

# Active Abiding

Are we up to date with Jesus? No, I'm not asking "Is the Christian message up to date? Is the gospel relevant today?" Hopefully, we know the answer to that!

But are we personally up to date with what the Lord Jesus has done for us? Over the last five sessions together, we have been looking at 'the finished work of Christ' and how our own experience is intimately linked with what the Lord Jesus accomplished in his death, burial, resurrection and ascension. The burning question for each of us is this: Are we learning to live in the good of what he has done for us?

No, I am not asking whether we have got it all sewn up, whether we have 'arrived' and are now continually and continuously living a life of constant and close walking with the Lord, with no failures and no 'gaps' in our experience! It is now more than 50 years since I began to see the truth of being '**in Christ**' and I know that I still fail and need to go on growing and learning. As a friend said several years ago: "There is always MORE !"

But the question remains: Are we learning? Have we set out on that exciting journey of discovery of what it means to be **in Christ** ?

Or does it all look like so much theory, just a nice collection of information that is not really much use to us in our practical daily lives?

Or are we somewhere in between those places? Not really experiencing much of the reality of being in Christ, but not writing it off either? Perhaps wanting to move into a new dimension of Christian living but not really knowing how to get started? Maybe, if the truth be known, deeply hungry for spiritual reality and a meaningful 'walk with God', something that seems very desirable but somehow out of reach?

Several times, I have recommended the book *The Normal Christian Life* by Watchman Nee. When I first saw that title, I was a bit put off. I thought "this book must be about living an **ordinary** Christian life". Even as a young teenage believer, I didn't want to live a Christian life that was just ordinary – somehow, I knew there must be more! I had mixed up 'normal' with 'ordinary'! If you have read the book, you will know that what the author describes as 'normal' is far from ordinary.

Are you prepared to settle for an 'ordinary' Christian life, just the same as it has always been, the same old routines, same old failures, same old emptiness? Or have you glimpsed what the Lord has in store for **all of us** ?

If so, are you asking the next important question: **How?**

How can I experience God's forgiveness?

How can I experience at least **some** level of victory in the face of temptation?

How can I escape from religious legalism?

How can I start to live a life that really pleases God?

How can I know the power of the Holy Spirit in my life?

Have we spent time in prayer asking God to give us some or all of these things?

Or have we begun to see that **he has already given us all that we need in the Lord Jesus – ?**

". . . by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption . . ." **1 Corinthians 1:30**

"God makes it quite clear in his Word that he has only one answer to every human need – his Son, Jesus Christ . . . It will help us greatly, and save us from much confusion, if we keep constantly before us this fact, that God will answer all our questions in one way and one way only, namely, by showing us more of his Son." Watchman Nee in *The Normal Christian Life*, chapter 1.

Do we find ourselves in the same position as Hudson Taylor, writing to his sister in 1869: "All the time I felt assured that there was in Christ all I needed, but the practical question was how to get it *out*." – ?

Last time, we looked at the question of giving and receiving. There is a difference between being given something and receiving it. I gave Mike an envelope with a £10 note in it. The envelope was given to him and it had his name on it, but it was only when he opened it that he actually **received** what I had

**already given** to him. The £10 note was already his, but he didn't know it. Once he saw that it was his, he had no difficulty in receiving it and making use of it!

We applied that to the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out on all believers, but it applies to all the aspects of our inheritance in Jesus. Once we see that it is ours, that our heavenly Father has already given it to us by virtue of the fact that he has placed us in his Son, taking hold of it (whatever the particular issue) is the obvious thing that we do.

F.B. Meyer, a well-known preacher and teacher from the late 1800s and early 1900s, used to say "Do not pray so much, but take." In other words, God has already given us what we need in Jesus, so we don't need to keep asking him to give us what he has already given!

The Lord Jesus told his disciples *"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me. 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 15:4-5**)

'Abide' means 'stay' and the Greek word has the same breadth of meaning as our English word. It can mean 'don't move' – like commanding a dog to 'stay!' It can mean 'remain' or 'endure' – a sense of being unchanged. It can also mean 'live here', as it does when we invite a friend to come and stay with us, and in fact this is probably the commonest way that this word is used in the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke & John as they tell the history of Jesus' life and ministry.

With that in mind, what Jesus says in **John 14:10** will have been an eye-opener for his disciples, and particularly for Philip, who had just asked Jesus to reveal the Father to them: *"Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own initiative, but the Father abiding in me does his works."* Jesus was saying that his life was joined with the life of God the Father and that it was the Father working in him who performed the miracles and gave Jesus the words to speak.

Just a little later, in the same long conversation between the 'Last Supper' Passover feast and his arrest in Gethsemane, Jesus tells his followers to abide in him, and he in them (**John 15:4-5**). The same words, with the same meaning as when he was talking about his intimate relationship with his Father! He tells us to have the same relationship with him that he has with the Father – Wow!

And a few minutes after that, when his friend John overhears Jesus talking with his Father, he hears him say *"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in me through their word; that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me."* (**John 17:20-21**) The word translated 'even as' means 'in exactly the same way'. So it's not just Jesus and his Father, not just the eleven disciples, but **all of us who believe in him**. Wow again!

So then, **how** can we abide in the Lord Jesus? Perhaps, more realistically, **how can we start learning to abide in him?**

'Abide' means 'stay'; we know that. Jesus is telling us to stay in him. You can't stay somewhere unless you are already there. So he is talking to those who are already in him.

Is that us? How did we get there? Two parts of the answer to that: 1) We believed, we trusted 'into' him. The Greek word for believing **in** Jesus is usually the word for 'into' or 'onto'. A sense of movement or at least a change of position. 2) God the Father has placed us in Christ. We keep coming back to **1 Corinthians 1:30**! It is our Father who has placed us in Christ!

Think back to Mike, the envelope and the £10 note. Once he saw what was in the envelope, Mike had no problem taking hold of it. He knew it was for him because his name was on the envelope and, as soon as he saw it, he knew he could make good use of a £10 note !!!

If I had told Mike what was in the envelope before I gave it to him, he would certainly have opened it just as fast, so that he could get hold of that £10 note.

We have been looking at a number of basic things that we have been given because we are **in Christ**. If you know that you have put your trust in the Lord Jesus, it's like having your name on the envelope. Just in case you are in any doubt, **1 Corinthians 1:30** underlines it for you: *"by His doing you are in Christ Jesus"* or, as the NIV has it, *"It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus"*. You are in Christ,

so all the contents of the 'envelope' are yours – take hold of them! See **Ephesians 1:3** if you don't believe me!

I expect that Mike's £10 was spent quite quickly, but imagine what it would have been like if he had found £10,000 in that envelope. I think he would probably have taken time to discover and decide how he would spend it. Or . . .

. . . if, instead of money, inside the envelope had been the title deeds of a magnificent house, showing that it belonged to him, with all its spacious rooms, land and facilities. That would certainly take time to explore! Discovering every little detail would just go on adding to the enjoyment of receiving the gift in the first place. In fact, after a few years of living in the house, he would probably realise that he had not really fully understood this inheritance at first, but more time and more exploring were making it more and more precious to him.

Which brings us back to **abiding** – staying, dwelling, making our home in Christ. If we live somewhere, even just for a short visit, we normally like to find out all that is available to us in this place and then, having found out, we want to make use of it. For example, if you rent a holiday cottage and find that it has its own swimming pool, you won't hesitate to make use of it, will you? It's yours for the week, it's included, it's yours – of course you will!

So, have you begun to realise that you are in Christ? Have you begun to see some of the things that are yours in him? Have you started to take hold of them, to make use of them? Have you realised that the questions we looked at earlier have all been answered in Jesus?

**How can I experience God's forgiveness?** Not just once, but over and over again as I realise my failure and confess it, I find that Jesus shed his blood for me and I am forgiven.

**How can I experience at least some level of victory in the face of temptation?** God tells me that, because I am in Christ, my old life is dead and I don't **need** to go on failing; I can hide in Jesus' death.

**How can I escape from religious legalism?** Because I am included in Jesus' death, I am dead to law. I am not subject to religious laws and expectations, even the ones I have manufactured for myself!

**How can I start to live a life that really pleases God?** My old life has no hope of pleasing God, however hard I try, but I have been given a new life by the Holy Spirit living inside me – sharing in the resurrection life of Jesus – and that life is definitely pleasing to God!

**How can I know the power of the Holy Spirit in my life?** The Holy Spirit has been poured out on the Church **because** Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father. I am joined to him and this also is part of my inheritance, including spiritual gifts and especially the way that the Holy Spirit reveals more of Jesus to me. Yes, this is definitely something for US, not just for ME !

*"Abide in me, and I in you"* says the Lord Jesus. Your life is joined to his, just like his life is joined to the Father's. The Holy Spirit has begun to show you your inheritance, the things that are yours because you are in him. Take hold of them!

There is so much! If we had been given that enormous house, we might not find everything that was in it – even after years of living in it – if we didn't have some help from someone who already knew it from top to bottom . . .

. . . and that is one of the things that the Holy Spirit specialises in doing!

Jesus said: *"but when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth . . ."* (**John 16:13**) A guide is someone who comes with you, shows you the way and all the features of the place that you are exploring.

Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth: *"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God."* (**1 Corinthians 2:12**)

. . . and to those in Ephesus: *"For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe."* (**Ephesians 1:15-19**) Paul was praying that they would see, and go on seeing, more and

more of their inheritance.

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Years ago, when I first began to see clearly that God had placed me in Christ, I had just come through a long period of spiritual hunger, so I knew that there were many things that I had needed. I began to find that my needs were met in him, and so it was natural to say ‘thank you’ to my Father again and again for his provision. And so I found myself ‘taking my stand’ on what I was discovering that he had given me in Christ, taking hold of forgiveness when I needed it, taking hold of being dead to sin, failure and legalism, embracing the resurrection life of Jesus in me because I was joined to his resurrection as well as to his death and rejoicing in the fact that the Holy Spirit was poured out on me because I was joined to the One who was seated at his right hand. I started thanking Father on a daily basis for the fact that he had placed me in his Son, with the solid foundations of the ‘finished work of Christ’ – his shed blood, his broken body, his burial, his resurrection and his ascension and glorification – and the practical implications in my life.

I was starting to learn to abide. To take hold of what is mine in Jesus, to rely on the Holy Spirit to guide me into more truth that I had not seen before.

‘Abiding’ had always seemed so passive before, but now I began to see that it was a command that the Lord Jesus gave us so that we would really receive (= take hold of) more and more of the riches that are ours in him.

By the grace of God, all these years later I am still learning more of what it means to make my home in him.

*“What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits toward me?*

*I shall lift up the cup of salvation  
and call upon the name of the LORD.”*

**(Psalm 116:13-14)**

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Over these six sessions, we have looked at some of the basics of what is ours in Jesus. For me, these subjects seem like foundations, essential for every believer in their own personal spiritual growth towards maturity and effectiveness, but they really are **basics** and there is more and more for us to ‘discover’ by the revelation of the Holy Spirit.

And as we grow individually, we will begin to see that God’s purposes reach far beyond his dealings with us on a personal, one-to-one basis. Yes, we have been individually joined to Jesus, but joined for a purpose, to be part of his grand plan, part of the company of the ‘called-out ones’ who will ultimately share in ‘the kingdom of God and of his Christ’ and in the meanwhile be effective for him on this earth in our own generation.

*“I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in me through their word; that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me. The glory which you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as we are one; I in them and you in me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that you sent me, and loved them, even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, be with me where I am, so that they may see my glory which you have given me, for you loved me before the foundation of the world.”* Part of Jesus’ prayer for the Church, **John 17**.

*“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32)*

*“So if the Son will make you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36)*

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