships.
- b. **Misconception:** God's greatest concern about my sin is the degree to which it falls short of His standard of righteousness, and "**avoiding sin**" should be the primary focus of my Christian walk. **Reality:** God is most concerned with **the disruption** sin causes in His **continual abiding fellowship (communion)** with me, and that it consequently hinders Him from accomplishing His purposes in and through me. The writer of Hebrews tells us: ... *let us **lay aside** every weight and the sin that so easily ensnares us. **Let us run** with endurance the race that lies before us, **keeping our eyes on Jesus**,...* (Heb. 12:1-2)
- c. **Misconception:** The condition of abiding is somehow "**attained to**." **Reality:** Abiding is the **birthright** of every child of God; it is not about achieving a certain level of maturity. Does a child have to **earn** the privilege of being in fellowship with their parents? God has made provision for **every** Christian to live consistently in harmony with Him **without extended periods of being out of fellowship**.
- d. **Misconception:** Abiding is restricted by my lack of knowledge, past experiences, or personal limitations. **Reality:** What hinders God from blessing and using me as He desires is only my choice(s) and **unwillingness** to acknowledge and confess unresolved issue(s). The Biblical "normal" Christian life is one of **habitually** abiding; not to abide is **abnormal**. (2 Peter 1:3-4)
- e. **Misconception:** Since my natural tendency is to **categorize or classify** "acts of behavior" and



build mental lists of "**do's and don'ts**," it is easier to follow "**my list**" of perceived expectations. **Reality:** As the Holy Spirit leads me moment by moment, I will increasingly form the habit of carefully looking at each choice, judging or discerning if it is pleasing to Him. What I tend to consider "insignificant" may be very significant to Him. It will help me to consider "sin" as "**anything that is displeasing to God**."

Example: Do you think reading the Bible can ever be sinful? Imagine you are resting on a riverbank reading your Bible. You notice a child struggling against the current, being swept downriver. You faithfully continue reading. Suddenly, a mother appears frantically asking if you've seen her child. You tell her that you would have saved the child if you hadn't been reading God's Word. Imagine her response (and God's)! This example may seem extreme, but it illustrates the danger of categorizing acts of behavior because what God deems "correct" today may be "incorrect" in a similar situation tomorrow.

John 5:30 (*Jesus said*) ... I do not seek My own will, but **the will of Him who sent Me**.
2 Cor. 5:9 Therefore we also have as our ambition, ... to be **pleasing to Him**.
Eph. 5:8-10 ... walk as children of Light ... **trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord**.
Romans 14:23 ... **whatever** is not from faith is sin.