



**Talmid תלמיד** a Hebrew word that means “a true disciple who desires to be what the Rabbi Jesus is.”

*Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 (NIV)*

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STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDETH NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY  
DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH. 2 TIMOTHY 2:15



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## *The Amazing Fact of the Virgin Birth*

EXTRAORDINARY BIRTHS are certainly not unprecedented in biblical history. As part of the Abrahamic Covenant, God promised to send a son to Abraham and Sarah ([Genesis 17:19–22](#)). They were both beyond normal childbearing ages and laughed at the prospect of being parents, yet they ultimately witnessed the miraculous arrival of their son, Isaac ([Genesis 21:1–3](#)).

In [Judges 13](#), an angel of the Lord told Manoah and his barren wife that they would have a special son. True to the heavenly messenger’s words, Samson entered the world and for a time delivered the Israelites from the oppression of the Philistines.

Samuel, the first prophet, final judge,

and anointer of kings, also demonstrated in his birth the providential power of God. He was the answer to the faithful, persevering prayers of his godly mother, Hannah, who had remained childless until then. John the Baptist’s mother, Elizabeth, was also unable to have children until God graciously intervened when she was in her sixties or seventies and made her the mother of the forerunner of Christ ([Luke 1:15–17, 76–79](#)). But none of those special births was as amazing as the virgin birth of the Son of God, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

## REGARDING THE VIRGIN BIRTH

Even though the fact of Jesus’ virgin birth is clearly and concisely stated in Scripture, the unconverted mind of sinful humanity, as with all essential doctrines of the Christian faith, resists embracing the truth of His unique birth.

First of all, ancient mythologies and world religions counterfeited Christ’s virgin birth with a proliferation of bizarre stories and inaccurate parallels. These stories undercut and minimized the uniqueness and profound impact of our Lord’s birth. Several accounts illustrate the point. The Romans claimed that Zeus impregnated Semele without contact and produced Dionysus, lord of the earth. Babylonian religion asserted that a sunbeam in the priestess Semiramis conceived Tammuz, the Sumerian fertility god ([Ezekiel 8:14](#)). Buddha’s mother allegedly saw a large white elephant enter her belly when she conceived the deified Indian philosopher.

Hinduism teaches that the divine

Vishnu, after living as a fish, tortoise, boar, and lion, entered Devaki's womb and became her son, Krishna. Satan has propagated other similar legends, all with the purpose of undermining the nature of Christ's birth and deceiving people into seeing it as just another myth or nothing exceptional.

In addition, the scientific age and the emergence of modern and postmodern theologies during the past two centuries have eroded many professed believers' confidence in the reality of the virgin birth. (Along with that trend has been a noticeable decline in the percentage of "Christians" who believe in the deity of Christ.) But such skeptical thinking is foolish and directly contrary to the explicit teaching of all four Gospels, the Epistles, and the historical testimony of the entire early church that Jesus was none other than the virgin-born Son of God.

Unfortunately, a heart attitude of unbelief concerning Jesus' identity has characterized much of men and women since the Fall. The Jews who opposed Christ vividly illustrated that attitude on more than one occasion ([John 5:18](#); [John 7:28-30](#); [John 10:30-39](#)). But such hostility and lack of faith should not discourage us or deter us from embracing and defending the truth of Christ's virgin birth. The apostle Paul reminds us, "For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly, not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar" ([Romans 3:3-4](#); [Romans 10:16](#); [Isaiah 53:1](#)). The world's opinion, popular as it might be, is rarely a reliable source of truth.

Undoubtedly, therefore, the Holy Spirit acted with significant purpose in devoting an early passage from the Gospel of Matthew, at the front of the New Testament, to establish right away the humanity and deity of our Lord. His incarnation, properly understood, is foundational to Christianity. There could have been no genuine work of redemption apart from the fact of God becoming man and, by being both completely God and completely man, reconciling people to Himself through His substitutionary death and physical resurrection. If Jesus had not been both human and divine, there would be no gospel. (For further discussion on the necessity of believing and proclaiming the truth of Christ's virgin birth and deity, see chapter 8 of the book *Nothing but the Truth* [Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1999]).

Many skeptical New Testament commentators

will concede that Matthew and other authors of Scripture sincerely believed and taught that the Holy Spirit conceived Jesus without any assistance from a human father. But such interpreters nevertheless glibly discount the validity of Scripture's claims by immediately asserting that its writers were naive, uneducated, and subject to the myths and superstitions of ancient times. According to the critics, the Gospel writers merely adapted some of the familiar virgin birth legends to the story of Jesus' birth.

But nothing could be further from the truth. Matthew's account, for example, reads as history, but it is history he could know and record only because God revealed it and accomplished it by miraculous intervention. Matthew's words are far superior to the immoral and repulsive nature of the secular stories he and the other writers allegedly drew from. Here is his clear, uncomplicated narrative of the Incarnation:

#### **Matthew 1:18-25 (NASB)**

<sup>18</sup> "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.

<sup>19</sup> And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly.

<sup>20</sup> But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>21</sup> "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

<sup>22</sup> Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

<sup>23</sup> "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US."

<sup>24</sup> And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife,

<sup>25</sup> but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus."

Matthew declares Jesus' divine lineage in this passage and reveals five aspects of His virgin birth: 1) its first announcement, 2) Joseph's response to it, 3) the angel's clarification of it, 4) its connection to prophecy, and 5) its actual occurrence.

## THE VIRGIN BIRTH ANNOUNCED

Matthew needs only one verse ([Matthew 1:18](#)) to announce the fact of Christ's virgin birth. Such a concise statement, though it doesn't all by itself prove the point, strongly suggests that the notion of our Lord and Savior's virgin birth was not simply a man-made story. A human author, writing strictly on his own initiative, would characteristically tend to describe such a momentous and amazing event in an expansive, detailed, and elaborate manner. But not the apostle Matthew. He does relate additional circumstances surrounding the virgin birth, but the basic fact is stated in one simple sentence: "**After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.**"

Matthew devotes the previous seventeen verses to Jesus' human genealogy but just this part of one verse to His divine genealogy. As the Son of God, Jesus "**descended**" from His Heavenly Father by a miraculous and never-repeated act of the Holy Spirit; even so, the Holy Spirit chose to announce that astounding truth by just one brief, declarative sentence. As all God's Word does, Matthew's simple statement contains the solemn tone of authenticity. By contrast, a human fabrication would tend to have that false ring of exaggeration to it, being filled out with much more "convincing" material than what this inspired version needed.

Scripture gives us little information about Mary and even less about Joseph. Mary was undoubtedly a godly young woman, probably a native of Nazareth who came from a relatively poor family. Joseph was the son of Jacob ([Matthew 1:16](#)) and was a craftsman, probably a carpenter ([Matthew 13:55](#)). Most significant, he was a "**just man**" ([Matthew 1:19](#)), one who placed saving trust in the coming Messiah.

Most likely Mary and Joseph were both quite young when they were engaged ("betrothed"). She may have been as young as twelve or thirteen, and he not any older than fifteen or sixteen. Such youthfulness at the time of a couple's engagement was standard for that culture. Another standard aspect of the Jewish betrothal was its binding nature—society considered the man and the woman legally married even though the formal ceremony and consummation might occur a year later. The purpose of the engagement period was to confirm each partner's fidelity when the two had little or no social contact with each another.

Mary and Joseph faithfully abstained from sexual relations with one another during the engagement period, as the contract required. That was also in accord with the Bible's high regard for sexual purity and God's commands for sexual abstinence prior to the marriage ceremony and for sexual fidelity afterward. Thus, Mary's virginity was an important indicator of her godliness.

However, Mary's virginity protected something much more important than her own morality and godly reputation. It ensured the deity of Christ and supported the veracity of His teaching and works as the Son of God. Had Jesus been conceived by natural means, with Joseph or anyone else as His father, He would not have been God and would not have been a true Savior of sinners. To be in accord with what Scripture reported about His life, He would have had to make false claims about Himself, and He would have had to endorse false stories or hoaxes concerning the Resurrection and Ascension. Meanwhile everyone would have remained spiritually dead, condemned forever by their unforgiven sins. But we know that all that is contrary to what God's Word teaches.

The apostle Paul, for example, was also very clear and concise when he reiterated the true nature of the Incarnation: "**But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman**" ([Galatians 4:4](#)). Paul includes no mention of a human father for Jesus because, according to the divine plan, God was His Father. Jesus had one human parent (Mary) so that He could be a man and identify closely with what it means to be human ([Philippians 2:5-7](#); [Hebrews 4:15](#)). And He had divine parentage so He could live a sinless life, perfectly fulfill the Law of God for us, and make the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

Admittedly, all these centuries after Matthew's divinely inspired Gospel declared that Jesus was born of a virgin, His miraculous conception remains impossible to understand by human reason alone. God chose not to explain the details of it to us, even as He chose to leave unexplained the intricacies of His creating the universe from nothing, the precise way He could be one God in three Persons, or exactly what happens when depraved sinners are born again as they repent of their sins and trust Christ. Many of the essentials of Christianity God wants believers to accept by faith. Full understanding will have to wait until heaven: "**For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now [we] know in part, but then [we] shall know [fully]**" ([1 Corinthians 13:12](#)).

## JOSEPH'S RESPONSE TO THE VIRGIN BIRTH

Initial news of Mary's condition presented Joseph with a twofold problem. A caring and responsible person concerned about doing the right thing, Joseph was unwilling to proceed with his original plans once he perceived that a crucial part of those plans was no longer acceptable. His difficulty was intensified by the reality that he was a righteous man, genuinely concerned about doing what was morally and ethically right according to God's Law. **First**, when Joseph realized Mary was pregnant, he knew he could not go ahead with their marriage. He knew he was not the father and, based on what he knew at the time, he had to assume that another man was.

Joseph's **second** difficult decision concerned how he should then treat Mary. Because he was a good and loving man, he was grieved at the thought of shaming her publicly (a common practice in those days when a wife was unfaithful), and even more so at the prospect of demanding her death, as provided for in [Deuteronomy 22:23–24](#). We don't know if he felt anger, resentment, or bitterness, but he certainly experienced shame at what he had to assume was true. However, Joseph's concern was not primarily with his own shame and embarrassment, but with Mary's. [Matthew 1:19](#) says, **“not wanting to make her a public example, [Joseph] was minded to put her away secretly.”**

Therefore, Joseph's plan was to divorce Mary secretly so she would not have to endure the disgrace of everyone in the community knowing about her supposed sin. Not many husbands ever display such firmly held and deeply felt love for their wives. Of course, eventually, when the marriage didn't occur, everyone would have found out that something had gone wrong. But at least in the meantime Mary would be protected from humiliation and death.

The Lord, however, in His sovereign providence and wonderful grace, intervened directly into the situation and spared Joseph the further trauma of actually carrying out his divorce plans. **“But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit’”** ([Matthew 1:20](#)). This verse underscores the miraculous nature of the virgin birth and the supernatural character surrounding

the entire event of Christ's birth. It also provides divine assurance to Joseph (“son of David”) and to us that Jesus had legitimate royal lineage that legally came through Joseph as a descendant of King David.

The angel's words provide the ultimate and most irrefutable testimony to the essential truth of the virgin birth and to the proper response Joseph was to have to Mary's extraordinary situation.

## THE ANGEL CLARIFIES THE VIRGIN BIRTH

But what was the significance of Mary's pregnancy even though she had not had relations with Joseph or any other man? Joseph likely would have spent some time puzzling over that question if the divine messenger had not immediately clarified his pronouncement with these words, **“And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins”** ([Matthew 1:21](#)).

The angel tells Joseph that Mary will actually bear a son. And not just any son, but Jesus, who **“will save His people from their sins.”** God chose the name Jesus for His Son because its basic meaning defined the fundamental, overarching purpose for the Son's coming to earth. Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew Joshua, Jeshua, or Jehoshua, each of which means **“Jehovah (Yahweh) will save.”** The baby Mary had conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and would give birth to in the plan of God would grow up to testify to the Father's salvation and would Himself be that salvation. By His own sacrificial death on the Cross and triumphant Resurrection from the grave He would save His own—all those who are drawn from sin to repentance and who receive faith to embrace His atoning work.

## THE VIRGIN BIRTH PROPHESED

At the time the angel told Joseph about Jesus' unique birth, the idea of a virgin birth was not one that was completely foreign to the Jews' understanding of their Scripture. Although they misinterpreted it, many of the rabbis exegeted [Jeremiah 31:22](#) (**“a woman shall encompass a man”**) in a way that suggested the Messiah would have an unusual birth. Their fanciful explanation of that verse (**“Messiah is to have no earthly father,”** and **“The birth of Messiah shall be like the dew of the Lord, as drops upon the grass without the action of man”**) at least preserved the general idea that the Messiah's birth would be unique.

The Book of Genesis gives us the first glimpse that Christ's birth would be special: **“And I will put enmi-**

ty between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed” ([Genesis 3:15](#)). Technically, the woman’s seed belongs to the man, but Mary’s impregnation by the Holy Spirit is the only instance in history that a woman had a seed within her that did not originate from a human man.

The later divine promise to Abraham concerned his “**descendants**” (Hebrew, “seed”; [Genesis 12:7](#)), a common Old Testament way of referring to offspring. The unique reference in [Genesis 3:15](#) to “**her Seed**” looks beyond Adam and Eve to Mary and to Christ. The two seeds of that verse can have a twofold emphasis. First, they can primarily refer to all people who are part of Satan’s progeny and all who are part of Eve’s. The two groups constantly wage spiritual war against each other, with the people of righteousness eventually defeating the people of evil. Second, the word translated “Seed” can be singular and refer mainly to one final, glorious product of a woman—the Lord Jesus Himself, born without human seed. In that sense the prophecy is definitely Messianic.

[Matthew 1:22–23](#) clearly identifies Jesus’ virgin birth as a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy: “**So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated, ‘God with us.’**” Matthew’s quotation here of [Isaiah 7:14](#) confirms that the prophet did in fact predict the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.

The prophet Isaiah made this momentous prophecy during the reign of Judah’s wicked and idolatrous King Ahaz. The king faced a major military threat from the Israelite king, Pekah; and the Syrian king, Rezin; both of whom wanted to overthrow Ahaz and replace him with a more compliant monarch. Instead of seeking the Lord’s help during that crisis, King Ahaz turned to Tiglath-Pileser, the brutal ruler of the pagan Assyrians. Ahaz even induced their assistance by offering them gold and silver stolen from God’s Temple.

Ahaz refused to listen to Isaiah’s report that God would deliver the people from Pekah and Rezin. Therefore, the prophet spoke the remarkable prophecy of [Isaiah 7:14](#), which told Ahaz that no one would destroy the people of God or the royal line of David. And sure, enough, although Tiglath-Pileser destroyed the northern kingdom (Israel), deported its population, and overran Judah four times, God ulti-

mately preserved His people just as He promised.

Isaiah also said that before another child (Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz) was very mature or aware of events, the territories of Rezin and Pekah would be abandoned ([Isaiah 7:15–16](#)). Again, the prophet’s divinely inspired words were completely accurate. Before the other child, who was born to Isaiah’s wife, was three years old, the two enemy kings were dead. Just as God fulfilled that ancient prophecy about Isaiah’s son, so He was about to fulfill the one concerning the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Both were signs from the Lord that He would not abandon His people, but the greatest of the two was obviously the second one: that His Son would actually be born of a virgin, live among His people, and die for their sins.

In his original pronouncement in [Isaiah 7:14](#), Isaiah used the Hebrew word **’alma** for “**virgin.**” That is a significant term, and it’s important to understand why the prophet used it. **’Alma** occurs six other times in the Old Testament ([Genesis 24:43](#); [Exodus 2:8](#); [Psalm 68:25](#); [Proverbs 30:19](#); [Song of Solomon 1:3](#); [6:8](#)), and in each instance, it connotes or denotes “**virgin.**” Until recent times, both Jewish and Christian scholars always translated the word that way.

It is interesting that in modern Hebrew either **’alma** or **betula** can mean “**virgin.**” However, Isaiah did not use **betula** because in Old Testament Hebrew it can refer to a married woman who is not a virgin ([Deuteronomy 22:19](#); [Joel 1:8](#)). It’s apparent, therefore, that he used **’alma** in [Isaiah 7:14](#) with the clear, precise conviction that the woman who would bear the Messiah would indeed be a young woman who never had sexual relations with a man.

Matthew’s use of Isaiah’s prophecy followed directly in the prophet’s path. The apostle was not giving **’alma** a Christian “**twist**” to make its usage fit a theory of the virgin birth. Instead, Matthew gave the term the same meaning as Isaiah intended, demonstrated by his translation of **’alma** with the Greek **parthenos**, the same word used by the Jewish translators of the Greek Old Testament.

Although the credibility of the virgin birth does not rest solely on the use of a Hebrew word, a general understanding of the background and usage of **’alma** strengthens our belief in Christ’s unique birth. It also helps us to see that Matthew, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, knew exactly what he was doing when he related [Isaiah 7:14](#) to the birth of Jesus and declared again the equally amazing truths that “**the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His**

**name Immanuel.”** In His virgin birth, Christ was, in the most literal sense, the Son who was **“God with us.”**

## **THE OCCURRENCE OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH**

All of Matthew’s explanation of the significance of the virgin birth came within the revelatory dream God gave to Joseph. Such extraordinary, direct communication evidently occurred while Joseph engaged in the otherwise ordinary activity of sleeping. Matthew does not record any detail of Joseph’s immediate reaction, except to say that he woke up and obeyed the angel’s instructions: **“Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus”** ([Matthew 1:24–25](#)).

You can imagine how great Joseph’s feelings of amazement, relief, and gratitude must have been once he realized what the Lord, through the heavenly messenger, had told him. Not only could he go ahead and gladly take Mary as his wife with honor and righteousness, but also he could rejoice at the privilege of being allowed to bring up God’s own Son.

The wedding ceremony of Joseph and Mary likely took place soon after Joseph received the angel’s announcement. Matthew makes it clear that Mary remained a virgin until after Jesus was born, implying that normal marital relations began after that time. That, along with the references to Jesus’ brothers and sisters ([Matthew 12:46](#); [Matthew 13:55–56](#); [Mark 6:3](#)), proves Mary was not a virgin for her entire life, as some claim.

Finally, Joseph followed through on God’s command in [Matthew 1:21](#) and named the baby Jesus, indicating, as we’ve already seen, that He was to be the Savior.

The amazing fact of Jesus’ supernatural birth is the only way to explain the perfect, sinless life He lived while on earth. A skeptic who denied the virgin birth once asked a Christian, “If I told you that child over there was born without a human father, would you believe me?” “Yes,” the believer replied, “if he lived as Jesus lived.”

Christ’s virgin birth is a necessary component that helps us believe and make sense of the entire story of His person and work. His extraordinary conception and birth, not before or since equaled, is an amazing reality that we should with joy and gratitude never take for granted.





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## Introduction to 1 John

### Part 06

This study continues with the Introduction to the book of [1 John](#) and will look at the key word “**abide**” or “**abides**”. This is an extremely important word to John. The Greek word for “**abide**” is “*meno*” and it is used 118 times in the New Testament. Of those 118 times that it is used, the [Gospel of John](#) uses it 40 times, [1 John](#) uses it 24 times, and [2 John](#) uses it 3 times. Proportionately, [1 John](#) has more usages of the Greek word “*meno*” than any other book in the New Testament – 24 times in 5 chapters. Throughout the New Testament it is generally translated as “**abide, continue, endure, remain, to stand firm, dwells.**” based on whatever translation someone may have. Strong’s says that the word “*meno*” means to stay in a given place, state, relation, or expectancy. The Revised Version generally translates it as “**continues**”. Very often it refers to staying in a house as a guest, or staying in a particular place. When the Holy Spirit descended on Christ, the Greek term to describe that event was the word “*meno*” and provided the idea of the Holy Spirit permanently resting on Christ. [John 1:32](#) says,

**Jn 1:32 And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him.**

In [John](#) and [1 John](#), the word “**abides**” is concerned with the primary aspect of **continuing** in a personal bond with someone. It is one thing to start a relationship, but quite another to remain in that relationship. Most would think of this aspect in relation to a marriage and how the partners are to continue in a personal bond with one another. This “**abiding**” aspect of the Christian life is not something mystical, but rather it is the very core of what it means to even be a Christian. We will see in [John 14 and 15](#) that the idea of “**abiding**” is twofold – Christ abides in the believer first, and because of His abiding in them, the believer is to abide in Christ. In reality, it is His abiding in the believer that gives them the very power that they need to abide in Him. In [1 John](#) the way that John expresses this is that he says that “**His seed remains**” in the Christian. [1 John 3:9](#) says,

**1Jn 3:9 Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.**

The idea of “**abiding**” is an essential element of salvation. In practical terms, it would be considered as the element of loyalty that is utterly critical in any meaningful relationship. Relationships are quickly dissolved when there is no loyalty between the parties concerned. One of the greatest places where disloyalty is often expressed is in the local church. People come and go. People become dissatisfied over various issues and off they go. However, from God’s perspective, it is the willingness, the patience, and the spiritual stamina to work through something that gives substance to the relationship. A person can never have a good marriage if every time that they have a disagreement with their partner they start thinking about divorce or separation. What makes any relationship meaningful is the willingness to work through the difficult moments. That is what ultimately gives meaning and purpose to the relationship – working through things that are difficult. It is easy to quickly measure this by looking at God’s unswerving loyalty and faithfulness to believers in spite of their personal indifference and spiritual laziness that they so often exhibit.

Expositionally there is what is known as “transitional truths”. I.e., they are teachings that build on one another. I.e., the individual has to understand the first in order to appreciate and apply the second in their life. This is clearly seen in [John 14](#) and [John 15](#) where the first truth that John establishes is that believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It is the simple truth that God lives in the believer. [John 14:16](#) says,

**Jn 14:16 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever.**

It has to be appreciated that when Jesus taught this to His disciples, this was the first time that they had ever heard anything like this at all.

So the first transitional truth that Jesus gave was that Christ abides in believers permanently – “forever”. Then, however, He gives the second transitional truth that believers abide in Christ in [John 15:1-8](#), or His great teaching on abiding in Him so that the believer can bear spiritual fruit in their life. Christians cannot fulfill the second until they fully understand the first. [John 15:4-7](#) uses the word “abide” or “abides” seven times in four verses.

**Jn 15:4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned. <sup>7</sup> If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.**

The first transitional truth teaches that someone cannot be a Christian without Christ and the second transitional truth teaches us that men cannot be godly without God. His abiding must exist in them before they can “abide” in Him. If Christians are ever going to be able to live the Christian life the way that God intended for it to be lived, then they must know that they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. When they come to know that truth more than just as a doctrine and if they see that incredible truth in their heart, it will change their life. Just notice again what Jesus told His disciple in [John 15:7](#) when He said,

**<sup>7</sup> If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.**

How good is that? The operative word, however, is “abide” – and nothing less. This is very much a conditional promise to the believer. This verse just takes my breath away. If Christians do not know who they are in Christ and what they actually have, then they will never become what God wants them

to become. Every believer needs to answer the question as to “*who am I and why am I here*” if the Christian life is ever going to have any real meaning for them. Many Christians are simply suffering from an “identity crises”. They have not yet decided whose family they want to be a part of. No one is an accident or some kind of amoeba that has no meaning and is simply here by some kind of cosmic explosion. Just look in the mirror. Every person has been created in the image of God to bring glory to God.

Most likely it is important to have a paradigm shift in your thinking. Please never lose sight of the very simple yet profound truth that men become what they think. How someone thinks determines what they become. It is inevitable, unavoidable, and certain. Now, the shift that needs to occur in most believer’s thinking is relative to what it means to be saved, and there are two foundational truths that need to be fully understood. The first truth is that at the moment of salvation we were sinners saved by grace. Unfortunately, that is where many Christians remain in their thinking – just an old sinner saved by grace. The second truth that should remove the mindset of the first truth is that NOW believers are saints being sanctified by the truth. Testimonies are given all the time and someone says “*I’m just an old sinner saved by grace*”. Now, that sounds nice, but in reality it is very incomplete and actually reflects an error in someone’s understanding of Scripture. It may be well and good for a very young Christian to say that, but it would not be proper for someone who has been a Christian for some time to say that. It would be similar to my telling someone that I am just an infant fresh out of the womb. That is not true. To the contrary, I am an adult. I have grown up. In my home we do not have any of my baby pictures hanging on the wall – none. Why? It is because that part of my life is over, done, finished. Just imagine someone sending out a Christmas card of their family and it being a collage of all of their baby pictures?

Once someone is saved, they are literally transferred from Adam’s family to God’s family, and to make it even better they are indwelt with the mighty person of the Holy Spirit who began immediately to start transforming their lives to be a reflection of Jesus Christ. They were saved initially so that they could be sanctified continually. If believers do not see that, then they will never make any substantial progress in their Christian life. A believer’s personal testimony right now should not be that they are just a sinner saved by grace, but rather that God is working deeply, intimately, and mightily in their life. Their testimony should be that they have been abiding, are currently abiding, and will continue to abide in Christ and in His Word, and that



God is being glorified in their life. That should be every believer's testimony right now! The very evidence of salvation is that those who are saved are continually developing spiritually – growing, learning, and abiding. So, how does all of this happen in a practical way? Well, it really is very simple - by simple faith believers constantly surrender and yield their life to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit within them. They allow His sanctifying presence, influence, and power to control their lives. In reality, the word “surrender” is not a biblical term. It is not used in the Scriptures as an indication of what has just been described. The biblical word that the New Testament consistently uses is the word “**present**” or “**yield**” based on whatever translation someone may be using. Believers “**present**” themselves to the Holy Spirit for His sanctifying work within them. The following are a few verses to highlight this - [Romans 6:13,19 and 12:1](#).

Ro 6:13 **And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.**

Ro 6:19 **I speak in human *terms* because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness *leading to more* lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.**

Ro 12:1 **I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your reasonable service.***

The word “**present**” is the Greek word “*parastemi*”. “*Para*” means “near” and “*stemi*” means to place. So, the meaning is that of placing oneself near or standing near someone. Here is the operative question in all of this – “*Would I be willing to take this area of my life and place it near Jesus Christ?*” Would Christ be satisfied with this area of the believer's life or with how they responded to something difficult? Would He be satisfied with what was said to someone and how they handled a particular situation? Would He be satisfied with the believer's attitude? That is the picture here of being surrendered, of yielding oneself to Christ, and of our presenting ourselves to Him. [1 Thessalonians 5:19](#) gives some insight into what too often goes on in people's lives. It says,

1Th 5:19 **Do not quench the Spirit.**

The word “**quench**” means that the individual stifles and hinders the Holy Spirit's work in their life. They refuse to yield themselves to Him and to His sanctifying work within them. It is doing those things in their life that do not allow the Holy Spirit to exert His full influence over their life. It is being stubborn, self-willed, and often very unpleasant. Christians grumble and complain. It is all a part of not yielding themselves to the Holy Spirit, and it is a conscious choice that they make every day in all of the various areas of their life. A committed Christian must stand in awe that the Holy Spirit indwells them and they must cherish the fact that He wants to work deeply in their life. The principle here is very simple – by faith a believer yields their life to the work of the Holy Spirit within them. This is a foundational truth to the Christian life – God must first work in the believer before He can work through them. God will not use someone if they do not allow Him to change them. Every believer must submit themselves to the major changes that God wants to work into their life. Everyone who wants to be used by God must allow this to happen in their life. The Holy Spirit will not force anyone to do this. The worst thing that a believer can do is to become satisfied with a very minimal work of the Holy Spirit in them and to go on living their life anyway that they want to live. That is spiritual arrogance of the highest order.

So, how does all of this happen in a Christian's life in a practical sense? Well, it happens through “**abiding**” – through remaining, staying, standing fast, dwelling, continuing, and enduring in the things of God and in the Word of God. Much of this is seen in [John 15:1-8](#) which is a great passage on “**abiding**”. The primary meaning of the word “**abides**” or “**abiding**” is that of remaining steadfast and of persevering in something. It refers to remaining united with someone in heart, mind, and will. What is important about this word, however, and one of the elements of its meaning that is so often missed is that the word implies a very conscious exercise of the will to persevere. I.e., the person chooses to endure, chooses to persevere, and chooses to continue in the things of God. One of the nuances of the word “**abide**” is that when a believer allows the word of God to “**abide**” in them, it has a very significant sanctifying effect on their life. [1 John 2:6](#) seems to best capture this meaning when it says,

1Jn 2:6 **He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.**

In this verse, abiding is equated with and directly linked to walking. What Jesus promises to do through the believer is directly conditional on their abiding. [John 15:7](#) starts out this way,

**John 15:7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you....**

The word “**if**” makes the promise conditional. Now, the tragic part of not understanding this simple truth is found in [John 15:4](#) which says,

**Jn 15:4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.**

Spiritual fruit in a believer’s life is a direct by-product of their abiding in the Vine. The word “**unless**” expresses an indispensable condition and an inevitable spiritual law. There is only one way for a branch to bear spiritual fruit, and that is by abiding in the vine. The moment that it becomes disconnected from the tree, it can no longer produce any fruit whatsoever. There are no exceptions. When looking at someone’s spiritual life and it is apparent that they are not producing any spiritual fruit in their life, it is because they are not abiding in the Vine. There are no exceptions – none.

Now, there are two final and significant statements regarding abiding that need to be made. First, the abiding believer is the only one who can have any legitimate assurance of salvation. Secondly, it is a very dangerous place to try and convince oneself that they are saved if they never bear any spiritual fruit in their life and if God is not involved in pruning away things that are hindrances to their spiritual growth and maturity. Fruitfulness is NORMAL for a believer. What most people want is a theology that allows them to live in sin, that allows them to never grow spiritually, and that allows them to live however they want to live. That is spiritual suicide, and unfortunately one can find many churches that will tell them what they want to hear.

#### **ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup>Strong’s, 1229.

<sup>2</sup>Renn’s, 2.

<sup>3</sup>EDNT, Abides, electronic page.

<sup>4</sup>Strong’s, 1297.

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