

Abiding in Christ

By Paris Reidhead*

I just wanted to highlight this particular bit of the sermon, which was an “Aha!” moment for me - he hit the nail on the head with this one.

Have you ever been listening to something being taught – oh, perhaps in a service, or on television or radio – and you said, “That doesn’t sound right to me...”? “I can’t put my finger on it – I don’t have a verse, but there’s something about that that just doesn’t sound right...” You know what could very well be happening? God the Holy Ghost is causing that unction to exercise in you. And it’s therefore extremely important for you to become sensitive to what the Spirit of God may be saying. Why is it important? Because it’s this unction that will preserve us against the antichrists now, for there are many.

Thank you. Will you turn please to I John 2. I’d like to read verses 18-29. I like to read the portion, because I want you to hear it. By the way, if you’ve been making notes, putting the little numbers in, I suggest you put “5” next to I John 2:24.

Beginning with verse 18:

“Little children, it is the last time: and as you have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. But you have an unction from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written unto you because you know not the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father. Let that therefore abide in you, which you have heard from the beginning. If that which you have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, you also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father. And this is the promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life, These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. But the anointing which you have received of Him abideth in you, and you need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, you shall abide in Him. And now, little children, abide in Him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at his coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him.”

The main idea of this little general epistle is still “fellowship with God.” That’s what it’s about – “these things are written that we might have fellowship with Him,” said John in the first verses, “and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ” (I Joh. 1:3).

So, with that in mind, you’ll understand that he is going to emphasize this again and again. In this portion I’ve read, verses 18-29, fellowship with God is still the main theme. To remain is salvation. To go out is damnation. The antichrists went out and sought to induce others to go out with them. To remain steadfast to Christ requires that we resist the seducers; that we recognize truth. That we remain faithful to the truth, and that we rejoice in the prospect of His coming.

Somewhere along the line, I ran into an outline, and - as outlines sometimes have a way of doing - it stuck in my mind. I’m giving it to you, and we’ll try to follow it as time permits. Now, I don’t remember from whom I got it – I know it’s not mine. And I don’t know to whom credit should be given. I suppose I should do like one preacher said he did, whenever he started to speak, he went like this, and when he finished he went like that, and he said it was quotation marks – so that he could give full credit for everything that he had used. So I’ll do the same now.

Verses 18,19 – “Deserters”. D-E-S-E-R-T-E-R-S. Deserters.

Verses 20,21 – “Discerners”

Verses 22,23 – “Deniers”

(Isn't that nice? Oh, I love alliteration. I heard about the Canon from a church in England who came to America, and when he got back, two ladies sitting in the congregation said, [see, he'd been here and he found out about how we do all this alliterating] "When we sent him to America, he was a Canon. Now he's come back just a peashooter" Everything began with "P". Well, anyway...)

Verses 24-27 – "Defenders"

Verses 28,29 – "Deservers"

Well, I hope that will help to make this graspable by you. At least, I'll try to explain it.

Now, "deserters" – verses 18 and 19. This is a very crucial time of which the apostle speaks. It is "the last time". It is, literally, "the final hour". It denotes the beginning of that period that will ultimately conclude all things. We're still in that period. And I would like to suggest that we're closer to the last of the last times than we were when John said it was "the last time". And we shouldn't say, "Well, all things continue as they were, nothing is changing," because we must recognize that we're something like nearly 1900 years closer to the conclusion of all things than he was. But it's been the last time for this entire period. It marks the period of time (long or short) in which apostasy will occur. It marks the beginning of a crisis of enormous significance – that is, the emergence of antichrists. That's in the plural. This time has been marked by a turning away from Christ on the part of many who profess to follow Him. I think it's important for us to realize what Paul said, in writing to Timothy, that would characterize this period called the last time. In I Timothy 4:1: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." In II Timothy 3:1,8: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come." And in verse 8: "Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith."

In II Timothy 4:3: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts (or appetites and desires) shall they heap to themselves teachers," Now there's a comma there – I used to think it was teachers that had itching ears, but it's not. The people who "heap to themselves teachers," select the teachers to put in the heap, that are going to scratch their ears and make them feel comfortable with what is given. I've heard it said that a preacher of the truth should have two ministries. One is to comfort the afflicted, and of course that's a ministry with blessing, and we all should rejoice in it. But the second is to afflict the comfortable – and I think we should be just as diligent in the second as we are in the first. And therefore, we would not be among that number that consider it their primary purpose in teaching and preaching to make people feel good. I think our purpose is to understand what God wants to say, and not to be among that number that "give heed to seducing spirits" and turn away from the faith, and withstand the truth.

Now, there have been last times of real significance in the past. And even as there will be some last times in the future. Our Lord spoke about it – He said that we should beware the false prophets. They would come – "Many false prophets shall arise, and shall deceive many, and because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." Matthew 24:24: "For there shall arise false christs, and false prophets shall show great signs and wonders." Verse 25: "Behold I've told you before – times of great persecution are going to arise."

Well, we see that. We recognize it, we realize it, Peter described it. Again, we find that in the lifetime of many of you, perhaps not all, but certainly many of us here, more people have died for Christ, for persecution reasons since 1949 than in all the centuries from the time of Christ until 1949. I don't know that I made that quite clear. Let me repeat it, so you're sure you get it. More people have died martyr's deaths on behalf of our Lord Jesus Christ since 1949 than in all the centuries from the time of Christ until 1949. Hard to believe? Well, two months before Nixon went to communist China to open relations with that nation, The Washington Post carried on page 16 column 4 or 5 just a little 2½ inch summary or report that had come out of China that during the first 20 years from 1949 to 1969, China had found it necessary to "deprive of existence" 30 million people, half of them because of stubborn adherence to economic systems inimicable to the purposes of the revolution (they didn't take kindly to having their money taken away from them). And the other half was for stubborn adherence to religions imported from the Imperialist West. Now, I suppose you could say that Buddhism had come from west, and you could say that Islam had come from west of China, and Christianity.

Now, let's assume – we don't know the figures, but let's assume that half of those were, had died for their faith in Buddha or in Muhammad, and the other half died for their faith in Christ. That would mean that about 7½ million people died martyr's deaths. I remember hearing, in those days, about children that reported on their parents. And the authorities would put a cross down on the ground. At one end would be the smiling child that had reported his parents as being believers in Christ, and at the other would be the parent. And if they would walk on the cross to the child, their life would be spared. But if they didn't, they would die. And most who were confronted with that test elected to die rather than to do as the government was asking – to walk on the cross.

When the communists took over in Korea, we are told on, I think, quite good authority, that in 3 months about 800,000 pastors, elders, Christians in North Korea were killed, were assassinated, murdered, sacrificed, martyred - call it what you will. Well, that's a great many more than you have listed in the entire book of Foxe's Book of Martyrs that covered a couple of centuries.

In Vietnam, we're told that 300,000 people died as Christians in about 8 months of persecution when the communists took over North Vietnam. We know that on the Tet Offensive, two weeks over Christmas, there were over 5,000 believers that were killed. Lined up, bulldozer had dug a trench, they were machine-gunned and pushed into the trench and covered with dirt.

So, just from those three countries, not counting what happened in Russia, not counting what had happened in other countries, I think it's safe to say that we may be living pretty close to the last time, when more people die for Christ in a 20 year period, than died in about 18 centuries from the time of Christ.

In Revelations 6:9-11, we are told: "And when He had opened the fifth seal, I saw, under the altar, the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God and for the testimony they held." There've been a great many that have died for Christ. There's a supreme test that's given here in verse 19: "They went out from us, but they were not of us." Christ declared that a test is required. "He that is not with me," said our Lord, "is against me." And in I John 5:12, the apostle said that "He that hath the Son hath life." The person who refuses to recognize and enthrone Christ as God the Son is antichrist. Everyone who opposes the Gospel as our Lord delivered it - every teacher and writer who lowers the Gospel standard to the spirit and taste of the world is an antichrist. I didn't say THE antichrist – he is an antichrist, no matter where or among whom he may be found.

This is a very sad statement, a very sad fact. There had been, in the time of John, a defection from the ranks of the followers of Christ. "They went out from us." Some of these went out because they loved this present world, and did not want, under any circumstances, to be curtailed, as the Scripture indicates that we should live holy lives. Others went out because they had been seduced by some of the current heresies of the day – by Gnosticism, by antinomianism. There were others who went out as teachers of these pagan philosophies that had crept into the church, and they went out because they were able to exploit that, they could now use this to promote themselves as teachers. They went out disgracing the Gospel. They had made their pernicious and evil opinions, they merchandised, they were willing to sell, they mingled pagan philosophies with Biblical terms and so were able to confuse the people. They turned the truth into a lie and slandered God. The apostle declared – these are not our fellow believers. We abhor their creed and their conduct, and we never sent them to teach. You've got to recognize – "they went out from us because they were not of us."

And then it proceeds to say that they went out that it might be made manifest that they were not all of us. You know, it's interesting, isn't it, how easy it is for us to confuse external church membership with vital fellowship with Christ? By no means are they one and the same. They may be, but they're not necessarily.

When John Wesley¹ began to preach, everyone that he talked to were already members of the Church of England. They all had been baptized, there was only the one fellowship, and every Englishman was inscribed in the local church records at his baptism. It isn't any wonder to me, that the churches in England closed the doors to Wesley even though he was in good standing as an Anglican clergyman. When he went to Epworth where his father had been pastor for many years, the then-

¹ John Wesley (1703-1791) Anglican cleric, Christian theologian, and founding the Methodist movement

rector of the church said, "I will not permit this man to stand in the pulpit." And so John Wesley went out. Actually it really marked kind of a beginning of his open-air ministry. He went out and stood on the grave of his father. And of course he had a good crowd, because the rector of the church got messengers to go all through the town, saying, "Don't go listen to John Wesley – he'll be preaching in the cemetery this afternoon." About the only time that the people obeyed what the rector said was when he told them what not to do, and they did it!

So the whole town was there, and Wesley stood on his father's grave and preached the truth that God had revealed to him. Because he'd been a clergyman. He'd finished his training, he'd gone to Georgia as a missionary to the Indians. And while he was on the way over, he saw the Moravians and the difference between the Anglicans and the Moravians during that terrible storm, convinced him that they had reality that he and his people didn't have. And then he was still with them, and saw that fellowship with them while he was still in Georgia, and he was terribly abused by the powers of Savannah. In fact they drove him out of the church, because he refused to serve communion to the daughter of the mayor of Savannah, who was living in open immorality with a man in the community, and so Wesley shook the dirt off his feet. In fact, there's a monument there in Savannah now – a plaque on a stone – "This is the place that John Wesley shook the dust of Savannah off his feet when he left to return to England."

When he got back there, he discovered that God had been working in the heart of his brother and some of his friends, and he attended a meeting at Aldersgate Street, when a Moravian brother was reading Luther's "Introduction to the Book of Romans". And as he read about justification by faith, Wesley said, "His heart was strangely warmed." And he knew, for the first time in his life, that he had been born of God, and so that day at Epworth, when he stood on the grave of his father, he proclaimed to the people of England that (that community, at least, and it subsequently went to the nation) that no one had a right to think themselves a child of God because they were members of a church, that they'd been baptized – it was necessary for them to be born of God, and the evidence of the new birth was the witness of the Spirit.

So, this is an important truth, that external membership does not mean vital fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. It is possible that even antichrists can and do exist in the church.

Now, the function of the Word ought to be to divide soul and spirit. It will do that if people will hear it. But that doesn't necessarily mean that people who discover what the Word has revealed are going to acknowledge it or deal with it. Sometimes the preaching of the Word is a savor of life to life, and sometimes of death to death. So, what we have here, then, in these first two verses, is this revelation that believers in every age, including ours, must recognize that there will be a falling away.

But in verses 20 and 21, he talks to us about discernment, about being discerners. He says that "We have an unction from the Holy One." That's an interesting word. I went to find out what unction was, and the Greek word is "chrism", and it literally means ointment. It's an ointment that was used when the chief high priest was anointed. Remember when God gave the prescription for the ointment, He said, "Don't let anyone touch it, lest they be judged." Well, this is an ointment. This is God, the Holy Ghost, touching those who have been born into the Father's family with an anointing (here the English word is an "unction") that enables us to discern between truth and error. It's important for us to realize this. In Psalms 45:7: "Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness. Therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." Those who have been born of God have been anointed – that's the word – an anointment put on, the Holy Spirit Himself, not some concoction made of various things that are put together as it was in the type back when an ointment was made for the dedication of the high priest. This is God, the Holy Ghost – the same one Who witnesses to us that we're born of God is going to be to us the means by which we can discern truth from error, right from wrong.

This is from the Holy One. "We have an unction from the Holy One." He that baptized us with the Holy Ghost has given to us, with the Holy Ghost, this knowledge of truth and error. And it was done when we were born again, but more particularly, when we were baptized with the Holy Spirit. Isn't it interesting to realize that in the New Testament, the only kind of people that you have are Spirit-baptized people? But isn't it also interesting to realize that all of the teachings given in the New Testament were given to people that were baptized in the Holy Ghost? And all of the exhortations in the New Testament were given to people that were baptized in the Holy Ghost? And all of the warnings in the New Testament were given to believers

that were baptized in the Holy Ghost. You know why? Because that's the only kind of believers you have in the New Testament. The only kind there were. After they were baptized in water, they were prayed for, and the Spirit of God came upon them. And so all the warnings, all the teachings, all the exhortations were given to Spirit-baptized people.

But, even so, with all those warnings, all those teachings, all those exhortations, we realize that the believer has this unction, whereby we can know truth from error. And it's extremely important for us to accept the fact that we are so equipped, and to pay attention.

Have you ever been listening to something being taught – oh, perhaps in a service, or on television or radio – and you said, “That doesn't sound right to me...”? “I can't put my finger on it – I don't have a verse, but there's something about that that just doesn't sound right....” You know what could very well be happening? God the Holy Ghost is causing that unction to exercise in you. And it's therefore extremely important for you to become sensitive to what the Spirit of God may be saying. Why is it important? Because it's this unction that will preserve us against the antichrists now, for there are many. Oh, we have them in atheism, in pantheism, in deism, anti-supernaturalism. And I must say, with tenderness, because I don't want to be less than tender, since I was among them so many years – misguided and misled, but nevertheless wanting truth – I have to include Dispensationalism, and Dispensationalists. As I say again, among whom I was, but hungry for truth and looking for reality. Oh, what a burden that lays upon you.

I remember, years ago, when I was pastor of First Baptist Church in Little Falls, Minnesota. I was preparing a message from the Gospel of Matthew. And the message just seemed to fall there, and open up, and I was thrilled by what I was seeing. So I said, I better go to Gaebelin's Annotated Bible and see if I was kosher. And, you know, I discovered, when I went to it, that I wasn't!?! To show you the tyranny – I didn't just crumple that sermon up and throw it into the wastebasket. I tore it in two – this is lengthwise (not crosswise, so that you could read it, half of it, anyway, if it was crosswise) – I tore it lengthwise. And then I tore it into little bits, and I put half of them in one wastebasket, and another half down the hall in another wastebasket, so nobody would put them together and find out how dangerously close to heresy I'd been. Talk about living in bondage and living in a straitjacket. Well, I certainly was.

All right, the Spirit of God wants us to be equipped, so that we will not be misled and captured by the antichrists. What is it that the antichrists deny? Verses 22 and 23 – they deny that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, that He's the anointed of the Father. And in this respect, you can say that the Jews up to the present are blinded. They deny that Jesus Christ, that our Lord and Savior is both God and man. Originally there was an attack on His humanity – they said that He was spirit and not man, and what appeared to be a body was a theophany. Today, we live in a time when they see Him as man and not God, an attack on His deity. But the Scripture teaches us that He is very God of very God – God come in the flesh. The antichrists would teach us that Jesus is not the eternal Son of God, and consequently they would deny the incarnation. They would deny the authority of God's Word. They would deny its inspiration, and they would deny its truth. Oh, what attacks there are! Even today, amongst some who normally would think of themselves, or would have us think of them as being Evangelical, attacking the authority of the Word of God. This denial involves the fact that they consider there's no personal revelation of God, nor is there any message of love from the eternal throne. No redemption, no Savior. God's Word is no longer binding upon people.

We have something today that's approaching today – I'm troubled by it. I pass it on to you – it seems to me it's dangerous. I had talked to a pastor of a rather large church, and I said – “Why aren't you doing more for missions? You're talking about the five to seven thousand people you have in attendance. I see from your published report that you're giving just a very small amount for mission.” “Well, we are not only controlled by the Bible. We're also controlled by the Spirit. You see, we have both ‘logos’ and ‘rhema’, and we don't consider the ‘logos’ binding unless the Spirit, under ‘rhema’ emphasizes it.”

I said, “Well, the people that have been carrying the responsibility of missions for the last two hundred years have the Word of God.” “Well, that's true, but to us, it doesn't become binding until the Holy Ghost, by some means, and we've had so many prophetic messages, and none of them have been challenging us to do anything more about missions overseas.”

I submit to you that, first, I don't believe the Scripture teaches such a distinction that can be hard and fast between 'rhema' and 'logos'. Secondly, that whenever the tradition of the elders or the practice of the people makes the Word of God of none effect, it is approaching to this thing that we're talking about here.

So we come to the test, the evidence of eternal life. Verses 24-27, wherein we are told that "Let that therefore abide in you, which you have heard from the beginning." What did you hear? What was it that God said? What did God's Word proclaim? "Let that abide in you." If there remains in you what, from the beginning you heard, you, too, in the Son and in the Father, will continue to remain. That is the translation that Lenski gives that I find very refreshing to my heart. The light, the truth of the Word, the commandment, the teachings of the Word are the means of establishing for us the basis and foundation of our fellowship - fellowship with the Father, and fellowship with the Son. And that's the whole purpose of this letter - to make certain that we do understand and that we abide.

Now, I've said in the past, and you've heard it, that in this day, as in other days, so it's nothing truly new - a great many people that profess faith in Christ fall away. You've heard the statement that I've made, and it's been made by many, and I've not been challenged on it, so I'm assuming that, however hard it is for us to grasp or to accept, we do, to some degree at least, and that is, that out of every two hundred persons that profess faith in Jesus Christ in present day evangelism, at the end of a year, there's only one that's effectively going on for Christ. Now, I know that you can find a particular situation where there's more than one. But you can find other situations where there aren't any. So this is the average - and it's not my average. It's from some very close to the main evangelistic streams of our nation. What does it mean? It means that multitudes of people are professing faith in Christ on some grounds or other. And then, within days or weeks or months, they've drifted away. They've gone back, and are no longer found among the people of God. They're not abiding in Him.

Now, in John 15, the apostle writes, saying, "Abide in Christ." But that abiding has to do with a relationship to Christ. Abide in Christ, crucified with Him and buried with Him and quickened with Him and raised with Him and seated with Him. And then He said, "And I will abide in you." That is reciprocal indwelling, said F B Meyer². Well, we live in Christ, in our identification and union with Him and He lives in us, to make real His presence and minister through us. That is the abiding of relationship.

But that's not the abiding that the apostle uses here. This is the abiding of continuing, of standing. So, when you're sitting across the table from someone who's said to you, "I am not sure that I am a child of God. I am not certain that I've passed from death to life. Please help me." And you've gone through "1" - if we say we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth. If we say we know Him and keep not His commandments we're liars. Any man who doesn't love his brother is still dead in his sins. Love not the world, neither the things in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father's not in him. You've brought them - 1,2,3,4. Now you've come to "5" - "Let that therefore abide in you which you've heard from the beginning." And you're saying, "Now, are you abiding in the profession of the faith you made? Are you abiding and continuing in the repentance that you expressed? Are you continuing to trust in the finished work of Christ? Are you staying? Are you standing on that grounds in which you came into your profession of being a child of God?" That's the issue.

Because, you see, the person that's gone out from us - all of the arguments, all of the evidence, all of the support is that they were not of us. And so when someone's talking to you about this, you'd better bring them right straight to the Word, and let the Spirit of God speak to their heart through the Word. I've had people say, "You know, my husband was saved, but he's been backslidden for many years now. I can't get him to go to church. I can't get him to do this. He doesn't want to pray, but I'm..." I was in a church, oh, many years ago now, and I told the people, "I'm here to help you, and if there's anything I can do, I want you to come to me and I'll join you in prayer, I'll be all the help I can in the few days I'm with you." And the first one that came to me was a lady. And she said, "You know, my husband made profession of faith in Christ when evangelist so-and-so was here. And there's only one verse of Scripture in the Bible that he knows," and she quoted it, "and the evangelist told him that if anyone ever tried to say he wasn't a Christian, that he should use that verse. So, he still continues in his drunkenness, he still continues in his immorality, I know he's cheating and he's stealing, but he claims he's a Christian and that it's just that he's weak."

² Frederick Brotherton Meyer (1847-1929) A Baptist Pastor

And she said, “I wish you’d pray with me that my husband would be recovered from his backsliding.” And I looked her square in the eye, and I said, “I’m sorry, I can’t. And because I can’t, of course I won’t.” She said, “Here I am, the first one to come after you invited us to come to you, and you’d help us.” “No, you misunderstand. I didn’t say I won’t help you, I won’t pray, but I can’t pray the way you’ve asked me to pray. You’ve asked me to pray that he’ll be recovered from his backsliding. I don’t know too much about it. The Word doesn’t have too much to say about backsliding. But I know this – you can’t backslide till you’ve front-slid sometime. I don’t think he’s ever moved! I think he’s still dead in his sin.” And you know, she looked at me and she said, “Well, I’ve been suspicious about that...”

You know, if you see a bird, and it’s got a bill like a duck, and it quacks like a duck, and it’s got webbed feet and waddles like a duck, and it swims like a duck – I don’t think you’re being prejudiced if you think that’s a duck. Even though it may have sign on its chest that says, “I am an eagle!” I still think you’d be perfectly justified in thinking that perhaps it was a duck. And the Scripture tells us that “by their fruits we will know them” (Mat. 7:20). And so, it tells us also that the ones that come and identify with us, and claim to be part of Christ, part of the body of Christ, that give ear to seducing spirits and follow heresy and go back into the world, and leave that which they profess to have followed – we have reason to believe that they are in very serious trouble and, possibly, have not been born of God.

I think the apostle tells us that those who are born of the Spirit should, must abide – continue to stay – in Christ on the very basis on which they came to a profession of faith in Christ. Fifth evidence of being born of God is abiding, continuing in Christ. Shall we pray?

Father of Jesus, look down upon us now, the people that are concerned about ourselves. We want to be everything that Thou in Thy grace and mercy and love would have us be, and in turn, we want to help everyone we can. And so we ask Thee, Father, that the Word may have free course in us, and be glorified, and that we will abide and continue to stand there, that we will resist every effort of a defeated foe to deceive us, that we will permit that anointing, that unction to function in us, to enable us to discern between truth and error, and that we will ever stand, loyal and faithful to the truth as it is revealed to us in Christ, and in Thy Word. In Jesus’ name, and for His sake, Amen.

* Reference such as, Delivered at Bethany Fellowship, Minneapolis, MN on Thursday, June 9, 1988 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.