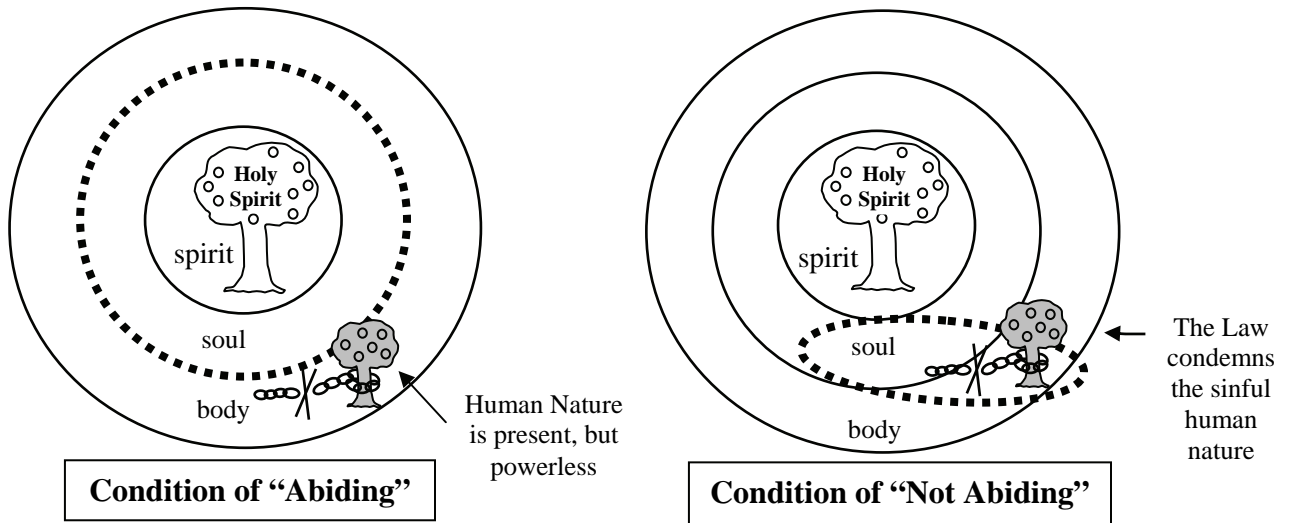


“ABIDING” PRINCIPLES TO HELP ME MAINTAIN CONTINUAL FELLOWSHIP WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

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



Note: The circular “dotted line” represents the “conditional” aspect.

1. WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT FOR ME TO ABIDE ?

- a. God is looking for **available vessels**. 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. 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**; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he **bears** much fruit; for apart from Me you can do **nothing**.”* (John 15:5)
*... the mouth speaks **out of** that which fills 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”**, because the clearest **model** God has given us is His designed Husband - Wife relationship. Examining the husband - wife model (or a close friendship) will give me many insights into my relationship with the Holy Spirit.

2. IT MAY HELP TO THINK OF ABIDING AS HAVING THREE DIMENSIONS:

W

WIDTH could refer to the “daily” aspect of abiding. I need to view my relationship of abiding in fellowship with the Holy Spirit 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 be sufficient for tomorrow’s issues, as they become “today’s” issues. (see also Lesson 1-16)

a. The Lord promises to meet our “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. I am told 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, that is, I need to consciously choose to quickly acknowledge (confess) 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), ... Galatians 6:7-8*

God promises to meet my needs (Matt. 6:19-21, 25-34). Being concerned, 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 (Col. 3:15)*

H

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

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 of 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 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 Holy Spirit. Both the Holy Spirit and my spouse will be offended if I carelessly disregard 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. Never allow what you are **doing** to become more important than your fellowship with Him.

D

DEPTH could refer to my deepening relationship with the Lord, getting to know Him, as in a marriage. The concept of "**spiritual growth**" and the "**maturing process**" imply that there are many things presently in my life that are displeasing to God. Even though the Lord is aware of those many 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.

I can look at the air in a room and it looks relatively pure (**my** perspective). If a ray of light should appear, an innumerable number of dust particles would suddenly be visible (**God's** perspective). Even though God sees my human nature as totally corrupted and unholy if 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 to not allow my "good" things to rob me of God's "best". (e.g. Martha – Luke 10:38-42)

c. **Caution: Don't be surprised by the sinfulness of your human nature.**

As we grow spiritually, we will increasingly see our human nature as God sees it. Flaws become more visible as they are more exposed to light. The closer we are to God the more abhorrent our human nature will become to us. (... *all things become visible when they are **exposed by the light**, ... Eph. 5:13)*

3. PREVALENT MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE CONDITION OF ABIDING

- a. At salvation I was put into the condition of abiding fellowship with the Lord, by virtue of Jesus' righteousness, not because I deserve it. Now, as a believer, I cannot keep myself in the condition of abiding through my own efforts. My goal should be to please Him, and to be sensitive to Him in order to not allow any issues that He brings to my attention to continue unresolved. Those unresolved issues can disrupt my fellowship, as in human relationships.

God's greatest concern about your sin is not the degree to which it falls short of His standard of righteousness for you, but rather the disruption it causes in His fellowship with you, and the consequent hindrance it causes as He seeks to accomplish His purposes in and through you.

"Avoiding sin" should not be the primary focus of your Christian walk, but rather maintaining a continual abiding communion with Him. The writer of Hebrews tells us: ... *let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, ...* (Heb. 12:1-2)

- b. There is a prevalent misconception that the condition of abiding is somehow "attained to", when in reality it is the birthright of every child of God. Abiding does not speak of having achieved a certain level of maturity. Did you as a child have to earn the privilege of being in fellowship with your parents? God has made provision for every Christian to habitually live in harmony with Him without extended periods of disrupted fellowship (communion). Abiding is not restricted by my lack of knowledge, past experiences, or personal limitations, but only by my unwillingness to acknowledge and confess unresolved issue(s) that are hindering God from blessing me and using me as He desires. The Biblical "normal" Christian life is one of habitually abiding; to not habitually abide is abnormal. (2 Peter 1:3-4)
- c. My natural tendency is to categorize "acts of behavior" and build for myself a mental list of "do's" and "don'ts". It seems easier to follow a "list" of perceived expectations than to be continually attentive to the Holy Spirit as He leads me. I need to form the habit of carefully looking at each choice and judging if it is pleasing to Him at this moment. 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: I could ask the question, "can reading the Bible be sinful?" Imagine yourself resting on a riverbank reading your Bible. You hear a child frantically struggling against the current as he is being swept downriver. You continue faithfully reading your Bible. Shortly a mother appears and asks if you've seen her child. You tell her that you would have saved the child if you hadn't been occupied. You can imagine her response (and God's). This may seem extreme, but it points out the danger of "categorizing" acts of behavior.

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.*