First John, #6 Pastor Phil Congdon

Abiding Leads to Boldness!

1 John 2.28

We've arrived at the heart of 1 John – living a life that leads to boldness when we stand before Christ! Confessing our sins leads to intimacy with God, and we've been warned against the antichrists. Now we look ahead to the Judgment Seat of Christ, and getting ready for that day!

Where We're Going (2.28-4.19)

Abiding in Christ leads to Confidence at His Coming (2.28; 4.17-19)
Abiding in Christ leads to Righteousness, never to sin (2.29-3.10a)
Abiding in Christ leads us to have love for one another (3.10b-23)
Abiding in Christ leads to God's Spirit controlling us (3.24-4.16)

The Theme Verse for the Heart of First John (2.28)

Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.

- The audience: "Little children"
- The exhortation: "Abide in Him"
- The focus: "When He appears…at His coming"
- The objective: "Have confidence and not…shame"



1 John 2.28

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A recent Barna research study asked 1,500 U.S. teens ages 13-18 – the last members of Gen Z, and the first members of Gen Alpha – about the pressure they feel to have answers to some of life's biggest questions. The results of that study are fascinating. Young people feel an urgency to answer the deepest questions of life at the same time as they're trying to figure out how to afford adulthood. Questions like: Will we even have a future? How do I know what's true? Will anyone actually show up for me? Is God even there?

Young people are not alone in asking these questions. We're all living in an "AI" or "SI" (super intelligence) age. People feel like we're on the cusp of a new frontier, but no one seems to know where it's heading, or what it will mean. You can't even tell if a video you watch online is real or AI-generated today! What is truth? But one thing is becoming clear: All the gigabytes in the world can't answer life's ultimate questions. What is 'true'?

Into this dark vacuum of meaninglessness, the message of the Bible shines an eternal light. The metanarrative of history unfolds from Genesis to Revelation. God created a perfect world and put mankind in it. Man rebelled against God and the world fell under a curse of sin and death. To free us from this curse, God sent His Son Jesus, who came to earth, lived a sinless life, then sacrificed His life on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin. Having paid the price for our freedom,

Jesus rose again, victorious over sin and death. Everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sin and the free gift of eternal life. Life is no longer an accident of evolution. We aren't just space dust blowing through time. There is an eternal future coming. But what now?

Let's say you've believed in Jesus as your Savior. You were convicted that you were a sinner. You heard that God loved you, and Jesus died for you. You put your trust in Christ as your Savior, and now you're in the family of God. You know that if you die, you will have eternal life with God. As the Bible puts it, you will be *absent from the body*, but *present with the Lord*. That's a wonderful truth!

But for many Christians, this raises a new question – and it nags at them. *What now? Now that I have eternal life, what's left for me in this world? Am I just marking time until I die and go to heaven? To adapt from Barna's survey, do we have a future in this life? What is my purpose here and now?*

The answer to this question is actually revealed in the book of Genesis. Genesis 3 tells us that God walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Far from the impersonal God of the deists who has nothing to do with His creation, the God of the Bible wanted to have *fellowship* with us! After the Fall, when we were enslaved to sin and death, that fellowship was broken, but because of Jesus' death and resurrection, not only can we have eternal life, we can enjoy fellowship with God again. This experience is available for every Christian. And that brings us to the letter of First John.

John begins this letter talking about fellowship with God. It's what he and the apostles have, and he wants all of us to have that fellowship, too. In the first two chapters he gives basic principles about a life of fellowship with God:

- *Living in fellowship with God doesn't mean we never sin, but when we sin, we need to confess it.*
- *Fellowship with God involves obeying His commandments – what John calls "walking in the light."*
- *Because we're still living in a sinful world, where its lusts pull us away from God, this is a battle.*
- *Furthermore, false teachers ("antichrists") will deceive believers, and we must avoid them.*

Having rehearsed these basic principles, John now comes to the heart of his letter, where he gives specific instructions on living the "abiding" life, in fellowship with God. This section begins in 2.28, which we will look at today, and concludes in 4.19. As we go through these verses, we are going to discover four truths about abiding in Christ:

Abiding in Christ leads to Confidence at His Coming (2.28; 4.17-19)
Abiding in Christ leads to Righteousness, never to sin (2.29-3.10a)
Abiding in Christ leads us to have love for one another (3.10b-23)
Abiding in Christ leads to God's Spirit controlling us (3.24-4.16)

But we begin this morning by focusing on just one verse, the theme verse for this section, 1 John 2.28, where John exhorts us to abide in Christ, and tells us why it is so important.

Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.

- The audience: "Little children"

John begins with the words, "Now, little children…" This was John's way of referring to those Christians in Ephesus who he was a spiritual father to. He had led them to faith in Christ, and taught them their first lessons in the Christian life. We might say that he had taught them to "walk" spiritually.

But the key for us as we seek to apply this epistle to our lives is this: John is writing to Christians. Like any parent, he has high hopes for their lives. I've conducted a lot of baby dedications over the years, and often ask parents about their desires for their child as he or she grows up. Many Christian parents respond something like this: *Whatever my child does, my prayer is that they will come to know the Lord, and live their lives for Him.* What is John's desire for his spiritual children?

- The exhortation: "Abide in Him"

It is that we would all "Abide in Him" – in Jesus Christ. If anyone knew about abiding, it would be John. He got his instruction on this directly from Jesus Christ Himself in the Upper Room, the night before He was crucified. John could never forget it. Jesus' words that night were seared into his memory: *I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing* (John 15.5).

The image of a vine and branches was clear: The kind of relationship Jesus was speaking of was a constant connection. If a branch didn't remain in the vine – if something severed that connection, it would bear no fruit.

But now, Jesus was gone. He had ascended back to heaven, so how could that connection continue? More to the point, for us today, 2000 years later, how can *we* experience that constant connection? John had already told them, and us, in 2.24: *As for you, let that abide in you which you have heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.*

One of the saddest things I have seen in life is Christians who were once on fire for the Lord, who have lost their enthusiasm for spiritual things. It doesn't happen overnight. Little by little they drift away from the Lord. The first step is often stopping reading God's Word. They start depending on a sermon each Sunday to keep them going, and before long they start getting bored with it all. Soon they stop attending church regularly or fellowshipping with Christians. And one day they wake up and their spiritual 'branch' is severed from the 'vine' of Jesus, and the joy of fellowship with God is gone.

Let me be blunt: Have you lost the joy of fellowship with God in your life? Are you going through the motions, wondering where the love you once felt for God has gone? That's a first sign that your spiritual 'branch' is coming away from the 'vine' of Jesus. I beg you, take John's advice: Get your Bible out, make a cup of coffee, and start reading it again. If God's word is abiding in you – if you're reading and meditating and memorizing it, you'll stay connected to God.

- The focus: “When He appears…at His coming”

That is critical for your life now – but it’s going to be critical for your life eternally, too! *Wait a minute*, you say, *I’m saved and I’m going to heaven. How can this make a difference in my eternal life?* Simply this:

Whether or not a person believes in Jesus determines *where* they will spend eternity. Eternal life is an entirely free gift for all who believe in Jesus as their Savior. Eternal life can never be lost. A Christian will never be judged to determine their eternal destiny. That is why Jesus said that “whoever… believes…will not come into judgment” (John 5.24).

But for a Christian who is going to heaven, there is another judgment, and it will determine *how* they will spend eternity. Whether or not we live an ‘abiding’ life the rewards we receive and the roles we play in heaven.

Notice what John says: …abide in Him *so that when He appears*, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame *at His coming*. This is the Judgment Seat of Christ – a future day when our lives will be evaluated:

…we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: “As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God.” So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. (Rom.14.10-12, NKJ)

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be paid back according to what he has done while in the body, whether good or evil. (2 Cor. 5.10, NET Bible)

- The objective: “Have confidence and not…shame”

On that day, we’ll all stand before Jesus as children of God, having received the treasure of the free gift of eternal life, and give an account of our lives here on earth. Jesus spoke many times about this judgment. Jesus said that some would hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” and be rewarded, but others would be left with nothing but regrets. Paul wrote that our works would be judged by fire – what we did for Christ would remain, and all else would be burned up. John writes that when Jesus returns, some will stand before Him with boldness or confidence, while others will *shrink away from Him in shame*.

I’ve experienced shame while golfing. I’ve never mastered the sport. Pro golfers who can hit the ball a couple hundred yards and make it go where they want is close to a miracle. When I hit a golf ball, I just hope I’ll be able to find it. Often, I hit an especially bad shot, and I’m ashamed. When that happens, I get a mulligan – a do-over. A second chance.

But when we stand before Christ, our sin nature will be gone. We won’t be rationalizing sin anymore. We’ll see it for what it really is. For those who have not been abiding in Him, the remorse, sorrow, confession, and repentance we should have had on earth will come at the Judgment Seat of Christ. We’ll wish God would give us a mulligan, but it will be too late.

What you do now lasts forever. Having fellowship with God now leads to boldness and confidence when you stand before Jesus at the Judgment Seat.

Digging Deeper

1. Let's take a quick look back at what we've covered in First John to this point. What shows us that John is writing to Christians (the way John refers to his readers, what he exhorts them to do, etc.)? What is his 'focus' in writing them (see 1.3, 6, 7)? What does he say about "light," "darkness," and sin in 1.5-2.2? What behaviors in our lives show that we have come to know God *intimately* (2.3-11)? What are our sources of strength ('spiritual assets') as we face spiritual battles in life (2.12-15)? What does John exhort and instruct us about 'the world' in 2.15-17? How does he describe false teachers who seek to deceive Christians (2.18-27)? In addition to warning us about them, how can we identify, expose, and overcome them?

2. 1 John 2.28-4.19 is the "body" of this epistle, where John gives the 'heart' of his instruction. Earlier (in 2.6) he had said that abiding in Christ involves a Christlike walk (lifestyle). But what does that look like? How will keeping Christ's commands be manifest in our lives? Read these verses aloud. What major ideas does John focus on?

3. John's instruction on the "abiding" life in 2.28-4.19 is 'book-ended' by a reference to a coming "day of judgment" (4.17) when Jesus will appear (2.28). To what future judgment of believers does this refer? What two opposite experiences can believers have at this judgment? What will a believer who lives an "abiding" life experience when he stands before Christ on this day of judgment?

4. The possibility of having "confidence" (some translate "boldness") and not "shame" (2.28) at the Judgment Seat of Christ is astounding! Imagine standing before Christ and having your life evaluated! What was John's reaction upon seeing Christ in Rev. 1.17?! How serious is this judgment (Rom. 14.10-12; 2 Cor. 5.10-11)? In 1 Cor. 3.12-15, how will the quality of our works be revealed? What will a believer who has squandered his life *feel* on that day? What will a Christian who has invested his life for Christ *feel* on that day? See the parables of the Wise Servant (Mt. 24.45-51; Lk. 12.42-48) and the Talents (Mt. 25.14-30; Lk. 19.12-26), where Jesus contrasts the experience of faithful and unfaithful believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

IV. Body: Abiding in Christ Leads to Confidence at His Coming (2.28-4.19)

1. Theme Verse: Abiding in Christ gives us confidence at the Judgment Seat (2.28)
2. Abiding in Christ leads to righteousness, never to sin (2.29-3.10a)
3. Abiding in Christ leads to love for one another (3.10b-23)
4. Abiding in Christ leads to God's Spirit controlling us (3.24-4.16)
5. Conclusion: Abiding in Christ gives confidence at the Judgment Seat (4.17-19)