As you watch the Olympics, do you ever imagine yourself out there skiing or skating? But then you have a reality check, right? You realize you’re so out of shape it’s hard to get up the stairs in the evening after sitting on the couch watching the Olympics.

About ten years ago, Mike Reynolds and I started training for a sprint triathlon. A sprint triathlon is much shorter than an Olympic or ironman triathlon. It’s about a half mile swim, a 13 mile bike ride, and a three mile run. We followed a workout plan called “From Couch Potato to Triathlon.” It was rough at first, but we got better with each passing week. There were milestones along the way, like the first time we ran three miles without stopping and the first time we swam 500 meters without almost drowning. We trained for months and eventually we completed our first sprint triathlon in OKC.

But about two months after that triathlon in OKC I quit working out and really haven’t done much since. Mike on the other hand, continued. He got a new workout buddy in Ty Schwertfeger, because I flaked out on him. I abandoned him with excuses of being too busy at work, staying up too late, having too much “ministry” going on. You know the excuses.

I quit. But Mike has continued to work out, train, and participate in races. He gets up every morning like clockwork at 4:30 or 4:45, meets up with Ty, and works out. Since our race in OKC Mike and Ty have done a number of other sprint triathlons, four Olympic length triathlons, one half ironman, a 75 mile bike race, some half marathons and one full marathon. Not to mention how many times they’ve completed the P90X workout DVDs. Need I say more?

What’s the difference between me and Mike? In a word: “endurance.” Mike has continued to stay in shape and even race. Me on the other hand, I competed in one race and then I quit. And as my friend Scott Pitman used to always say, “used to bees don’t make no honey!” Mike’s still making honey. My honeycombs have all dried up. Mike has endured the race. I’ve stopped running the race.

In Mike McKinley’s book Am I Really a Christian? he uses a similar illustration about physical endurance. Then he goes on to say, “The Bible talks about another kind of endurance. And this type of endurance is far more important: spiritual endurance.” McKinley says, “A true Christian must and will remain until the end.” Matthew 10:22 makes this plain: “…the one who endures to the end will be saved.”

Or in the words of Don Carson, “[true] faith, by definition, perseveres.” There are many people who have started in the Christian faith, but who have not persevered in the faith. They grew up in the church, but they have since left the church. As I say this, there’s probably someone you’re thinking of right now. And that person may be very dear to you.

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1 The title of this series is borrowed from the title of Mike McKinley’s book, Am I Really a Christian?
2 Mike McKinley, Am I Really a Christian? pp. 75-76.
Some have left the church with a bang—they have been very vocal about leaving the faith. There are many blog sites hosted by such vocal and hostile “ex-Christians." These people not only left the faith, but they seem intent on trying to drag as many people as they can away with them.

But most have left the church much more quietly. Maybe they were burned by the church. Maybe they wanted to live a lifestyle that was contrary to the gospel. Maybe they stopped believing the central truths of the gospel. Whatever the cause, the fact remains. Many started in the faith, but they're not enduring in the faith.

This is not a new phenomenon. In the history of the church there have always been people who have defected, who have left the church. In Jesus day we see many who start to follow but then fall away. Paul names a number of his associates that fall away. And it’s clear that the same was true of the community that John was writing to.

Turn in your Bibles to 1 John 2:18-27.

We’ve been studying 1 John for a number of weeks, asking the question, “Am I really a Christian?” And we’ve learned there are certain tests to help us examine ourselves to see if we’re in the faith (cf. 2 Cor. 13:5).

- The theological test: Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God?
- The moral test: Is your faith in Christ accompanied by a transformed life?
- And the social test: Is your faith in Christ accompanied by a transformed love for other believers?

But this morning we see that there is another test. This test qualifies all of the other tests. Do you endure? Do you endure in believing in Christ? Do you endure in your transformed life? Do you endure in your transformed love for other believers? Do you remain in Christ all the way until the end? That’s how you know if you’re really a Christian. Faith, by definition, perseveres.

1 John 2:18-27

"Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life. I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

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3 Mike McKinley, Am I Really a Christian?, p. 76.
4 Nb. how these three common reasons, line up with the three tests in 1 John.
5 Mike McKinley, Am I Really a Christian?, p. 77
6 Ibid., pp. 77-78.
7 Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.
There are two commands found in this passage. But the main one is found at the very end of the passage. Everything in the passage is moving toward this main command. Abide in him! That is, abide in Christ. Or in other words, continue to remain in Christ. Endure!

Sermon in a sentence: You’ll know you’re a Christian if you remain in Christ till the end.

This is the point John wants to get across to his readers. This is the point God wants to get across to us this morning. And there are two questions related to this command that are answered in this passage.

- Why is this command needed?
- And how do we fulfill this command?

I’d like to spend the rest of our time this morning answering those two questions.

SOME DON’T REAMIN IN CHRIST; THEREFORE, WE MUST BEWARE.

First, why is this command needed? It’s needed because you can’t assume people will continue to embrace the Christian faith till the end. The command to abide is accompanied by a warning. Some don’t remain in Christ; therefore we must beware. Instead of remaining in Christ, some deny Christ, deceive others, and defect from the church. Let’s look at each of these.

Some deny Christ.

First, some deny Christ. Look again at verse 18. It is the last hour. What this means is we live between the first coming and second coming of Christ. And the antichrist is coming. The antichrist is a political figure that will be raised up right before Christ returns to oppose Christ and his people and to deceive the nations. But before the end times and the coming of the antichrist, there will be many antichrists. These antichrists are forerunners to the antichrist. These are people who deny that Jesus is the Christ, as verse 22 says. More specifically, these antichrists deny that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, as 4:2 says.

To abide in Christ is to abide in a very specific belief about Christ—that he is the eternal Son of God, who became a man, to save his people from their sins (cf. Mt. 1:21). Antichrists deny this central truth of the gospel! But you can’t deny this central truth of the gospel if you are saved. As we said in the second week of this series if Jesus isn’t God, he isn’t able to save us from our sins. And if Jesus isn’t man, he is qualified to save us from our sins.

If you don’t pass this theological test, you aren’t saved. If you don’t abide in the Christ of the Bible, you aren’t a Christian. To deny Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who came in the flesh is to deny the Father and the Son altogether, as verse 22 says. And those who deny Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God don’t have the Father, as verse 23 says. That is they do not have a relationship with God. They are not Christians. Period!

There were people in John’s day that used to be in the church and claimed to believe this central truth of the gospel. But now they deny it. They don’t abide in Christ. The same is true in our day.

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8 Robert Yarbrough, 1-3 John.
9 See, e.g., the parable of the sower.
Some deceive others.

But not only do these antichrists deny that Jesus is the Christ; they also try to deceive others, as verse 26 says. They’re trying to get others to follow them in the lies they’ve come to believe (cf. v. 22).

We live in perilous times. If you haven’t encountered people who are hostile to the Christ of the gospel, you will. They’re found in many of your schools, in the work place, in the media, and in some of the fastest growing religions of the world, like Islam, Mormonism, and the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Some of these antichrists will show up at your front door from time to time, well dressed. They’ll ask you to talk about Jesus. But the Jesus they want to talk with you about is not the Jesus of the gospel; he’s not fully God and fully man. And that Jesus is not able to save you from your sins! There are others who are less obvious in their views of Jesus. They want to talk about a Jesus who is a good teacher and a great example, but not a Jesus who is the Son of God who came to die for sinners.

John wants his readers to know that those who deny this central truth of the gospel aren’t saved. And he wants them to know that there are many people like this in the world who want to deceive you. Beware!

Some defect from the church.

But not only do antichrists deny Christ and deceive others. They also defect from the church. They may start out in evangelical churches, but they don’t stay in evangelical churches. Eventually they leave. Look at verse 19. “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.”

There is a very interesting connection being drawn here between really being a Christian and being in a gospel-centered church. When people leave churches that believe the gospel, John seems to be saying, they do so because they never really believed the gospel.

Now John is not saying a person can lose their salvation. He’s saying that if a person truly believes the gospel in the first place, they will continue to believe that gospel till the end and they will stay in a church that believes that gospel. There is a connection between remaining in Christ and remaining in the church.

Our text this morning is meant to encourage those of us who haven’t denied Christ, haven’t deceived others, and haven’t defected. Those of us who remain have the promise of eternal life, as verse 25 says. But I know this is a really difficult topic for a number of you because you have loved ones who have denied the gospel or have left the church. You may even have loved ones who are involved in deceiving others with lies. In light of what we’ve learned so far this morning, what should you do?

Well first of all, let me suggest what you shouldn’t do. Don’t blame yourself. As we’ll see, true faith in the gospel comes as a gift from God, the anointing of the Holy Spirit (v. 20). It’s not something we can make our loved ones believe. They may have rejected the gospel. But you’ve not rejected it for them. They may have left the church, but you’re not ultimately responsible for their defection. Maybe you weren’t the perfect parent. Well, join the club. But you’re not ultimately to blame.
Secondly, don’t bank on a past profession of faith. While we can’t see into somebody’s heart, we can see external evidence of faith. A person may be saved without clear evidence of salvation. But we can’t have assurance of salvation without evidence. If you’re loved one is showing no signs of saving faith, you shouldn’t assume they have saving faith. Instead, you should urge them to repent and believe the gospel. That is the only way to salvation. And the only way to have assurance of salvation is by continuing to believe the biblical gospel. If your loved one claims to believe the gospel but you’re not sure, simply continue to point them to Christ and urge them to continue in the gospel. Also, urge them to connect with a church that makes the gospel central in all it does and teaches.

In all of this, the most important thing you can do is to pray for them. The Holy Spirit is the one that grants belief in the truth. The Holy Spirit is the one who teaches all knowledge, as verse 20 says (cf. v. 27). Therefore, pray for God to do his work with his Word in their hearts.

We’ve seen why we need the command to abide in Christ. There are some people who don’t remain in Christ; they deny, deceive, and defect. Therefore, we must be warned. But our passage not only wants to warn us; it also wants to encourage us. Let’s look now at that encouragement.

**CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THE GOSPEL.**

How do you abide in Christ? Quite simply, you continue to believe the gospel. As verse 24 says, “Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you.” What he’s speaking of here is the gospel. He lays out the gospel in other parts of his letter. The love of God was made manifest among us. God sent his only Son into the world (in the flesh) so that we might live through him (4:9). Christ is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world (2:2).

This is the message they heard from the beginning.

And the Holy Spirit made this message come alive in their hearts. In verse 20 we’re told that true believers have been anointed by the Holy One and have all knowledge. This is speaking of the anointing of the Holy Spirit by Christ. And as verse 27 says, the Holy Spirit “teaches you about everything and is true and is no lie.” What this means is the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of our heart when we hear the gospel and shows us the truth of the gospel.

For example, the Holy Spirit teaches us that we’re sinners (cf. Jn. 16:8). Remember what we learned in chapter 1? “If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1:7; cf. 1:10). But the Holy Spirit who teaches us the truth teaches us that we are sinners in need of a Savior. And the Holy Spirit teaches us that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man and therefore wholly able to save us from our sins (cf. Jn. 16:14).

When we believed the gospel, it was because the Holy Spirit taught us the truth. God himself is not only the source of our salvation. God also gives us faith to believe the gospel of salvation. Therefore, we don’t need a different teaching, as verse 27 says. The gospel we heard and believed by the Holy Spirit is sufficient for salvation.

We need to continue to believe this gospel till the end. That’s how we abide in Christ. When I think of this truth, taught in 1 John, I’m reminded of 1 Corinthians 15:1-2. “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.”

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We must hold fast to the gospel until the end. That’s how we abide in Christ.

But how do we do that more specifically? Well to give full disclosure, we abide in the gospel in the same way that we believe the gospel. God who began a good work in us will carry it out until completion (Phil. 1:6). God is the one that ultimately enables our perseverance. But we also play a role in God’s work (cf. Phil. 2:12-13). So, I want to offer three ways people can abide in the gospel.

The first actually has to do with the way we share the gospel. You can set the stage for others to continue in the gospel by paying close attention to the way you share the gospel. When you share the gospel, you must first remember that it’s the anointing of the Holy Spirit that enables belief in the gospel. So, as you do evangelism it’s so important to be devoted to prayer throughout the process. Ask God to open people’s eyes. You must also make sure you talk not only about the work of Christ, but also the person of Christ. As we’re learning in 1 John, the gospel is connected with who Christ is. Therefore, we must not only share what God has done for us in Christ, we need to tell people who Jesus is—fully God and fully man. If he’s not both, he’s not able to save us from our sins. Lastly, when you share the gospel, call people to count the cost of believing in Christ. Saving faith is a marathon, not a sprint. I think people need to know this up front. True faith, by definition, perseveres.

I love the way John Piper put it. True Christians are coronary Christians, not adrenal Christians. Saving faith is like a heartbeat; it’s steady and it just keeps going. It’s not like a shot of adrenaline. A shot of adrenaline will get you started, but it won’t last! Call people to believe in a heartbeat-kind-of Christianity.

The second way I’d like to suggest that we abide in the gospel is by marinating in the gospel. To abide in the gospel we need regular exposure to the gospel. You’ve heard me say, it’s so important to preach the gospel to yourself daily. We need to daily remind ourselves that our standing before a holy God is based on his love and the finished work of Christ, not on our work! But how do we do this specifically? We need to read and study the Bible daily. We need to memorize portions of our Bible regularly, especially the portions that speak of God’s grace extended toward us in the gospel. We then need to meditate slowly and prayerfully on the gospel—let it sink deeply into your hearts, changing the way you think, feel, act, etc. (I’ll post some resources on our blog this week that may help you in these areas.) And, last, but certainly not least, we need to show up for weekly corporate worship services. Weekly corporate worship is not a means to earn God’s favor (or your pastor’s); it’s a way to be reminded of why we have God’s favor—it’s because of the cross of Christ! Weekly worship is a means of grace. It’s a way to marinate in the gospel.

The third way I’d like to suggest that we abide in the gospel is to commit to a local church that is committed to the gospel. As I was asking Mike Reynolds about his impressive resume of physical endurance, he replied with a very humble and helpful comment. “I’m not sure if it fits with your message, but I still want to say, I sure couldn’t have and wouldn’t have done any of [these races] without the accountability of people like Ty and others who came alongside of me and suffered with me.” What a testimony! And how much more appropriate are Mike’s comments when it comes to enduring in the gospel. We need the local church. As we see in verse 19, if you believe the gospel, you’ll stay in a gospel-centered church. You’ll stay in churches with gospel-centered people who will come alongside you and struggle with you.

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13 For helpful discussion of this tension, see Mike McKinley, Am I Really a Christian?, pp. 85-88.
14 John Piper, The Roots of Endurance, p. 11.
15 See Jonathan Leeman, Church Membership, for helpful perspective on the role of the local church.
To remain in Christ we must remain in the gospel. We live in a time when many deny Christ, deceive others, and defect from the church. This isn’t anything new. And it will be the same until Christ returns. Therefore, we must beware because saving faith is a faith that endures till the end.

**Athanasius Contra Mundum**

When I thought about the endurance spoken of in this passage, I couldn’t help but to think of Athanasius. Athanasius was the bishop of Alexandria for 45 years, in the fourth century. For 17 of those years, he was exiled for his faith. Why? Because he believed in the incarnation. He believed Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man. And he believed that those who denied this central truth of the gospel weren’t Christians and shouldn’t be allowed in the church.

What’s the problem with that? That seems to be what 1 John is teaching. Well, Athanasius lived during a time when this central truth of the gospel was being attacked throughout the world by the Arian heresy. According to one writer:

…Arius…taught that Jesus was created by, and not equal to, God the Father… [During Athanasius’ time as bishop of Alexandria], the Arians gained political influence…and were permitted [in] the church. When Athanasius vigorously objected, he was banished from his office. He was exiled a total of five times by four different emperors. One time he escaped death by hiding out for four months in his father’s tomb. Another time he hid in the Egyptian desert for several years from killers paid to murder him. During the worst years the future looked very bleak for the gospel as Arianism gained the upper hand in the church. Yet Athanasius stood firm, and ever since [he] has been known by the famous Latin epithet, Athanasius Contra Mundum, “Athanasius against the world.” In his last years he was reinstalled as the bishop of Alexandria, and shortly after his death the church finally defeated the Arians for good.

What enabled Athanasius to endure in his belief in the gospel in the face of violent opposition? He believed that to abide in Christ you must abide in the gospel. And that was worth enduring suffering.

In the second verse of the song “By Faith,” we’re told the saints in Hebrews 11 were able to endure to the end because they had the power of the promise in their hearts. Or in the words of 1 John 2:27, “the anointing that you received from him abides in you.”

We are able to abide in the gospel because the gospel that abides in us is powerful. The one who began a good work in you will carry it on till completion at the day of Christ Jesus (Phil. 1:6). That’s what gave Athanasius endurance during the dark days in which he lived. That’s what will give us endurance during the dark days in which we live.

Are you really a Christian? You’ll know you’re a Christian if you remain in Christ until the end.

**Benediction**

Jude 17-25

17 But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. 18 They said to you, “In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.” 19 It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. 20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit,
21 keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. 22 And have mercy on those who doubt; 23 save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

24 Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, 25 to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.
References


Abide definition is - to bear patiently; tolerate. How to use abide in a sentence. Did You Know? Synonym Discussion of abide.

1: to remain stable or fixed in a state a love that abided with him all his days.
2: to continue in a place: sojourn will abide in the house of the Lord. abide by.
1: to conform to abide by the rules. Define abide. abide synonyms, abide pronunciation, abide translation, English dictionary definition of abide. v. a·bode or a·bid·ed , a·bid·ing , a·bides v. tr. 1. To put up with; tolerate: can't abide such incompetence. See Synonyms at endure.
2. To wait patiently...Abide - definition of abide by The Free Dictionary.