

THE MASTER'S SEMINARY

THE JOHANNINE CONCEPT OF ABIDING

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Introduction

“Abide with me; fast falls the eventide / The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide.”¹ So begins the comforting hymn by Henry F. Lyte. But, to brusquely push past the sweetness of the lyrics, what does Lyte mean by ‘abide’? Is he asking Christ to tolerate him, wait for him, accept him, remain with him, continue with him, or dwell with him?² NT readers will instinctively turn to John 15:1-11 to explain the concept of abiding, but John 15 gives no command or plea to abide *with* Jesus; Jesus commands the believer to abide *in* Him. The confusion continues.

This warrants a careful study of the Johannine concept of abiding. This study has five parts: (1) a brief inquiry into John 15:1-11 sets the stage for the study; (2) a syntactical analysis of all Johannine uses of μένω (the word typically translated “abide” or “remain”) reveals that the *metaphorical* uses of μένω *with the preposition ἐν* are most relevant for understanding the Johannine concept of abiding; (3) an interpretation of these μένω with ἐν usages yields two seemingly contradictory definitions on what it means to abide; (4) a multi-faceted definition of Johannine abiding emerges: abiding involves both union and communion, describing what the Christian *is* and how he *lives* and has similarities with the ideal marriage; (5) an exposition of John 15:1-11 shows the coherence and consistency of this multi-faceted definition of abiding.

A First Look at John 15:1-1

Although it is not the first place that John uses μένω, John 15:1-11 contains the highest concentration of usages (11 times in 7 verses). Jesus uses a metaphor from viticulture to describe Himself and His disciples: He is the true branch, the source of life (John 15:1), and they are the

¹ Henry F. Lyte, “Abide with Me,” *Timeless Truths*, accessed October 14, 2022, https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Abide_with_Me/.

² “Abide,” *Merriam-Webster.Com Dictionary* (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), accessed October 14, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/abide>.

branches that necessarily bear much fruit if they abide in Him (15:2, 5, 8). Twice Jesus commands His disciples to abide—in Him (15:4) and in His love (15:9). But it is also possible to not abide, which has terrible, severing, fiery consequences (15:2, 6). So, the disciples are told to abide in Christ to bear much fruit (15:2, 5)—by prayer according to His words (15:7) and by keeping His commandments (15:10). Jesus speaks all this to make their joy full (15:11).

But joy can only be reached if there is understanding. The most pertinent questions for this study of Johannine abiding are as follows: (1) What does abiding in Christ mean? (2) “Abide in Me” is a command. Does that imply that one can *not* abide and still be a believer? (3) But, then Jesus says that those who do not abide are cut off and burned. Does that mean if one doesn’t abide, he is not a believer? (4) Jesus says that fruit is the result of abiding (15:2, 4), but then implies that obedience is the condition of abiding (15:10). *How* does someone abide in Christ?

A Syntactical Analysis of the Johannine Usage of μένω

The answers to the above questions can be found by focusing on the word μένω.³ In the NT, μένω is used 118 times in 102 verses.⁴ John himself uses μένω 68 times⁵ across 54 verses,⁶ with various senses: (1) to refer to dwelling in a physical location⁷ or to describe physical life⁸ and (2) metaphorically. The physical sense refers to physical inhabitation or remaining alive, and give grounding for the metaphorical usage. However, all the uses of μένω in the Johannine

³ For a full understanding of abiding, the phrase εἶναι ἐν also deserves study. See Edward S. J. Malatesta, *Interiority and Covenant: A Study of Εἶναι Ἐν and Μένειν Ἐν in the First Letter of Saint John* (AnBib 69; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1978). Derickson notes that Malatesta says μένειν ἐν includes an “enduring” sense not contained in εἶναι ἐν. Further, εἶναι ἐν is more often used to describe the mutual indwelling of God and the believer, as well as among members of the Godhead, than is μένειν ἐν. Gary W. Derickson, *First, Second, and Third John*, ed. H. Wayne House, W. Hall Harris III, and Andrew W. Pitts, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2012), 722n397.

⁴ For a helpful breakdown of the uses, see Derickson, *First, Second, and Third John*, 722–733.

⁵ 73 times if implied usages are included.

⁶ John (40 times), 1 John (24 times), 2 John (3 times), 3 John (0 times), Revelation (1 time).

⁷ John 1:32, 1:33, 1:38, 1:39, 1:39, 2:12, 4:40, 4:40, 7:9, 10:40, 11:6, 11:54, 19:31.

⁸ John 14:25, 21:22, 21:23; Rev 17:10.

epistles are clearly metaphorical,⁹ thus implying that the physical sense is not as critical for this study of Johannine abiding.¹⁰ Removing them leaves ~55 Johannine uses of μένω.¹¹

These instances can be further filtered by the preposition employed with μένω.¹² Exactly 45 instances use the preposition ἐν. This is a significant percentage (~80%) and seems to indicate that John uses μένω with ἐν somewhat formulaically.¹³ The overwhelming majority of these uses pertain to believers and the Godhead; however, 4 pertain to unbelievers, which will be excluded from the study, simply for the sake of focus.¹⁴ The remaining 41 instances of metaphorical usages μένω with ἐν can be categorized as shown in Table 1 below. The data of the table will be used in the next section to contend for a definition of Johannine abiding.

Row	Type of Abiding	Verses	#
1	Trinitarian Relations	John 14:10, 15:10	2
2	Believer & Christ	John 6:56 (2x), 15:4 (4), 15:5, 15:7; 1 John 2:6, 2:24, 2:28, 3:6	13
3	Believer & the Father	1 John 2:24, 2:27, 3:24 (2x), 4:12, 4:13, 4:15 (2x), 4:16 (2x)	10
4	Believer & the Spirit	1 John 2:27, 3:9	2
5	Believer & the teaching (or Word or message) of God	John 5:38, 8:31, 15:7, 1 John 2:14, 2:24 (2x), 2 John 9 (2x)	8
6	Believer in love [of God]	John 15:9, 15:10; 1 John 3:17, 4:16	4
7	Believer in light	1 John 2:10	1

⁹ Derickson, *First, Second, and Third John*, 725.

¹⁰ For a brief summary of the physical sense of μένω, see Christopher David Bass, “A Johannine Perspective of the Human Responsibility to Persevere in the Faith Through the Use of ΜΕΝΩ and Other Related Motifs,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 69 (2007): 307.

¹¹ Numbers are approximate because some usages are debatable whether they are physical or metaphorical.

¹² Three instances use no preposition (John 9:41, 12:24, 15:16); in these verses, sin, a grain of wheat, and fruit are the inanimate objects that abide. Four use εις (John 6:27, 8:35, 12:34; 1 John 2:17); in these verses, all the objects abide *to eternal life*. One uses ἐπί (John 3:36); God’s wrath abides on an unbeliever. And another uses παρά (John 14:17); the Spirit abides with believers. These instances contribute to the Johannine concept of abiding in some way, yet they will not be the focus of this study simply because of their relative infrequency.

¹³ μένειν ἐν has semantic overlap with εἶναι ἐν, but for brevity, this study will focus only on μένειν ἐν. See Bass, “Human Responsibility,” 308n10.

¹⁴ Unbelievers abide in darkness (John 12:46), do not abide in Jesus (15:6), abide in death (1 John 3:14), and does not have eternal life abiding in him (3:15).

¹⁵ Rows 1-4 use “&” to symbolize that the abiding is reciprocal in nature. “A abides in B & B abides in A.” Rows 6- 8 are one directional. See section ‘Synthesis of a Definition of Johannine Abiding’ below.

8	Truth in the believer	2 John 1:2	1
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An Analysis of the Johannine Usages of μένω with ἐν

The data of Table 1 can now be used to derive a definition of Johannine abiding.

Trinitarian Unity: The Foundation of Abiding

Table 1, Row 1 lists the verses regarding Trinitarian abiding: the Father eternally abides in Christ (John 14:10), and Christ eternally abides in the Father's love (15:10).^{16,17} This is foundational to understanding what a believer's abiding in God is. The paradigm,¹⁸ "the type and origin,"¹⁹ for disciples abiding in Christ is the inter-mutual abiding within the Godhead, the unchanging, unbroken, unrestrained, perfect-in-all-things abiding. "It is therefore a momentous thing...to think of God "abiding" with someone. It carries overtones of the very identity of God in his Trinitarian being."²⁰ Assuredly, the abiding eternally inherent to the Persons of the Trinity is not *equivalent* to believer's abiding in the Godhead, but it is the pattern after which believer's abiding is made.

Abiding as Permanent Union?

This abiding in the Godhead alludes to one of the most characteristic marks of Johannine abiding: "mutuality, or reciprocity."²¹ Table 1, Rows 2-5 show that if the believer abides in A, then A also abides in the believer, where 'A' is the Father, the Son, the Spirit, or the teaching. If

¹⁶ The Son abiding in the Father's love is essentially equivalent to abiding in the Father's Person.

¹⁷ Certainly, the Spirit is involved as well, even if not explicitly mentioned by μένω with ἐν.

¹⁸ Bass, "Human Responsibility," 307.

¹⁹ Edward W. Klink III, *John*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 655. Also "The intimacy between Jesus Christ and the believer is an intimacy paralleled in some respects by the intimacy between Jesus and his Father." D. A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus: An Exposition of John 14-17* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 92.

²⁰ Robert W. Yarbrough, *1, 2, 3, John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 251.

²¹ Derickson, *First, Second, and Third John*, 729.

the promises are to be believed, it is *impossible* for a believer to abide in A, and yet A *not* abide in the believer. This indicates that there is a component to abiding that inherently reciprocal.

This mutual abiding is often promised in the same breath. He who partakes of Christ mutually abides²² (John 6:56). He who keeps God’s commandments mutual abides (1 John 3:24). The gift of the Spirit is evidence of mutual abiding (1 John 4:13). Whoever confessed that Jesus is the Son of God mutual abides (4:15). He who abides in love mutually abides (4:16).

Recognizing this, those who hold to the abiding as *union* view say that abiding “is existence in God perpetuated; it is union made restful and secure.”²³ This the view that Johannine abiding is the active, constant, *unbreakable* union of the believer with God, founded upon the perfect abiding union of the Godhead. This view provides a reasonable explanation for why John’s usages of μένω with ἐν are always in the active voice and almost always in the present tense; the mutual abiding is active and continual. In this view, “[b]elief and love are not the conditions of the indwelling, but the tests and evidences of it.”²⁴ Indeed, this divine indwelling *causes* the fruits of Christian behavior.²⁵ Thus, he who abides in God will never cease to abide in God, because God Himself abides in him.

However, verses like 1 John 3:24 fly in the face of such a simple solution: “The one who *keeps His commandments* abides in Him, and He in him.”²⁶ If obedience is not a condition here, what is it? This means mutual abiding cannot be unbreakable; there must be a conditional aspect.

²² I use the term “mutually abide” as shorthand for “he abides in God and God abides in him.”

²³ G. G. Findlay, *Fellowship in the Life Eternal* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 146. Quoted in Derickson, *First, Second, and Third John*, 727.

²⁴ Commenting on this verse, Stott admits “the *condition* of continuous mutual indwelling obedience; although obedience is also the issue and evidence of the indwelling.” John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 19, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 151–152.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 19:168.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 19:151–152. Emphasis added.

Abiding as Conditional Communion?

The conditionality of abiding (c.f. 1 John 3:24) seems to indicate that Johannine abiding is better viewed as fellowship or communion, a relationship *subject to change*. Put bluntly, “mutual abiding is predicated on the obedience of the believer.”²⁷

The Conditionality of Abiding

The clearest proof of the conditionality of abiding are the commands to abide. Μένω in the imperative mood with ἐν is used 4 times: believers are commanded to abide in Christ (John 15:4; 1 John 2:24, 2:27, 2:28), in Christ’s love (John 15:9), and to have the message of Christ abide in them (1 John 2:24). A command has no sense of certainty; one may either obey or disobey, and the consequences are contingent upon their choice.²⁸

In addition, most of the Johannine uses of μένω with ἐν are in conditional statements (33 times).²⁹ This indicates that it is both possible for someone to abide and possible to not abide. The 6 instances of μένω in the subjunctive mood with ἐν show this clearly: only *if* the branch abides in the vine, can it produce fruit (15:4); *if* one abides in Christ’s word, he is a true disciple (John 8:31); only *if* one abides in Christ, can he bear fruit (15:4); *if* the message of Christ abides in the one, he will abide in the Son and in the Father (1 John 2:24); *if* one abides in Christ and *if* His Words abide in him, whatever he asks will be done [by God] (15:7). The subjunctive mood is used to indicate uncertain outcomes;³⁰ μένω with ἐν is therefore *the condition* for true discipleship, fruit bearing, answered prayers, and, most importantly, abiding in the Godhead.

²⁷ Derickson, *First, Second, and Third John*, 733.

²⁸ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 485–493.

²⁹ Here, I am using the broadest definition of a logical conditional sentence, not only those that follow a certain structure (i.e. using εἰ or ἐάν). Wallace lists three types of conditional sentences: (1) cause-effect, (2) evidence-inference, (3) equivalence. See *Ibid.*, 682–684.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 461–480.

Μένω with ἐν is used 19 times in the apodosis, as the result of a condition.³¹ These examples are the most pertinent: abiding in the Son and the Father depends on Christ's teaching abiding (1 Jn 2:24), mutual abiding depends on keeping His commandments (3:24), abiding in God depends on loving one another (4:12), mutual abiding is dependent on confessing Jesus as the Son of God (4:15), mutual abiding is dependent on abiding in love (4:16).

The Dimensions of Obedience: Light, Truth, and Love

In his epistles, John organizes the conditions for abiding into three dimensions of obedience: light (Table 1, Row 7), love (Row 6), and truth (Row 8).³² **Light** is the moral/ethical dimension; according to John, all of the following describe the one who truly abides: he bears fruit (John 15:4, 5), keeps Christ/God's commandments (1 John 3:24), walks as Christ walked (1 John 2:6), overcomes the evil one (1 John 2:14), and is not characterized by sin (1 John 3:6, 9). **Love** is the relational dimension; John says necessarily he who abides has the Father and the Son (2 John 9), has the Spirit (1 John 4:13), eats Christ's flesh and drinks His blood (John 6:56), has his prayers answered (John 15:7), has confidence at Christ's appearing (1 John 2:28), loves the brethren (1 John 2:10, 4:12), opens his heart to his brother in need (1 John 3:17). **Truth** is the doctrinal/faith dimension; John says that he who abides believes in Christ (John 5:38), confesses that Jesus is the Son of God (1 John 4:15), is taught by the Spirit (1 John 2:27). According to this view of abiding as communion, one must abide in all three dimensions of light, truth, and love to truly abide in God.

³¹ John 5:38, 6:56 (2x), 15:4, 15:10; 1 John 2:10, 2:14, 2:24 (3x), 3:17, 3:24 (2x), 4:12, 4:13, 4:15 (2x), 4:16 (2x).

³² See Yarbrough, *I, 2, 3, John*, 72–75. He calls these three axes the “Pistic-Ethical-Agaptic” dimensions of knowing God, corresponding to my truth, moral/behavioral, love/relational trifacta. Stott also identifies a tripartite test, which he identifies as “belief in Christ, love for the brothers and moral righteousness.” Stott, *The Letters of John*, 19:152.

Towards a Definition of Johannine Abiding

Even after an extensive word study, the Johannine concept of abiding is still “not easy to define.”³³ But distinguishing, while not separating, these two facets of abiding is the key to a multifaced, satisfying definition of abiding.

Union or Communion?

There seems to be an inherent contradiction. On the one hand, Johannine abiding is founded upon perfect, unbroken, *permanent* Trinitarian mutual abiding. The book of 1 John was written to assure believers that they do truly abide in God: they confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and therefore should be confident that they mutual abide (4:15); the Holy Spirit was given to them that so that they can say “we know that we abide in Him and He in us” (3:24, 4:13).³⁴ Yet, on the other hand, abiding seems to be *conditional*, predicted upon whether or not one acts, believes, and loves rightly: “But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? [Implied answer: it doesn’t!]” (1 John 3:17). Is then abiding dependent upon God’s unchanging perfection and love, or on the believer’s temperamental performance? Or somehow both?

John’s usages of μένω with ἐν may provide a clue. While he speaks of how the believer *mutually* (reciprocally) abides with Christ, the Father, the Spirit, and the teaching (Table 1, Rows 2-5), he only says that the believer abides in the light and in love *unilaterally* (Rows 6-7).³⁵ “The one who loves his brother abides in the light” (1 John 2:10); “the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (4:16). Never is light or love explicitly said to abide in the

³³ Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 143.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ This claim technically ignores 1 John 3:17, where John implies that the love of God *ought to* abide in a believer. But since it is posed as a rhetorical question to expose a loveless *unbeliever*, the claim is still valid.

believer. Again, the believer *unilaterally* dwells in the light and in the love.

John easily *could* have said that light and love abide in the believer. He is the same NT author to write, “God is light” (1 John 1:5) and “God is love” (1 John 4:8), which are exceptional simply because of their claim and also because these are the only instances in 1 John where God is equivalated with a nominative noun. And yet, John refrains from indicating that a believer’s abiding in light and abiding in love are mutual. This could be John’s way of differentiating the abiding in Christ, the Father, the teaching, and the Spirit from the abiding in the three dimensions of light, love, and truth.³⁶ Apparently, mutual abiding is distinct from unilateral abiding.

The three dimensions of light (moral dimension), love (relational dimension), and truth (doctrinal dimension) are often said to be the conditions of abiding. As quoted above, “mutual abiding is predicated on the obedience of the believer.”³⁷ But, if God *is* light and God *is* love, when believers obey (abide in light, love, and truth) these are practically equivalent to abiding in God. This implies that the conditional statements of abiding (as described above) should not be viewed as conditionals of cause-effect, but rather correlation and equivalence. In this view, 1 John 3:24 shouldn’t be read as “if you want to abide in God, you have to keep God’s commandments” (making obedience the condition of abiding) but rather, “What does someone who abides in God look like? He keeps God’s commandments.” This views obedience not only as the evidence of true abiding but more so the *necessary fact* of someone who abides in God). Then, the many ‘conditions’ of abiding are not gateways to begin mutual abiding (to enter and to leave) but rather the characteristics, *the necessary facts*, of true mutual abiding.

This way union (mutual abiding in God) and communion (abiding in light, love, truth) are

³⁶ Although John doesn’t explicitly say “God is truth” he does say “God is true” (John 3:33) and that Christ is “the truth” (14:6) and “full of... truth” (1:14). The truth dimension is assumed for the sake of argument.

³⁷ Derickson, *First, Second, and Third John*, 733.

not contradicting views of Johannine abiding but are both *necessary facets*. This will be summarized and illustrated below.

A Definition of Johannine Abiding: Union *and* Communion

John doesn't see a tension between the poles of union and communion because there isn't one. The Johannine concept of abiding includes *both* facets of union and communion, having an ontological component of persisting, *mutual* relationship (union) *and* a functional, *manifested* component of that relationship (communion). Or, more simply, the Johannine concept of abiding defines both what the Christian *is* and how he *lives out* what he is. In this view, it is not possible for a true Christian to cease to abide in the *union* sense, but it is possible for him to cease to abide in the *communion* sense by some deficiency in light, love, or truth.

Idealized Marriage as an Illustration of Johannine Abiding

This union-communion conception of Johannine abiding is better understood through illustration. The idealized marriage relationship has many similarities to abiding. First, to marry is inherently a reciprocal act, just like Johannine abiding. When a man marries a woman, the woman also, by necessity, marries the man. As a married couple, they now share not only a last name, but are *united* one flesh (Gen 2:24) in a *reciprocal* relationship. Their status as 'married' is active, constant, and unbreakable;³⁸ this entails the union aspects of abiding.

Yet, secondly, marriage is more union; it is also communion. 'Married' is now the couple's shared identity and becomes a status that shapes every part of their lives. Everything about the man now affects the woman, and everything about the woman now affects the man. As the man strengthens his marriage, so too does the woman's marriage strengthen—and visa versa.

³⁸ Remember, an *idealized* marriage relationship!

There are *necessary* acts that *manifest* the marriage relationship. If a husband cherishes his wife as his own body (Eph 5:28), provides her nourishment and security (1 Tim 5:8), understands and honors her (1 Peter 3:7), he *demonstrates* his love for her. If he truly loves her, he will surely do such things. If a wife respects her husband (Titus 2:5, c.f. Eph 5:22, 1 Tim 2:11-15), works excellently in the home and marketplace (Prov 31:10- 31), and builds their household with wisdom (Prov 14:1), she *demonstrates* her love for him. If she truly loves him, she will surely do such things.

However, two truths must be held in mind about these demonstrations of love. First, these acts are *not* the foundation of the marriage, nor do they *cause* the marriage; rather they are necessary manifestations of the reality of their marriage relationship. Love unmanifested is not love at all. As John wrote, "...let us **not love** with **word** or with tongue, but **in deed** and truth" (1 John 3:18, c.f. James 2:15-16). And second, without these necessary acts, the marriage suffers, and maybe even dies. If a husband neglects his wife, and fails to do what is required of him, their status is technically still 'married' and yet their relationship deteriorates. He can proclaim his love by his lips, but his deeds tell the real story. It may even be that his neglect will de facto terminate the marriage relationship (1 Cor 7:15). Or, as John would put it, "If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for **the one who does not love his brother** whom he has seen, **cannot love God** whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20 c.f. 3:14).

Thus, abiding is like marriage. Both have facets of both a steadfast covenant (union) and a living relationship with necessary acts of love (communion). The union is the foundation for the communion and yet the communion is the necessary expression and nourishment of the union. One ought not to exist without the other; the union is not founded upon the communion, yet a degradation of the communion threatens the integrity of the union. A believer can therefore

both abide and not abide—abide in the union sense because he is held by the power of God—and yet not abide in the communion sense because of his sin. But, of course, this is contrary to who he is. A Christian ought to commune with God in obedience because of his union with God. In fact, he who mutually abides with God (union) *necessarily* abides in light and love (communion). This fact has both an imperatival force and definitional force, just like the sentence, “A husband loves his wife.” He ought to, because that is what he is.

A Brief Exposition of John 15:1-11

With this definition, the questions raised earlier about John 15:1-11 can be answered satisfactorily. This brief exposition only seeks to illuminate the facets pertinent to abiding.

Abiding in Christ, the true vine from which all life comes (15:1), means is “the sine qua non of Christian discipleship.”³⁹ Those who do *not* abide, therefore, are those who are not believers and are only “in [Christ]” (15:2) in a superficial, lifeless way, having “an external association with Christ that is not matched by an internal, spiritual union [mutual abiding],”⁴⁰ the supreme example of which is Judas Iscariot.⁴¹ Because of the abiding which leads to fruit is a necessary fact of a Christian, “there are no true Christians without some measure of fruit.”⁴²

But the disciples are already fruitful and pruned (15:3) by Christ’s word.⁴³ Indeed, Christ has “so deeply bound them to himself [mutual abiding?] by his word... they are able and ready

³⁹ Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12–21*, vol. 25B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 142.

⁴⁰ J. Carl Laney, *John*, Moody Gospel Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 272.

⁴¹ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 515.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ “There are plays on words in the Greek... 'he removes' is *airei* and 'he prunes' is *kathairei*. Moreover, *kathairei* can also mean 'he cleanses' and is linked with 'clean' in verse 3: 'you are *katharoi*'. F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1983), 308.

to do his word and to bear fruit [communion?].”⁴⁴ The facet of abiding emphasized here in John 15:1-3 is union.

Out of this union, Christ then commands the disciples to abide in Him (μείνατε ἐν ἐμοί) (15:4) to bear much fruit. The aorist imperative μείνατε is a constative, which stresses priority, rather than ingressive, which focuses on *beginning* the act.⁴⁵ As an imperative, it places “the responsibility of abiding in Christ is placed squarely upon man's shoulders.”⁴⁶ The communion facet of abiding is commanded here; fruit bearing is in proportion to how one walks in light, love, and truth. Yes, the power comes from the vine, but the exercise of that spiritual life comes through obedience.

The second phrase καὶ γὰρ ἐν ὑμῖν (15:4) can be interpreted in various ways, and there is little consensus.⁴⁷ It is obvious that the verb μένω is implied, and that it has some bearing on prior command, but it is unclear how. Yet, over-scrutinizing this relationship may miss the point. “The lack of the verb in the second clause... implies” that abiding joins the participants as one in

⁴⁴ Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John: A Theological Commentary*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 517.

⁴⁵ Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, 720–721. Also Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 1000. “The present tense of the verb [μένω] in 15:5-6 suggests that John refers not simply to the moment of entering God's presence in Christ (14:6) but continued dependence on him, as one might continue to dwell in a shelter or tabernacle, or as the branch continues to depend on the vine. To continue to dwell is to persevere in keeping Jesus' commandments (14:21-23; 1John 3:24), especially to love one another (13:34-35; 15:10-12).

⁴⁶ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Gospel According to John*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953), 299.

⁴⁷ There are three dominant views: “(a) καὶ introduces a comparison: abide in me, as I abide in you. (b) καὶ introduces the apodosis of a conditional sentence, the protasis of which is expressed by an imperative (Robertson, 948f): if you abide in me, I will abide in you. ... (c) ...[taking] the two balanced clauses very closely together: let there be mutual indwelling. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978), 474.

View (a): J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 804.

View (b): Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 516.

View (c): Barrett, Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1984), 670. Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John: The Authorised Version* (Watford, Hertfordshire: Taylor Garnett Evans & Co. Ltd, 1958), 217.

union.⁴⁸ Thus, in the command, Jesus commands the disciples to commune, and yet in the very next breath, invokes union! This shows the inseparability of the facets, and transitions to His reminder in 15:4b-5 that “mutual indwelling [abiding] is not something the disciples can simply will into being...The Vine is the cause of this mutually indwelling existence.”⁴⁹

Fruitfulness comes by abiding in Christ, as the fruit of the branch comes from “organic union” with the vine (15:4b-5).⁵⁰ This provides the backdrop for both a warning and a promise: The warning: the one who does not abide in Christ, who is taken away by the Father (15:2), is thrown away and dries up, and then gathered, cast into the fire, and burned (15:6). The promise: he one who abides in Christ and who has His words (ῥήματά) abiding in him can ask whatever he wishes and it will be done [by God] for him (15:7). Both the warning and the promise are third class conditional sentences, indicating the real logical consequences for abiding and not abiding, and the real choice the disciples are presented with.⁵¹ The warning means that those who do not commune with God are shown to be those who are not in union with Him, and thus necessarily are dead and judged. It does not mean that lack of communion can make a believer lose his union; rather such exposes the person as not being a believer at all. The promise means that those truly communing in God must bear fruit (namely godly prayers) by nature of their union. This fruitfulness glorifies God and comes as a necessary part of being Jesus’ disciples (15:8).

Christ continues by encouraging the disciples with His divine, indeed Trinitarian, love (15:9a), and then quickly follows with a command to abide in that love (μείνατε ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ τῇ

⁴⁸ Klink III, *John*, 653.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 653.

⁵⁰ Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 2:999.

⁵¹ Derickson, *First, Second, and Third John*, 730–731.

ἐμῆ) (15:9b). This should be seen as equivalent to the command in 15:4, commanding the communion facet of abiding. It is not the “entrance into the act of remaining [abiding]” that is in view here, but the “continued enjoyment of that love [which] turns, at least in part, on our response to it.”⁵² The expected response is simple: keeping Christ’s commandments (15:10).

Jesus draws a parallel between a believer’s obedience to Him and His own obedience to the Father that clarifies the kind of abiding in view. Christ’s obedience is not the *cause* of His abiding in the Father’s love, nor that which merits the Father’s love; surely that would render the intra-Trinitarian love transactional, and no longer love. In the same way, it is not a believer’s love for God that “earns his love, nor is that love so sullen and miserly that it must be wrenched from him in a kind of moral bribery.”⁵³ Rather, Christ’s love “*precedes... accompanies... follows* our love, and ...[thus] *creates* more love toward him.”⁵⁴ Obedience is a necessary fact of love, an essential component that flows out of that love, manifests that love, and strengthens that love.⁵⁵

Christ ends this pericope by stating His purpose: the fullness of abiding joy in them. He does not intend for them to fear, but rather persevere with “delight... [as] authentic disciples... even though they may face pain or persecution.”⁵⁶

Conclusion

Johannine abiding not simplistic, but multifaceted, and better pictured as a constellation of ideas, where if one idea is pulled, all the other ideas come with it. Foundational to it is union with God, a persisting, mutual abiding that *defines* what the Christian is. The second facet of

⁵² Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 520.

⁵³ Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus: An Exposition of John 14-17*, 95. Carson cites 1 John 3:16, 1 John 4:10 as evidence of the a priori love of God for man.

⁵⁴ Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Gospel According to John*, 303. Emphasis in original. Also Klink III, *John*, 655. Also Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 2:1003.

⁵⁵ “...love and obedience are mutually dependent. Love arises out of obedience, obedience out of love.” Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 476.

⁵⁶ Borchert, *John 12–21*, 25B:147.

abiding is communion with a God, an enjoyment, strengthening, and necessary fact of that union, manifested by the believer in the dimensions of light, love, and truth—in other words, how the believer *lives* as a Christian. These two facets of union and communion ought not be separated—either in understanding or in life. Abiding is both promised (union) and commanded (communion), but while union never changes, communion may ebb via sin and flow via obedience. Yet, heed the warning; those who fail to commune show themselves as never having union with God. Those who commune in light, love, and truth enjoy the fruit of their union.

More could be said about the Johannine concept of abiding; this study simply taken one cup from the ocean of truth. But perhaps such an admission is appropriate. Just as no one can plumb the depths of the Person and work of Christ (John 21:24-25), so neither can any mind reach the depths of the sublime realities of abiding in God.

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