

***Meno* and the Doctrine of Abiding**

John Hepp, Jr.

Now he who keeps His commandments ABIDES in Him and He in him. And by this we know that He ABIDES in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

The verse above is 1 John 3:24, quoted from the New King James Version to show the word *abides*. (Hereafter, we will quote from the NIV.) This verse gives aspects of what has been called “The Doctrine of Abiding,” based on writings by the apostle John. The key word (here twice translated “abides”) is the Greek verb *meno*. John uses this word twenty-four times in the five chapters of his first epistle, and three times in 2 John. It is important to see how he uses it.

Meno simply means “to stay, remain, continue” in a place, condition, or existence. Most writers use it only in a literal sense: for physical or mental remaining. We will call this literal sense “sense A.” John, however, also uses *meno* in a non-literal sense, for moral or spiritual remaining. We will call this—the basis of abiding—“sense B.” In either sense *meno* extends an activity or status that already exists; it does not start a new one. For example, to **stay** in a place only extends **being** there; it is not a special kind of relationship.

Every New Testament use of *meno* outside of John’s writings is in sense A. John also sometimes uses it that way, as in the following examples from his Gospel. The words in all-capital letters are the NIV translation of *meno*. Notice something else about *meno*. It does not itself suggest that the continued activity or status will—or will not—come to an end. Such a suggestion must come from other words, such as in the third example below (2:12, “for a few days”).

- 1:32 “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven...and REMAIN on him [Jesus].” (also v. 33)
- 1:38 “Where ARE you STAYING?” (also v. 39)
- 2:12 “There they STAYED for a few days.” (also 4:40; 11:6; each telling how long)
- 3:36 “God’s wrath REMAINS on him.”

Now consider sense B, to continue morally or spiritually. Over half the time in his Gospel, and usually in his epistles, John uses *meno* this way. Since the KJV often translates *meno* as “abide,”¹ John’s uses of sense B constitute “The Doctrine of Abiding.” In the Gospel here are his first such uses, with comments for each. In them abiding means to continue relationships necessary for salvation. In other words, John uses sense B to describe every converted person.

- 5:38 “nor DOES his word DWELL in you”
(This was the defect that kept some from believing the One whom God sent and, as a result, from having life—v. 40—or the love of God—v. 42. We infer, therefore, that God’s word does dwell in all believers who receive eternal life.)
- 6:27 “food that ENDURES to eternal life”
(This true bread from heaven—v. 33—is Jesus Himself—vv. 35, 41—namely, his flesh—v. 51. Therefore, the food that must remain in someone for him to have eternal life would seem to be Jesus remaining in him. Compare v. 56.)

¹ KJV also uses “continue,” “remain,” or “dwell.” NIV most often translates it “live” but also “remain” or “continue.” The NET Bible translates “remain” if possible change seems involved—but usually “reside.”

- 6:56 “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood REMAINS in me, and I in him.”
 (This eating and drinking produces or is evidence of mutual indwelling. In the two previous verses—vv. 54-55—the same eating and drinking give eternal life. Therefore, it would seem that all who obtain eternal life remain in the Lord Jesus and He in them.)
- 8:31-32 “To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you HOLD TO [continue in] my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”
 (These were people “who had believed”—v. 31—but showed that they were not converted. They later tried to kill Jesus—v. 59. He said that they were not really Abraham’s children—v. 39—nor God’s children—v. 42—but the devil’s—v. 44. Therefore, it is not sufficient to initially “believe.” In order to truly be His disciple and become free, one must “hold to [His] teaching.”)

It seems obvious from these examples that all genuine Christians abide in Messiah and His Word. Likewise, He (and God) and His Word abide in them.² But this obvious meaning of *meno* gives us a difficulty in John 15:1-17. In that last and climactic passage about abiding in John’s Gospel,³ it seems to contradict the marvelous doctrine of Eternal Security (“once saved, always saved”).⁴ In John 15 Messiah calls Himself “the true vine” (vv. 1, 5). His purpose as the vine, of course, is to produce fruit (grapes). “The branches” in this vine (v. 5) are His disciples, who are known as such by the grapes they produce (v. 8). Notice how He exhorts and warns them in 15:4-6.

4 REMAIN in me, and I WILL REMAIN in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must REMAIN in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you REMAIN in me. 5 I am the vine. You are the branches. If a man REMAINS in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. 6 If anyone DOES not REMAIN in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away...thrown into the fire and burned.

Thus, Messiah exhorts people to remain in Him (v. 4) who are already branches (v. 5). And He warns them on the assumption that some “branches” will “not remain in” Him and will be “burned” (v. 6). This exhortation and warning seem to conflict with Eternal Security. Doesn’t that doctrine guarantee that all true believers will persevere and cannot be lost? If so, why exhort them to remain in Messiah? Why warn them about not remaining?

To harmonize John 15:1-17 with Eternal Security, some interpreters redefine *meno*. In this passage they restrict it to selected believers. All believers, they say, are **in** the vine, but not all **abide**. In their interpretation abiding has become a new and optional activity. It is not—as you saw in its earlier uses—a continuation of an existing activity (here being “in” the vine). Some of these interpreters conclude that not all believers bear fruit (v. 4) and that being “burned” (v. 6) is

² John’s next uses of *meno*, in 8:35; 9:41; 12:46; and 14:10, 17; have the same obvious meaning.

³ Not only is John 15:1-17 the last passage in John’s Gospel that uses *meno*. It also gives *meno* great emphasis, using it ten times: in vv. 4 (twice), 5, 6, 7 (twice), 9, 10 (twice), and 16.

⁴ Eternal Security is evident from many Scriptures and many considerations. For example, see John 10:28-30; Romans 5:1-11; and 8:28-39. Salvation is entirely a gift of God’s grace. The elect were—and still are—unworthy recipients of that grace. Since they do nothing to earn God’s approval, they count on God’s completing the good work He has begun in them. Having made them part of His family, He will never forsake them.

a temporal, not eternal, judgment. However, their explanation is not valid. It changes the meaning of *meno* (whether sense A or sense B) that you consistently saw in the earlier references.

A better solution maintains that in John 15 abiding means to keep on believing. There is—even in John’s Gospel—belief that does not continue and does not save. I give evidence of that in Appendix B (p. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**). For now, see how the normal meaning of *meno* fits in some of its uses in 1 John and 2 John. As above, the translations of *meno* are in all-capital letters. For your own study there is a complete list, at the end of this appendix, of the use of *meno* in those books.

- 2:6 “Whoever claims to LIVE in him must walk as Jesus did.”
 (“Live in him” continues “are in him,” from the previous verse, v. 5.)
- 3:24 “Those who obey his commands LIVE in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he LIVES in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.”
 (By definition every genuine disciple of Messiah obeys Him—Matthew 5:24; 28:19—and has been given the Spirit—Romans 5:5; 8:9.)
- 4:12,13 “If we love one another, God LIVES in us.... We know that we LIVE in him and he [LIVES] in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.”
 (Our love is evidence that we are His disciples—John 13:35. Regarding the Spirit, see the comment for 3:24.)
- 4:15 “If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God LIVES in him and he [LIVES] in God.”
 (As in the previous example, this sentence begins with a protasis [“if” clause]: “If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God.” This is followed by an apodosis [conclusion]: “God LIVES in him and he in God.” Since the protasis is true of every believer, so is the apodosis—mutual indwelling.)
- 4:16 “Whoever LIVES in love LIVES in God, and God [LIVES] in him.”
- 2 John 9 “Anyone who...DOES not CONTINUE in the teaching of Messiah does not have God; whoever CONTINUES in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.”
 (Could there be any stronger way of equating *meno* with genuine Christianity?)

Thus, abiding is not a special relationship but a continuance of what already exists—of believing. Will genuine believers unfailingly abide (continue to believe)? The doctrine of Eternal Security says yes. However, the exhortations to abide are essential. God designs to keep us secure in part through our heeding the exhortations. As in all His dealings, He treats us not as inanimate objects (like rocks) but as people who respond.

Those who do not abide (continue, remain) are not genuine believers. The false teachers did not abide, which is John’s proof that they never were believers: “If they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us” (2:19). Similarly, when he says that “no murderer has eternal life [remaining] in him” (3:15), he simply means that eternal life was never present (see v. 14). Whatever was not there could not remain.

Meno in 1 John and 2 John: Continue Morally or Spiritually

| Refer- ence | New King James Version Text (Translation of <i>Meno</i> Form in All-Capital Letters) | NIV Translation of <i>Meno</i> |
|----------------|---|---|
| 1 John 2:6 | He who says he ABIDES in Him, ought himself also to walk just as He walked. | LIVE |
| 2:10 | He who loves his brother ABIDES in the light. | LIVES |
| 2:14 | because...the word of God ABIDES in you | LIVES |
| 2:17 | He who does the will of God ABIDES forever. | LIVES |
| 2:19 | for if they had been of us, they WOULD HAVE CONTINUED with us | WOULD HAVE REMAINED |
| 2:24 | Therefore LET that ABIDE in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning ABIDES in you; you also WILL ABIDE in the Son and in the Father. | SEE THAT...REMAINS [If it does] WILL REMAIN |
| 2:27 | But the anointing which you have received from Him ABIDES in you....and just as it has taught you, you WILL ABIDE in Him. | REMAINS REMAIN |
| 2:28 | And now, little children, ABIDE in Him. | CONTINUE |
| 3:6 | Whoever ABIDES in him does not sin. <i>Note:</i> This is contrasted to “whoever commits [practices] sin” in 3:4. | LIVES |
| 3:9 | for His seed REMAINS in him | REMAINS |
| 3:14 | He who does not love his brother ABIDES in death. | REMAINS |
| 3:15 | no murderer has eternal life ABIDING in him. | [omit] |
| 3:17 | How DOES the love of God ABIDE in him? | CAN...BE |
| 3:24 | Now he who keeps His commandments ABIDES in Him and He in him. And by this we know that He ABIDES in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us. | LIVE LIVES |
| 4:12 | If we love one another, God ABIDES in us. | LIVES |
| 4:13 | By this we know that we ABIDE in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. | LIVE |
| 4:15 | Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God ABIDES in him, and he in God. | LIVES |
| 4:16 | God is love, and he who ABIDES in love ABIDES in God, and God [ABIDES] in him. | LIVES...[LIVES] LIVES |
| 2 John 2 | because of the truth which ABIDES in us and will be with us forever | LIVES |
| 2 John 9 | Whoever transgresses and DOES not ABIDE in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who ABIDES in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. | DOES CONTINUE CONTINUES |