

## Abide In God's Word

by Rod Reynolds

Jesus said, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32). To be a genuine disciple of Jesus Christ, rather than one in name only, requires abiding in his word. That's what Jesus Christ himself said. That means a real disciple of Christ, a real Christian, is one who abides in -- continues in, or lives according to -- the teachings of Christ. And one of the teachings of Christ is that we are to live "by every word of God" (Luke 4:4).

Is it your desire to be a true disciple of Jesus? If so, it's absolutely vital that you abide not in some particular organization of men, or a religious tradition imposed by the flawed teachings or reasonings of men, but in God's word, correctly understood.

Jesus prayed shortly before his death concerning his disciples, "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:16-17). The word of God is the truth. And the truth of God's word is what sanctifies his disciples. To sanctify (Greek: *hagiazō*) means to "consecrate or set apart persons or things to God" (Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* on John 17:17).

In John 4 we find recorded a conversation Jesus had with a woman of Samaria, a region which had been inhabited by a portion of Israel before the Assyrian captivity. When the Assyrians took Israel into captivity in the eighth century B.C., they brought in Gentile peoples from other areas -- primarily Chaldean cities or regions -- to settle the land alongside the remnant left in Israel (2 Kings 17:24; Ezra 4:7-10; cf. 2 Chronicles 34:9, 21). The preponderance of both Biblical and secular evidence indicates that only a relatively small number of Israelites was left in the land after the Assyrian captivity.

Inhabitants numbering 27,290 were recorded as being deported after a three year siege from the city of Samaria by Sargon II in an Assyrian inscription (*Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, Daniel David Luckenbill, ed., University of Chicago Press, 1926, vol. 2, p. 26). Some have carelessly assumed that this was the total number deported from among the Israelites by the Assyrians. But this assumption is not supported by Scripture nor by Assyrian records. In reality those were but a small portion of the total numbers carried away, killed or driven out of Israel during successive campaigns spanning decades. An Assyrian inscription records the boast of the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III, "The land of Bit-Humria [house of Omri, Israel] ... all of its people, together with their goods I carried off to Assyria. Pakaha [Pekah], their king they deposed and I placed Ausi' [Hoshea] over them as king" (*Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, vol. 1, p. 293; cf. 2 Kings 15:29-30). Among other Assyrian kings who subjugated Israel, Sargon II boasted that he plundered and devastated Samaria and the whole land of Israel, and carried Gentile peoples in to settle their land (*Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, vol. 2, pp. 2, 7, 26, 40, 46, 51, 61; 2 Kings 17:6, 18, 24; 1 Chronicles 5:26; Josephus, *Antiquities*, 9.14.1). For evidence indicating Sargon II and Sennacherib were two names for the same king, see *A Revised History of the Era of King Hezekiah of Judah and its Background*, Damien Mackey, p. 166; also "Mackey's Thesis Assessment After Ten Years (2007-2017)." (Both documents are available at the time of this

writing at [www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu)).

The new population, called Samaritans, or Cutheans, remained predominately Gentile, though at times they claimed to be descended from Joseph (Matthew 10:5; *Antiquities*, 9.14.3). Later, a number of Jews migrated to the area (cf. *Angus-Green Bible Handbook*, p. 598). The Gentiles who moved into the area of Samaria brought with them their pagan gods, and their religions were blended with the apostate Yahweh worship of Israel (cf. 2 Kings 17:21-41), and later, elements of Jewish Temple worship.

Over time, due to various reforms, many of the more readily apparent pagan influences were suppressed, and in many respects Samaritan practices eventually resembled those of the post-exilic Jews. For example, they kept the weekly Sabbath and the annual feasts commanded in the Law. But there were significant differences, as well.

Under the veneer of Mosaic ritual the old pagan sentiments appear to have remained strong and ready to surface at opportune times. When Antiochus Epiphanes instituted a persecution against the Jews in the second century B.C. the Samaritans sought favor by naming their temple after the Greek god Jupiter (*Antiquities*, 12.5.5; *2 Maccabees* 6:1-2). In the first century and later, Samaria was a hotbed of gnostic heresy. Of the heretic Simon Magus, it was said by Justin Martyr, who was born in Samaria, that "...almost all the Samaritans... worship him, and acknowledge him as the first god" (*First Apology*, XXVI). Evidence indicates the Samaritans, unlike most Jews and Christians in the early Christian era, used pagan icons in their worship (cf. *The People That History Forgot*, E. L. Martin, ch. 4). Scripture condemns the use of idolatrous images in the worship of God, and condemns the blending of heathen customs in such worship (Deuteronomy 4:15-19, 23-26; 5:7-9; 12:1-4, 29-32).

The Samaritans of Jesus' day claimed to worship the same God as the Jews, and used as their Scriptures their own version of the Pentateuch. Nevertheless, their worship was marred by false practices and superstitions. The Jews at the time of Jesus' sojourn in the flesh regarded the Samaritans as a mixed race of apostates (Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, p. 354). Jews usually avoided contact with Samaritans, and there was deep animosity between the two peoples (cf. Luke 9:52-53; John 4:9).

Jesus, knowing the flaws in both the prevailing religion of the Jews and that of the Samaritans (cf. Matthew 16:6, 11-12; Mark 7:6-13), told the Samaritan woman, "...the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him *must* worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24, emphasis added).

Abiding in the truth, God's word, separates God's people, God's Church, from the world (John 8:31; 17:14, 16-17). So if we are to be genuine Christians, if we are to indeed be truly a part of God's Church, we each, individually, and we as a Church must abide in God's word.

That means our conduct, our teachings and practices must conform to God's word. Not only our identity as genuine Christians, but salvation itself hinges on abiding in God's word.

Why would I say that salvation hinges on abiding in God's word?

(1) James wrote, "Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness [i.e., repent], and *receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls*. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:21-22, emphasis added). The implanted word is able to save -- if you do it.

(2) In Ephesians 2:8 we are told that we are "...saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." But in Romans 10:17 we are told, "...faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." So a key to *acquiring saving faith* is *hearing the word of God*.

(3) In Colossians 1:27 we find the phrase, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." In other words, Jesus Christ dwelling in us is the foundation of our hope of being resurrected into the same glorified state that he now enjoys. And the key to Christ dwelling in you is to *keep his word*.

Jesus said, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" (John 14:23; see also John 14:21, 24). Note that keeping God's commandments -- his word -- is also the key to having and using the Holy Spirit (John 14:15-17).

As we saw earlier, true Christians are those who believe and keep God's Word (2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 John 2:5; 2 John 1:9).

(4) In order to thrive we must bear spiritual fruit, and the key to bearing spiritual fruit is abiding in Christ, and letting his words abide in us (John 15:1-8).

All sorts of spiritual benefits flow from abiding in the word of God.

God's word is "light." As light enables one to walk a sure path, the Bible is a sure guide to conduct that produces happiness and avoids pitfalls which tend toward catastrophe. "Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105).

One who obeys the word of God can be confident that he is following a sound and proven path. God's word not only comes from the source of infinite wisdom, but it has met the test of time, and it is applicable not just to a particular time and place and people but is valid for all ages, and all peoples everywhere. "As for God, His way is perfect; The word of the Lord is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him" (2 Samuel 22:31). "The entirety of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever" (Psalm 119:160).

If your steps are directed according to God's word, iniquity shall not rule you. "Direct my steps by Your word, And let no iniquity have dominion over me" (Psalm 119:133). It equips you for every good work (2 Timothy 3:14-17).

The word of God is food for the spirit. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4; cf. Hebrews 5:12-14). Just as we cannot continue to thrive and live without physical food, we will wither and eventually die in a spiritual sense if we neglect the spiritual food of God's word. Desire the milk of word that you may

grow (1 Peter 2:1-2). Abiding in God's word will enable you to thrive spiritually, to develop, grow and be changed more and more into the likeness of Christ.

Abiding in God's word is a simple concept, it's not difficult to understand at all. Essentially it simply means to keep God's word, to live by it. However, mankind throughout history has shown itself unwilling or unable to abide in God's word. Why is this?

A big part of the answer is that human beings have tended naturally to resist the word of God. Israel in the wilderness is a good example (Hebrews 3:7-8, 12). If you resist God's word, if you harden your heart to it, it will not have the effect of helping you to grow and change, and you will place your salvation in jeopardy.

Most of the Jewish leaders of the time of Jesus' sojourn on earth did not have God's word abiding in them because they did not truly believe it (John 5:38-39, 45-47). They put their own traditions ahead of God's word, making it of no effect (Mark 7:6-13). Mankind in general has done the same thing down through the ages, and this pattern continues among most today, even those calling themselves Christians.

However, you can succeed where others have failed. God told the Israelites whom he had led to the land he had promised them, "the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it" (Deuteronomy 30:14). They were given a clear choice, and encouraged to make the right choice to receive the many benefits available to them (Deuteronomy 30:11-20). We, also, must choose where to set our minds, and how to conduct ourselves (Colossians 3:1-16).

You may say, "But it takes God's Spirit to obey his word." Yes, it does, but to those who repent and show a willingness to truly obey his word God will give his Spirit (Proverbs 1:23; Acts 5:30-32).

Following are three specific steps that will enable you to abide in God's word.

(1) Hear the word of God. To walk in God's word we must first hear it, and not only hear it but receive it as the word of God and be willing to be taught (John 6:45).

Israel was given many opportunities to hear God's word. Prophet after prophet was sent to them to testify and call them to repentance, yet they refused to hear (Nehemiah 9:29; Isaiah 28:12; Zechariah 7:9-13).

The Jewish leaders also refused to hear Jesus' words. "He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God" (John 8:47).

Who is of God -- and of the truth -- hears God's words (John 18:37). "We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (1 John 4:6). Note that the way to tell where the true Spirit of God is working is in whether God's word is truly heard.

Scripture is often twisted and perverted to support error (2 Peter 3:14-17). Rather than

allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture, people often read their own ideas into Scriptural passages. As a result, false concepts become embedded in their minds, and the minds of others who may be subject to their influence. Yet, Scripture says, "no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation" (2 Peter 1:21).

We must learn to correctly understand the Scriptures (2 Timothy 2:15). Never build a doctrine on one or two obscure or ambiguous Scriptures. Use Scriptures with clear meanings to interpret ambiguous or obscure Scriptures. Go to all the Scriptures on a subject, studying diligently, and allowing Scripture to interpret itself (Isaiah 28:9-10). "Theology is the whole meaning of Scripture — the sense taught in the whole of Scripture, as that sense is modified, limited, and explained by Scripture itself" (*Angus-Green Bible Handbook*, p. 201). "It has often been said that the best commentary on Scripture is Scripture itself. Nowhere is this more true than in Hebrew word studies. The best method for determining the meaning of any Hebrew word is to study the context in which it appears" (*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Thomas Nelson, 1985, p. xvi).

Follow the example of the Bereans. who were receptive to truth, yet did not gullibly swallow everything they were told, but "searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). For any teaching to be considered authoritative, it must be not the product of human imagination, rationalization, or speculation, but rather, in full accord with a sound understanding of Scripture.

(2) Believe the word of God.

The Israelites heard God's word, but did not believe it (Hebrews 3:15 - Hebrews 4:2).

Believing the gospel, the word of God, is necessary for salvation (Mark 16:15-16; John 12:46-48).

(3) Obey God's word.

Obedience is the test of genuine faith (Acts 7:37-39; Hebrews 11:8; Romans 16:25-26; verse 26, "of faith," as in the KJV, is the correct translation).

Salvation is given to those who obey God (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9; 1 Peter 4:17; Hebrews 5:9-10; Revelation 22:14).

Immerse yourself in God's word through daily Bible study. Meditate on it often. Strive every waking moment to put it into practice.

If you can learn to carefully obey God's word it will change your life. It has the power to heal and preserve us. By relying on and abiding in God's word we have access to God's power in this world and in the world to come. Study God's word, abide in it, let it shape and mold your thoughts and actions. If you do that you can be spiritually whole, and you will share the rewards of its promises forever in the Kingdom of God

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