

# The Ethical Principles of “Abiding In” from John’s Perspective

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## Abstract

*Johannine Literature is known for its rich theological perspective. Grounding from his theological standpoints, he draws his ethical principles. One of the disputes in this book is whether John has explicit or implicit ethical implications for his teaching. The methodology used in this paper is a literature review using exegetical sources. This paper focuses on one of John’s teachings, “abiding in” and its ethical principles. The concept of “abiding in” portrays the identity and authority of Jesus related to His Father, the status and fellowship between Jesus and His disciples, as a mark of true or false disciples, and as a basis to live as Jesus lived. Deriving from this concept, abiding in Jesus is the ground of ethical principles: living in the light, loving others, and obeying the truth.*

**Keywords:** *abiding in, Johannine, John, ethical principles.*

## Introduction

Johannine literature has a distinctive emphasis on the relationship between Christ and believers throughout his writings. One of the expressions is represented by the phrase ‘abiding in’. Donald Guthrie explains that the idea of the word ‘abiding’ is frequent in the farewell discourse. Particularly in his Gospel, apostle John uses the word ‘abiding in’ when Jesus explains His intimate relationship with the Father (John 14:10, 20). The usage of the word is more intentional when John records Jesus’ prayer for His disciples (John 17) and in the Vine allegory (John 15).<sup>1</sup>

Among the wide usage of the word ‘abide,’ scholars have varied opinions about ethics theme in Johannine literature. Guthrie claims that the Gospel of John lacks an ethical explanation unless in the farewell discourse (14-16), while the Epistle of John is rich in ethical principles without specific ethical instruction. John does not explain it specifically because the Epistle reader knows the difference between light and darkness, truth and falsehood, or love and hatred.<sup>2</sup> Rudolf Schnackenburg agrees with Guthrie that ethics is not separated from

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1981), 642.

<sup>2</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 932.

Johannine mysticism of fellowship with Christ.<sup>3</sup> Differently, a new study landscape has argued that ethics is implicitly displayed in Johannine literature.<sup>4</sup>

This paper conveys the theme 'abide in' in John's perspective and its ethical aspect within the Gospel of John and the first epistle of John. This research's thesis is that Johannine ethic lies inseparably as the logical consequence of abiding in Christ. Living according to ethical values is the affirmation of abiding in Christ. In order to achieve those objectives, this paper will deal with the origin meaning of 'abide in' in Johannine literature and its relationship with Johannine ethical principles.

### Abiding Him – A Theological Interpretation

The word 'abiding him' or μένειν occurs 112 times in the New Testament, and 66 times of them appear in Johannine writings: 40 times in the Gospel and 23 times in 1 John and 3 times in 2 John. Due to its limitation, this paper will assess a few of John's usage of the word in the Gospel and the first epistle of John. Throughout its usage, μένειν is commonly referred to the immutability of God and the things of God which has a similar line with the Old Testament definition of the word<sup>5</sup>, such as His counsel, which cannot be changed (Romans 9:11), and His Word, which remains as compared with what is human and corruptible (1 Peter 1:23, 25). In its correlation to salvation, the word μένειν points out the lasting immanence between God and Christ or Christian and Christ.<sup>6</sup>

"ABIDE IN" in Johannine writings.

#### a. Identity and Authority: The Father in Jesus & Jesus in the Father (John 14:10).

John's record of Philip's request to see Father in the Gospel of John is eminent proof of the wide usage of the word 'abide in.' Jesus' response to the request is using the word μένω which discloses the intimate relation existing between Jesus and the Father. The Father who is not visible, now is seen in Jesus; whoever sees Jesus has seen the Father (v. 9).<sup>7</sup>

The word μένω in this text is in present, active, participle tense and has varied translations, such as dwell (ESV, NRSV, KJV, and RSV), abiding (ASV and NASB), living (TNIV and NLT). The tense itself emphasizes the person who carries out the traits or fulfils a

<sup>3</sup> Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 1 (Lexington: Crossroad, 1990), 162.

<sup>4</sup> Prof. Dr. J. G. van der Watt and Ruben Zimmermann, eds., *Rethinking the Ethics of John: "Implicit Ethics" in the Johannine Writings, Contexts and Norms of New Testament Ethics III*, WUNT 291 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Old Testament definition on meno focuses on the distinctiveness of God with everything earthly and human in His immutability. It is explained by His superior beyond false gods (Daniel 6:27), God's counsel remains while all the plans of His enemies are bound to fail and to be broken by Him (Proverbs 19:21; Isaiah 7:7), His promises to His people (Isaiah 40:8). See F. Hauck, "Menw," in *Theological Dictionary of The New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) 4:575. (Henceforth: TDNT).

<sup>6</sup> Hauck, "Menw," in TDNT, 4:575, 576. Raymond E. Brown considers a slight distinction as he argues that Johannine literature mostly relates the word for divine indwelling. However, in the Old Testament passages God is said "to remain forever" but is not said "to remain in" individuals. Paul also speaks the term "being in Christ", but he does not use μένειν as it is in Johannine sense. See Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistle of John: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary by Anchor Bible* (London: Yale University Press, 1982), 261.

<sup>7</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 643.

condition, while the present tense indicates a duration.<sup>8</sup> There are three possible ways to understand Jesus' usage of μένων: fellowship, identity, and the unity of the will of Christ and the Father.

The word μένων is closely related to Jewish tradition which identifies the sender from the messenger. Jewish believes that one sent is as he who sent him.<sup>9</sup> Thus, this is the affirmation that Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in Him. Schnackenburg is quoted by Beasley-Murray, supporting this idea by describing that μένων is a linguistic way to describe the complete unity between Jesus and the Father (10:30, 37-38). The word μένων is greater than human language can express; it portrays an existing *koinonia*, a fellowship, between Jesus and the Father that describes the unity of speech and action.<sup>10</sup> Jesus asserts His divine nature and the Father, who ἐν ἐμοὶ μένων in Him, does the work (v. 10).

Due to a lack of understanding of who Jesus is at the time, some scholars relate the concept of the word μένων to assurance<sup>11</sup> in Jesus, which is very important. Ben Witherington III argues that Philip's question is not separated from Peter's (13:36), Thomas's (14:4), and Judas's (14:22) questions. It is not only Philip who failed to understand who Jesus is.<sup>12</sup> In other words, Jesus is using μένων to assure His incapable disciples at the time that He is from God, The Father.

Slightly different, Robert H. Mounce explains that the word μένων in this text cannot describe the whole identity of Jesus Himself. Jesus did not speak about His identity; rather, He spoke about the unity of will between Jesus and the Father. Mounce clearly states that whatever He does and says, it is the Father living in Him who is doing His work through Him.<sup>13</sup>

A bigger perspective is needed to evaluate the closest meaning to what John really meant. The passage has given specific situation where the disciple's heart is troubled by His imminent departure soon (v.1). Jesus assures them that they will never be separated forever from Him, as the disciples know the way to where Jesus is going (vv. 2-4). Thomas then is asking the way to where He is going (v. 5). Jesus replied by using the "I am" statement (v. 6)

<sup>8</sup> Cleon L. Rogers Jr. & Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 216.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Bauckham has investigated that Johannine Jesus has called Himself as Son of the Father as He clearly identifies Himself as the Father's agent, to represent the Father. See Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 193.

<sup>10</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary: John*, vol. 36 (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 253-254.

<sup>11</sup> Leon Morris uses theophany as the term. Philip asked Jesus to reveal the manifestation of God, which frequently happens in Old Testament tradition (Ex. 24:10; 33:17; Isa 6:1). Philip may think that to see the Father would solve many difficulties about who Jesus really is. See Morris, *John*, 643.

<sup>12</sup> Ben Witherington III, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster, 1995), 249. J. Ramsey Michael also holds that some disciple's questions drive Jesus to explain an assurance in Him relating to who He really is. Near to the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus strengthens His disciple that the bonding of Jesus and His disciple would continue until the eternity. The assurance is based on who Jesus really is. J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 768, 771, 777.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Mounce, "John," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Luke-Acts* vol. 10, ed. Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2007), 562.

which describes His identity.<sup>14</sup> The “I am” declaration goes on as Philip questions the relation of Jesus and the Father (v. 8), where here Jesus claims the authority in Him (v. 10). The major issue of this chapter is likely on the identity of Jesus.

Thus, the *μὲν* in this text refers to the identity of Jesus, who is divine as the Father is divine. The Father sends Jesus as Messiah to be the only way, truth, and life that come from the Father and to the Father. Derived from this divine identity, His works are divinely authoritative works from the Father and in the Father. Therefore, believing in Him<sup>15</sup> is the most proper way to respond to knowing Him and His works from John’s perspective.

*b. Status and Fellowship: Christ in believer & the believer in Christ (John 6:56).*

In this text, Jesus announces His controversial statements, “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.” The story appears after Jesus did one of His unforgettable miracle, feeding 5000 men (6:5-13). The miracle is powerful because it generates enthusiasm in the people to crown Jesus as king (6:15). After that, various dialogues between Jesus and the crowd show the gap in understanding between them. While Jesus expected true faith by believing Him, the crowd wanted to use Jesus as a supplier of their needs and desires (6:25-52).<sup>16</sup> Jesus continues by explaining the prerequisites for being His disciple: to eat His flesh and drink His blood (6:56).

The word *μῆνει* in present, indicative active, which describes an ongoing work - continual abiding,<sup>17</sup> and translated as abides (ESV, RSV, NRSV, NKJV, and NASB), remain (NLT, TNIV, NIV, and ISV), and dwell (KJV). Some scholars relate this text to the eucharist celebration.<sup>18</sup> However, it is unlikely that Jesus refers to simply one of the church practices in which the idea has not been in His disciple’s mind. Craig L. Bloomberg quoted Maurice Cassey’s argument against the Eucharist view in this text. He argues:

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<sup>14</sup> The I am statements describes that Jesus not only is but also the way. He is the truth and the life and He is the only way to the Father. Moreover, Herman Ridderbos also explains the I am statements points that He is the life that is from God and that imparts itself as “the light of humans (1:4) so that people can know the Father as the only true God. Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel according to John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 493.

<sup>15</sup> Johannine literature deals with believe theme more than another Gospel does. And the purpose of the whole book is the readers might believe (John 20:30-31). Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 581.

<sup>16</sup> Jey J. Kanagaraj said, “after Jesus feed the five thousand, the Jews tried to take Him by force to make Him King. However, they are not sure that Jesus is a King or the prophet. This is a reason why John mentions that the Jews do not believe the Jesus is the Son of God. Jey J. Kaganaraj,” *Jesus the King, Merkabah Mysticism and the Gospel of John*,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 47, no. 2 (1996): 351, <https://doi.org/10.53751/001c.30362>.

<sup>17</sup> Rogers, *Linguistic*, 198.

<sup>18</sup> Herman C. Waetjen argues that the phrase may presuppose the tradition of Eucharist. The eucharist overtones of the passage are secondary and negative in import. See, Herman C. Waetjen, *The Gospel of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2005), 213. C.K. Barret also opines that John 6:53-58 alludes to the Lord’s Supper. The eucharist concept is seen as Jesus explains the importance of eating the bread of life, and then He continues not merely to eat His flesh but must be accompanied by drinking blood. The repetition of this several times refers to the sacrament. See C. K. Barret, *Essays on John* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982), 84. Likewise, Lightfoot also sees that the continuing explanation to drink His blood after eating His flesh describes that the eucharist rite of the Church is inescapable. Then, this text is not different from 1 Cor 10:16-17, 11:23-28, which is used commonly for sacramental references. R. H. Lightfoot, *St. John’s Gospel: A Commentary* (London: Hassell Street Press, 2023), 162.

Jesus could not expect Galilean crowds a year before his death to have understood the significance of teaching not articulated until the last night of his life. But it is not at all clear that we should take this passage as John's equivalent to the Last Supper. There Christ offers his body (Greek: *soma*) and blood; here he speaks of eating his flesh (Greek: *sarx*) and drinking his blood. In chapter 13-17, while giving us more detail about Jesus' last meal with His followers than all three Synoptics combined, John assiduously avoids the words of institution of the Last Supper. ...it is more probable that John is playing down references to the sacraments, which by the end of the first century have become too institutionalized for his liking. So, we should understand Jesus' graphic language here in John 6 as vivid metaphors for identifying with him in his death, not commands to celebrate the Lord's Supper.<sup>19</sup>

Israel's ancestor experiences in dessert along with Moses gives a valuable contribution in understanding the meaning of the text. Ben Witherington III opines that Jesus is reforming the Jewish mindset about God's election. Even though they are elected as His only people among other nations, the punishment and the discipline of God would not be absent. God gives *manna* to all Israel's people, but the rebellion died in the desert and only a faithful people would see the Promise Land. Jesus introduces Himself as the bread of heaven that provides eternal life. Flesh and blood represent Jesus' life and suffering. The one who accepts the life and death of Jesus will have eternal life.<sup>20</sup>

From this point of view, it is likely that Blomberg stated that Jesus was trying to say that it is not manna, Torah, or Wisdom that nourishes His people, but Jesus Himself. Although this is definitely a new thought to Jesus' hearer at the time, Jesus proclaims that His people need spiritual bread, which is His flesh more than they do for earthly bread. The spiritual bread is the only one that can give them the true life they need.<sup>21</sup>

Leon Morris elaborates more that the text has two important aspects: continuous and permanent.<sup>22</sup> The word μένει is a continuous act rather than a fleeting action. Notwithstanding, it indicates continuous action, but the status is permanent. The fellowship with God is continuous action, but the believers have had a permanent status before God as His disciples.<sup>23</sup> Continuous fellowship with Christ is portrayed by feeding Jesus' flesh and drinking Jesus' blood. As Morris stressed literally eating Jesus' flesh and drinking Jesus'

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<sup>19</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel: Issues & Commentary* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 126.

<sup>20</sup> Witherington, *John's Wisdom*, 159.

<sup>21</sup> Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability*, 125-126. Eunyoung Jang has extensively investigated the word "abide" through the covenant theme. Jang argues that abiding in Christ means entering a new covenantal relationship with God through Christ. See Eunyoung Jang, "Abiding in Jesus and Bearing Much Fruit: Reading John 15:1-17 Through the Covenant Theme," (PhD diss., Torch Trinity Graduate University, 2021).

<sup>22</sup> F. F. Bruce also holds a continuous act in permanent status. He reckons that believing in Christ and keeping His commandments are two things that cannot be separated. There is no true faith without obedience, and no true obedience without faith. And further, there can be neither true faith nor true obedience without true love. See F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 160.

<sup>23</sup> Morris, *John*, 380.

blood, he explains that believers are continuously receiving Christ in a continuous relationship between believer and Christ.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, μένει in the relation between Christ and believers is about the identity (who) and fellowship (how) of the believer. Every believer has gained a permanent identity of who they are in Christ. Yet, fellowship with Christ is how every believer remains in Jesus, and Jesus remains in the believer. The two go together hand in hand.

c. *True or False disciple: growing branch or dead branch (John 15:1-6)*

The word μέναιτε in v. 4 is translated to abide (NASB, NKJV, NRSV, RSV, ASV and ESV) or remain (TNIV and NLT). The tense itself, aorist, imperative, active has a significant meaning. The aorist imperative tense indicates a strong instruction to do something without further considering whether it should be done continually. Beasley-Murray translated this text to, “step into union with me” as an injunction.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, μένη and μένητε (v. 4), which both are present, active, and subjunctive, describe a conditional case. Beasley-Murray clarifies that in this conditional case, the emphasis is on Jesus who encouraged the reader that “I will remain in union with you”.<sup>26</sup> In other words, Jesus takes the major roles here in order to bear fruit, not the branch. Thus, the dwelling of the Vine in the branch is the only requirement for the branch to bear fruits.

F. F. Bruce relates the discourse to the Old Testament verse in Ezekiel 15:18<sup>27</sup> when Israel was described as a useless vine. Producing grapes is the only purpose of the vine branch. The wood of the branch is useless unless fulfilling the vine’s proper function, that is, the production of grapes. The wood of the dead vine branch cannot be used to make a piece of furniture or a utensil of any kind except good only for fuel.<sup>28</sup>

The most debatable on this passage is in John 15:6 that the unfruitful branches will be thrown away and burned. This text is not related to assurance of salvation, while Armenians would suggest this to be their basic argument of salvation. They would explain that the fruitless branches should be Christians who lose their salvation. Adam Clarke, as quoted by Carl Laney states, “as the vinedresser will remove every unfruitful branch from the vine, so will my Father remove every unfruitful member from my mystical body, even those that have been in me by true faith (for only such are branches).”<sup>29</sup> This view is unlikely as the Jesus has opened clear context that the unfruitful branch does not abide in the Vine at the first place, “if anyone does not abide in Me... .” The unfruitful branch is not in the Vine and the Vine is not in the branch. Hence, this text is not related to the assurance of salvation concept.

Carl Laney has used Johannine theology of progress of belief to understand this text better. In Johannine writings, belief begins, continues, is strengthened, and finally is

<sup>24</sup> Morris, *John*, 380. Karen H. Jobes agrees that “abide” has a covenantal language. As she suggests, it could also be understood in salvific work of Christ. See Karen H. Jobes, *John through Old Testament Eyes: A Background and Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2021), 240.

<sup>25</sup> Beasley-Murray, *John*, 272.

<sup>26</sup> Beasley-Murray, *John*, 272. Ridderbos uses a reciprocal formula of immanence as a propulsive effect to explain this conditional tense. See Ridderbos, *The Gospel according to John*, 517.

<sup>27</sup> Other Old Testament evidence comes from Jer 2:21; 12:10ff.; Isa 5:1-7; 27:22ff; Ezek. 17:5ff.; 19:10-14; Ps. 80:9-16. See Witherington III, *John’s Wisdom*, 255.

<sup>28</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 309.

<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, Carl Laney debates that Armenian interpretation on this text would be inconsistent with Jesus’ word (John 10:28-29). In the verses, the assurance of believers has declared by God that no other power can snatch His disciple out of the God’s hand. See J. Carl Laney, “Abiding is Believing: The Analogy of the Vine in John 15:1-6,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146, no. 581 (1989): 61.

consummated in an abiding faith.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, abiding in Christ is not a stagnant faith, but a continuing growth of faith in Christ. Then, ‘in Me’ (vv. 2,4-6) does not emphasize the place of the branch but the process of fruit-bearing.<sup>31</sup> Based on this perspective, the unfruitful branch does not believe in Jesus, making bearing fruit impossible.

To conclude, the words μένη and μένητε in the analogy of the Vine portrays that Jesus’ election on every and each branch is the starting point of the abiding which prior to bearing-fruit ability. A true disciple is described as those who already abide in Jesus and Jesus in them and bearing fruit becomes the consequence. While false disciple is not in Jesus from the beginning, thus bearing fruit is certainly impossible. In other words, bearing fruit is an instrument to evaluate whether someone is genuinely a true disciple of Jesus.

d. *Live as Jesus lived (1 John 2:6).*

The phrase ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν (2:6) is used in a climactic development. Stephen Smalley argues the argument has started in v. 4, the writer has explained of “knowing” God in Christ; he continues in v. 5b that whoever keep His word means God exists in him; and v. 6 is the climax that “abiding” in God through Jesus the Christ means walking as Jesus walks. The usage of μένειν here requires an intensely personal knowledge of God. It demands an intimate and committed relationship with God through Jesus, which is both a permanent and continuous relationship. Thus, Smalley adds that the concept of “abide in Jesus” consists of a relationship with God through Jesus, the guarantee of having everlasting life, and the ability to live ethically as a believer.<sup>32</sup>

Specifically on ethical life, Robert Yarbrough points out the term imitation of Christ as an ethical responsibility as an affirmation of living “abide” in Christ. Imitation of Christ is not merely duplicating the deeds of Jesus or obeying Christ’s will in a formal way but living the whole of life as in the presence of God.<sup>33</sup> I. Howard Marshal supports the view and explains that being in Him and living in Him are to be regarded as synonyms. The phrases emphasize the permanence of the relationship and the need for perseverance on the part of men. When a

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<sup>30</sup> Laney gives an example of progress of believe in the Gospel of John. Nathanael “believed” in Jesus as Son of God and King of Israel when Christ revealed His omniscience before Him (John 1:50). The disciple is said to have “believed” in Christ after they saw the miracle at Cana (2:11). After Jesus’ resurrection the disciple believed the Scriptures and His teaching about His death (2:22). Their belief, conditioned on particular circumstances, is seen in John 6:69, 16:30 and 17:8. Christ allowed Lazarus to die so that the disciples might “believe” (11:15). After the resurrection, John saw the empty tomb and “believed” (20:8). Belief among the disciples was confirmed as they saw the miracle—the insignia of His deity (2:11; 6:69). Their belief was consummated by Jesus’ resurrection and His resurrection appearances (2:22; 20:8; 25-29). See Laney, “Abiding is Believing,” 62.

<sup>31</sup> Laney, “Abiding is Believing,” 62, 64. William Whitmore interprets the fruit-bearing of the branch is picturing the nature of Christian life that connects continuously to Jesus. In this sense, producing fruit is the collective work of Jesus and disciples. See William Whitmore, “The Branch is Linked to the Vine: Personal Discipleship and the *Missio Dei*,” *International Review of Mission* 107, no. 2 (2018): 478, <https://doi.org/10.1111/irrom.12244>.

<sup>32</sup> Stephen S. Smalley, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1, 2, 3 John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2020), 52. Similarly, Thompson portrays abiding in Christ as openness and responsibility in responding to the life of Jesus. The life abiding in Christ is never motionless and isolated, yet it’s an ongoing and dynamic activity. See Marianne Thompson, *John: A Commentary* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015) 325.

<sup>33</sup> Robert W. Yarbrough, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1-3 John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 88.

person claims that he is in Christ, the test of the claim is whether the person really lives as Jesus has lived in daily life.<sup>34</sup> John uses the earthly life of Jesus as an example to Christians (John 13:15). The way that John did not give a concrete description of how Jesus lived assumes that his reader is familiar with the earthly life of Jesus. Abiding in Christ is in accordance with our daily life, living as Jesus has lived. The test of our religious experience is whether it produces a reflection of the life of Jesus in our daily life; if it fails this elementary test, it is actually false.<sup>35</sup> *Meno* concept arrives to its real application. The status of “abide in” Christ requires empirical proof. John here argues that the only proof is the one who abides in Christ should live in his daily walk as Jesus lived.

To sum up, the “abide in” concept lies in the theological belief that Jesus declares His identity and authority as He is in the Father and the Father is in Him. This is the ground of the relationship between Jesus and the believer, where every believer is involved in an ongoing relationship and permanent status in Jesus. In fact, Jesus takes a vital role in abiding in the ongoing relationship and permanent status of Jesus and the believer. He is the dominant factor in the ability of His disciples to bear fruit. Thus, bearing fruit becomes proof of whether one is a true believer. John continues by saying that abiding in Jesus simply means walking and living like Jesus walked and lived. This imitating Jesus concept continues to its ethical principles, whereas the first epistle of John has displayed more.

#### “ABIDE IN” and John’s Ethical Principles

Dualism images are one of Johanne’s characteristics. His dualism denotes apparent differences between God and the world. Johannine ethical dualism is linked to “abide in Christ’s” concept. This section of the paper will focus on John’s ethical principles, which he draws from “abide in” concepts and portrays in dualist language.

##### *a. Living in light and no longer in darkness.*

Johanne frequently sees light and darkness as contradictory (1:5; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9; 12:35, 46). Jesus is the light, but he has come to the people who lived in the darkness so that His light enlightens the people as believers. Those who receive His light is called children of light (12:36).<sup>36</sup> Darkness always represents evil in Johannine (John 3:19). The person in darkness is described by the evil deeds he or she did. And Jesus determined that whoever is in Him should not walk in the darkness again (John 8:12), which means turn away from evil deeds.<sup>37</sup>

In addition, Leon Morris points out essential understanding. He describes that abiding in Christ demands belief in who Jesus is. This belief is grounded on the truth that Jesus is God, and God revealed Himself in Jesus. God is the light, and God’s light has been displayed perfectly in the person of Jesus. As a person comes to this understanding and trusts God, the person is no longer in darkness but is in the light of God through Jesus.<sup>38</sup>

John explicitly declares the ethical principle of being “abide in Christ”: that is, living in light and no longer in darkness. Believing in Jesus, which comes from understanding who Jesus is, becomes the fundamental aspect that ensures that the person has been separated from

<sup>34</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistle of John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1978), 127.

<sup>35</sup> Marshall, *The Epistle of John*, 128.

<sup>36</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1993), 260.

<sup>37</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 908.

<sup>38</sup> Leon Morris, *Expository Reflections on the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1990), 499.



the darkness of the below world. By positioning light and darkness as two sides against to each other, Jesus emphasizes a transformational life in His disciples if they genuinely abide in Him. The urge is as solid as impossible to a person who claims to be in Jesus yet lives out evil deeds. In this sense, Christian goodness action is not merely about social ethics or morality but rather an affirmation of being abiding in Christ. Christian morality derives from the separation from darkness to the light of Christ.

*b. Loving others and not holding hatred (John 15:12-25 & 1 John 2:9; 3:15; 4:20).*

The vine allegory is followed by Jesus' word of commandment (v.12). It shows that the concept of abiding, which occurs in the vine allegory, and the commandment to love one another are linked. As has been explained in the previous part, the vine allegory emphasizes bearing fruit as one of the instruments to evaluate whether a person is a true or false disciple of Jesus. Subsequently, Jesus urges to abide in His love (vv. 9-11), followed by the commandment to love one another (vv. 12-17).<sup>39</sup>

Leon Morris explains that love from a Christian perspective is not sentimentality; it is not a gushing, emotional indulgence of some loved one. Love is what we see in the cross. It is what Christ showed when he laid down his perfect life for sinners. Moreover, a redeemed sinner loves because it is his nature to love. This is what takes place when divine transformation controls.<sup>40</sup>

In addition, hatred is the opposite of love itself in John's writings. What is not love is hatred. The absence of love is hatred (1 John 2:9; 3:15; 4:20). Since it is opposite, there is no compromise in between, there is no possibility of love and hatred co-existing.<sup>41</sup> This is also pictured in John 15:18-25. While love is the new attitude of a transformed disciple, hatred is what they receive from the unredeemed world.

Abiding in Jesus demands an ongoing relationship between believers and Jesus. This is the only way each believer is able to bear fruit as they attach to the vine. As Jesus is in a believer and so believer is in Jesus, so also love. The love of Father to Jesus is also the love of Jesus to the believer. It overflows the believer's life, producing good fruit that the believer will also love one another. Thus, explicitly explained, loving one another is John's ethical principle, which is the consequence of a believer abides in Jesus continuously.

*c. Obeying the truth and not being a liar (1 John 1:6,10; 2:4, 22; 4:20; 5:10).*

Interestingly, John addresses a liar in several places in his first epistle. Instead of explaining an honest life, he exposes the negative nuance to instruct his audience not to have such a life. He uses the word 'liar' (*pseustes*) when he explains those who claim to be without sin is a liar (1:6) and make God a liar (1:10); those who claim to know God and do not obey him are liars (2:4); those who deny the truth of the incarnation are liars (2:22); those who hate their brothers are liars (4:20); those who do not believe God make him a liar (5:10). It concludes that liar in John perspective is all habitually deviating from God's truth and acting hypocritically.<sup>42</sup> Here, John portrays lying far beyond simple deed such as saying false facts. For John, lying is a theological problem. In other words, abiding in Jesus enables believers to have an honest life,

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<sup>39</sup> Van der Merwe writes that abiding in Jesus puts Jesus' love at the center and enables His children to love as He loves His children. See Dirk G. van der Merwe, "The Christian spirituality of the love of God: Conceptual and experiential perspectives emanating from the Gospel of John," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 41, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v41i1.2130>.

<sup>40</sup> Morris, *Expository Reflections*, 523.

<sup>41</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 932.

<sup>42</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 933.

a life that can be evaluated: self-acknowledgment as a sinner, obedience to Jesus' commandments, and loving others. Those who fail to show those evidence are liars.

John's exposure to the word lie is critical to his ethics. Each context where the word liar occurs is highly important to consider. The word liar appears first in 1 John 1:6 and 10, which are closely connected. It is after John repeats what he has explained in his Gospel that God is light and whoever has a relationship with God is supposedly to live and walk in light (vv. 5-7).<sup>43</sup> Then, someone who claims to be in the light of Jesus yet says that he has no sin and has not sinned is actually the person is a liar (v. 6) and makes God a liar (v.10, 5:10). The reason behind John's statements is very obvious. The gospel of John portrays Jesus, the Son, as having come to the world to redeem the world from its sins. The reconciliation between God and man can be fulfilled in His ultimate redemption. If someone declares proudly that he has no sin or has not sinned, which is contrary to the fact that Jesus has come to redeem our sin and the redemption on the Cross has been done, only two possible scenarios are left: the person is lying, or God is lying.<sup>44</sup> While the latter is contradicted by the attribute of God himself,<sup>45</sup> then the former is the most likely. Lying here becomes a theological problem.<sup>46</sup> Spiritual pride that claims that he has no sin or has not sinned is lying theologically. The person is not abiding in Jesus and is not walking in light.

The next occurrence of the word liar in 1 John 2:4 relates to obedience toward Jesus' commandments (v. 3). John argues that understanding who Jesus is, will be followed by obeying His word. So, if it is not followed by obedience, then the understanding is actually a lie; the person does not know Jesus yet.<sup>47</sup> Here again, John stresses that knowledge and obedience are not separated.<sup>48</sup> They go together. John's warning escalates as he strongly identifies that the liar, who claims to know Jesus but actually does not, is the antichrist, who denies the Father and the Son (v. 22).<sup>49</sup> Afterwards, he reminds his readers to abide in his gospel of Jesus, so that they remain abiding in the Son, and so in the Father (v. 24). Here lying becomes the problem of integrity theologically. Knowing God means obeying God. Obeying

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<sup>43</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians Volume I: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1-2 Timothy and 1-3 John* (England: Apollos Nottingham, 2010), 448.

<sup>44</sup> Brown explains clearly that making God a liar means equating Him with Satan. See Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John: A Concise Commentary* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1988), 110.

<sup>45</sup> Witherington stated that one of God's characters is true and synonymous with the truth. See Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, 458.

<sup>46</sup> Witherington parallels "lying" to "saying and doing" which also parallels to "walking." It displays the connection between belief and behavior. See Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, 451.

<sup>47</sup> Belief and behavior inconsistency means there is no truth or real knowing of God. See Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, 467. Daniel K. Eng has made an interesting study as he investigates Jesus' call for obedience to His disciples, which is similar to the loyalty Caesar expected from Pilate. See Daniel K. Eng, "I Call You Friends: Jesus as Patron in John 15," *Themelios* 46, no. 1 (2021): 57.

<sup>48</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle of John*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce & Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995).

<sup>49</sup> Smalley connects liar as antichrist – the archetypal liar. Smalley interprets such liar as to Corinthians who are influenced by Gnosticism. They are not only liar as they know Christ yet disobey His word, but also, they hold Christological error in their understanding. See Smalley *1, 2, 3 John*, 110-111.

God's commandment means abiding in God (3:24a). If it does not come that way, John declares explicitly that the person is lying. The person's integrity theologically is at risk.

In 1 John 4:20, the word liar is connected to the attitude of love. John says that whoever says loving God yet hates his brother, then he is lying. Colin G. Kruse argues that John uses *a fortiori* statement, reasoning from the lesser to the greater. If someone cannot fulfil the lesser (loving his brother he can see), it is impossible to do the greater (loving the unseen God). Then, loving God is affirmed by a willingness to love brothers.<sup>50</sup> In fact, as quoted by Witherington, B. F. Westcott states, "The claim to the knowledge of God without obedience, and the claim to the love of God without action, involves not only denial of what is known to be true but the falseness of character."<sup>51</sup> Based on John's perspective, love and hatred are opposite. Loving God results from abiding in Jesus (4:7-12); hatred of others results from abiding in death (vv. 14b-15). Those who admit to love God but hate his brothers are actually lying.

To conclude, abiding in Jesus requires a decision to act ethically. An ethical decision must be made between light or darkness, love or hatred, obeying the truth, or being a liar. John's argument is clear and explicit that abiding in Jesus will always generate living in light and not in darkness, loving others and not holding hatred, and obeying the truth and not being a liar. On the contrary, living in darkness, holding hatred, and lying ethically are confirmation that one's life is actually apart from Jesus.

## Conclusion

Apostle John displays that the concept of abiding in is grounded on the divine relationship between Jesus and the Father. It pictures a permanent and ongoing relationship. John continues building the argument by teaching that every believer finds their new status in Christ. Thus, every believer partakes in a permanent and ongoing spiritual relationship with Jesus, in which the process of knowing Jesus is essentially involved.

Apostle John emphasizes that every believer should walk and live as Jesus walked and lived. This is how a believer is enabled to bear fruit in his life. Bearing fruit is the result of Jesus abiding in the believer, and the believer abides in Jesus.

John has a strong and vivid urge that abiding in Jesus requires walking and living as Jesus did and has ethical principles. For those who abide in Christ, apostle John admonishes them to consider every decision they make according to who they are in Christ. Ethical principles that guide believers are light, love, and obeying the truth. For John, a life that abides in Christ should be living in light, loving others, and obeying the truth. The ability to choose a decision representing the light of Jesus, the love of Jesus, and obeying the truth proves that Jesus abides.

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<sup>50</sup> Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020).

<sup>51</sup> Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, 537.

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