

# ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΟΥ

## “In the Nick of Time”

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Occasional Essays  
and Other Stuff  
for Christian  
Students

Presented by the  
President of

Central Baptist  
Theological  
Seminary of  
Minneapolis

American Christianity needs leaders. American Christianity needs *Christian* leaders. Christian leaders explain the Scriptures, bringing them to bear upon life's urgent questions. Christian leaders exemplify the life of faith, finding their ultimate satisfaction in God alone. They unite intellectual discipline with ordinate affection, turning their entire being toward the love of God. These essays are dedicated to the task of inviting today's Christian students to become tomorrow's Christian leaders.

—Kevin T. Bauder

“...Be instant in season,  
out of season;  
reprove, rebuke, exhort  
with all longsuffering  
and doctrine.”

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February 10, 2006

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## Heart of Prayer

The night before He was crucified, Jesus spent an extended period teaching His disciples. Apparently He began teaching His disciples while they were in the upper room, then continued to teach them as they left the room and walked toward Gethsemane. Part of what He taught them centers upon the image of the vine and branches, reported in John 15:1-8. Specifically, in the context of this image, Jesus uttered the command to “abide in me.”

Interpreters are about evenly divided on the significance of this command. Some understand abiding in Christ to refer to salvation; others take it to refer to some experience beyond salvation that Jesus wanted His disciples to enjoy. Of course, arguments can be advanced on both sides of this debate. I don't intend to go into all of them here. In my opinion verse 3 is decisive: the disciples to whom Jesus addressed this command were all already believers whose sins had been cleansed by His Word. They were already saved, and they were not in any danger of losing the salvation that they had received. To me, it seems necessary that “abiding in Christ” must refer to some experience subsequent to the reception of Jesus as Savior.

The point of the passage is not about getting saved. It is not even necessarily about growth. The passage is about fruitfulness. A branch (a believer) is able to bear fruit only if it is connected to the vine (Christ). However, not all branches that are connected to the vine will necessarily bear fruit. The branches that do not bear fruit will experience judgment (v. 6), which most likely refers to chastening and removal from service (compare this to 1 Cor. 11:30).

The connection between the vine and the branches is essential, but unlike real grapevines, the branches on this vine have the capacity to make choices of their own. Those choices will

greatly affect their fruitfulness. The main choice that they have to make is whether or not to abide in Christ.

Abiding in Christ is not a one-way activity. "Abide in me," says Jesus in John 15:4, "and I in you." Abiding in Christ implies some sort of reciprocal relationship. "Abiding" is a relationship of exchange and mutuality.

The nature of this relationship is clarified by the preceding context. In John 14:21 Jesus states that a person who loves Him will be loved by the Father, and indeed, by Jesus Himself. Jesus adds, "and I will manifest myself to Him," describing a relationship of reciprocal love in which Jesus somehow becomes apparent to the person who loves Him. But how?

That question seems to have puzzled the disciples as much as it puzzles us today. Speaking for the disciples, Judas (the *other* Judas, as John makes clear) asks, "How will you manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus replies that someone who loves Him will keep His words, and the Father will respond with an answering love. More than that, Jesus and the Father will come to such a person and "make our abode with him" (Jn. 14:23).

In other words, Jesus promises that He and His Father will take up residence or make a home with each person who truly loves Jesus and seeks to honor Him. The word for "abode" (residence, home) is the cognate noun for the verb that is translated "abide" in John 15. The abode of John 14:23 and the abiding of John 15:4 are almost certainly denoting the same thing. The divine side of this abiding is promised in 14:23; the human side is required in 15:4.

The abiding, then, is simply living together. To "abide in Christ" is to live together with Him. It is a matter of consciously and deliberately taking up residence with a Savior Whom we love and Who has taken up residence with us.

Living with another person always requires some adjustments. Collegians discover this when they are assigned their first roommates. Living together involves a process of getting used to one another, learning one another's likes and dislikes, and accommodating one another's habits and peculiarities. It necessitates an attitude of give-and-take. Roommates who will not make some concessions for the sake of harmoniously living together swiftly become nuisances to those around them.

This process is even more pronounced when a couple marries. A new bride and groom cannot possibly foresee all of the ways in which they are going to have to adjust to each other. Each carries a lifetime of habits, preferences, and family traditions, some of which will grate upon the other mate. Where will they squeeze the toothpaste tube? Which way will they hang the tissue on the roller? Which vegetables will they eat? The erstwhile bachelor may be unnerved to discover that he is no longer allowed to put away his clothes all over the floor. The new bride may be startled to learn that her husband considers cola and cheese curls to be a balanced meal.

How will the couple process such differences? One way would be for each to insist upon her or his rights. If each partner is determined to maintain all the old habits undisturbed, then the marriage is in deep trouble from the very beginning. In a truly loving relationship, however, the partners will not be nearly as interested in getting their own way as they are in pleasing the other, the beloved. For such a couple, learning to live together becomes an ongoing process of joyful surrenders for the delight of the other. In this atmosphere, mutual care flourishes. Incidentally, the process never ends: couples who have been married for decades can still be discovering anew what delights the other.

This, I think, is the image that Jesus has in mind when He commands, “Abide in me.” This command assumes that He and His Father have made Their home with us. Now we must learn to live with Jesus. We must become aware of His presence in our lives. We will want to learn what displeases or disappoints Him so that we may avoid it. We will wish to discover what pleases and delights Him so that we may pursue it. As we abide in Christ, this pursuit becomes a lifelong calling. Abiding in Christ means communing with Him, recognizing His place in our lives, and shaping our lives around His presence.

This kind of “abiding” life is what assures us of answers to our prayers (Jn. 15:7). These answers will be abundant, for if we are truly abiding in Christ we will be asking for the very things that He Himself wants us to have. We will be seeking only those things that would genuinely delight Him.

In fact, abiding in Jesus is really the heart of prayer. It is the foundation upon which an effective prayer life is built. In a certain sense, it is itself prayer: what could be more fundamentally prayerful than communion with Christ Himself? While prayer certainly includes asking, good asking is the result of a life lived with an awareness of the presence of Christ. Abiding in Christ means knowing Him, adoring Him, honoring Him, and seeking to please and to delight Him in all that we do. ✖

This essay is by [Kevin T. Bauder](#), president of Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

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## PRAYER. (II)

George Herbert (1593-1633)

OF what an easie quick accesse,  
My blessed Lord, art thou ! how suddenly  
    May our requests thine eare invade !  
To shew that state dislikes not easinesse,  
If I but lift mine eyes, my suit is made :  
Thou canst no more not heare, than thou canst die.

Of what supreme almightie power  
Is thy great arm which spans the east and west,  
    And tacks the centre to the sphere !  
By it do all things live their measur'd houre :  
We cannot ask the thing, which is not there,  
Blaming the shallownesse of our request.

Of what unmeasurable love  
Art thou possest, who, when thou couldst not die,  
Wert fain to take our flesh and curse,  
And for our sakes in person sinne reprove ;  
That by destroying that which ty'd thy purse,  
Thou mightst make way for liberalitie !

Since then these three wait on thy throne,  
*Ease, Power, and Love* ; I value prayer so,  
That were I to leave all but one,  
Wealth, fame, endowments, vertues, all should go ;  
I and deare prayer would together dwell,  
And quickly gain, for each inch lost, an ell. ✕

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