

The Obligation of Incarnation

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

A few years ago it was something of a fashion to wear a bracelet, or some other kind of trinket, like a necklace or a T-shirt, with the letters W.W.J.D. written on them. The letters stood for, What Would Jesus Do? The idea was that as you wore those bracelets you would be reminded in every life circumstance to try to live as Jesus would, to do as He would have done.

I remember once driving and having a car pass me when the driver was not driving politely; he had some obnoxious music on, and was dangling his arm out the car window, with a cigarette in it. And a few centimetres up was a little bracelet with W.W.J.D on it. I remember thinking, "Well, probably not that!" There are worse things you can do than drive selfishly while smoking and assaulting people's ears, but I'm fairly sure Jesus would not have done that.

But that little fashion craze draws attention to something we see in this text: that Christians are supposed to walk like Jesus walked.

Once again, John gives us a sign of life. John has many different ways of describing what it means to truly be a Christian, to have eternal life. To be a Christian is to be in fellowship with God, walk in the light, know Him, have His seed within you, be born of Him, passed from death to life, His love abides in us and so forth. In this Scripture, John describes someone who claims to be a Christian, and then states what ought to be present if that claim is true. There is the nature of the claim, and then the obligation of the claim.

I. The Nature of the Claim

Once again, John mentions someone who makes a claim to be a Christian. Here is another way of saying 'eternal life': He who says he abides in Him.

The word 'abide' simply means to dwell, to remain, to live in. Here is a person who says, if God is like a house, I am on the inside, not on the outside. If God is like a country, then I am a citizen, I am inside the borders. This is a claim to be related to God intimately and personally.

When Jesus wanted to make it clear that He was related to God in a very special way, He spoke of being in the Father, and the Father in Him.

John 10:38 but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him."

John 14:10-11 "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.

John 17:21 "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.

Jesus was saying, "I do not simply know about God from a distance. The Father lives in Me, and I live in the Father. We are one in essence. We cannot be separated from each other."

The one who makes this claim is claiming to know God in a similar fashion. And that is not unbiblical. In fact, it is exactly what Jesus taught. Jesus taught that the kind of close, organic

relationship that the Father and Son have, is what believers have once they become believers.

John 17:23 "I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me."

John 17:26 "And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

John 14:20 At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

John 6:56 "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him."

To be a Christian is to be in Christ, and to have Christ in you. If you put a piece of iron in the fire, the iron is in the fire, but eventually, the fire is also in the iron. So, when you are truly born again, you are placed into Christ. His righteousness becomes yours. His death becomes yours. His inheritance becomes yours. But Christ is also placed into you, by His indwelling Holy Spirit. His very person and life lives within you. He is in you and you are in Him.

To claim to be a Christian is to claim a massive thing. It is to claim that you have within you the life of Christ Himself, and to claim that you are covered with Christ's life and merits.

Well, such a claim brings an obligation. If you claim to know a celebrity, people will often ask for proof, and you ought to be able to produce it. If you claim to be able to lift 600 kg with one arm, people will ask for a demonstration, and you ought to be able to do it. If you claim to be able to speak Japanese, you ought to be able to speak about a given topic in Japanese. If you claim something, it brings an obligation to back up your claim.

II. The Obligation of the Claim

What is the obligation?

He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked

If it is true that He is in you, and you are in Him, then you ought to walk just as He walked. What does John mean by 'walk'? *Walk* speaks about the way you live your life. As you go about, your manner of life, your ongoing, habitual actions and lifestyle.

So if you say that you are in Christ, and Christ is in you, you ought to live your life the way He lived His life. To say you abide in Him is to link yourself with His life. To claim oneness with Christ is to set up the expectation that the life of Christ within you will find some form of outward expression.

You see, the spirit that possesses you is who you will be like. If you are controlled and indwelt by your own selfish, self-seeking spirit, that will be how you walk. If you are controlled and indwelt by a demonic spirit, that is who you will be like. But if you are controlled and indwelt by Christ's Spirit- the Holy Spirit, you will be like Christ.

The Bible is full of statements that Christians are supposed to be like Christ:

Luke 6:40 "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher."

John 13:15 "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.

John 13:34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,

Philippians 2:5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,

1 Peter 2:21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

It is amazing to see how little thought this is given today. Buddhists try to be like Buddha. Marxists try to follow Karl Marx. But how many professing Christians try to be like Christ? For some, they haven't really thought about it. In fact, what does it really mean to live like Christ did? Does it mean we should read the four Gospels, and then try to imitate the life of Jesus? Surely that's what it means to walk as He did?

It does mean that, but it means a lot more than that. The Bible cannot simply mean that we are to copy Jesus' earthly life, for a number of reasons.

The description of His earthly life gives us His life at the age of 33. If you're older or younger than that, how do you know what it is like to walk like He did? The description of His earthly life gives us His life as a single male. If you're a woman, if you're married, if you're a parent, if you're widowed, then Christ's earthly life does not match your excluding women, and those married, parenting, widowed etc.

Jesus' life is described for us for the three years that He was an itinerant prophet, living under the Law of Moses. That's not the vocation of any one of us, and we don't live in that culture or time. Christ's life described in the Gospels is a model, but it is just a snapshot. It is brief model. It is not exhaustive. The Gospel accounts do not contain all that there is to Christ's character. Where do we find it? The rest of Scripture. The Gospel accounts are remarkable and crucial eyewitness accounts of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They tell us what happened. They record many of His teachings. But they are not meant to be exhaustive accounts of how to live as He did. The entire Bible is there to give you the mind of Christ.

In other words, the Christian life is not merely an **imitation** of His earthly life. The Christian life is the **incarnation** of His life in you. When we speak of the Incarnation, we are saying, God the Son, the second Person of the Trinity, became flesh for us. He became the God-man, and was incarnate amongst us. John 1:14. That mighty mystery is what happens in lesser form with true Christianity.

You do not simply decide one day to turn over a new leaf and begin following Christian morals and ethics. You do not decide one day to live out the Sermon on the Mount, or to try to be as sacrificial as Jesus was. That would simply be a poor form of imitation.

In fact, part of the problem with the WWJD craze was it was based on a book, *In His Steps*, which did not make the gospel clear at all. People got the idea that you can just imitate Jesus, and it will make you a better person. Christianity is not an outside-in religion; it is an inside-out religion. False religions all try to get rules, morals and obligations forced from the outside into the individual's heart and mind. They try to merely imitate. Christianity says Christ takes up residence in you, and you take up a position in Him, and from that position of righteousness, and from the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit, God works out His holiness. Christianity is incarnation. The life of God

lives in you and because of that fact, you walk as He walked. Therefore, the person who claims to be in Christ ought to produce evidence of that fact with a life that is like Christ's. If you can never produce any evidence that Christ lives within, your claim is as good as a crooked timeshare scheme.

So that leads us to the practical question: How do we walk as He walked? How does the life of Christ become evident in you? Our passage in 1 John does not answer this, for that we must go to the Gospel of John. We'll see three parts to walking like he did and living His life. For each part, we'll see how this is initiated, and how it continues. The event that launches it, and the process that continues it. Jesus made it easy to understand by using an illustration. The illustration is one of plant growth.

We Can Only Live Like He Did If We Have Died To Our Own Life

John 12:23-25 But Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. "He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

Here Jesus uses something we are all familiar with: seeds and plants. He says a grain of wheat that just stays on the stalk and never falls does not produce life. Even though it sits on the stalk, it sits but if it falls off, shrivels up and dies, it becomes a seed for a new stalk of grain. But in order to produce new life, it has to stop clinging to its old stalk, and be willing to fall down into the dust and die. If it just wants to be a grain of wheat on a wheat stalk, that's all it will ever be. But if it will be willing to become something else, give up its life, it will truly live. When it does that, it brings forth life.

Then Jesus says, in the same way, he who loves his own life will lose it, but he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. In Matthew 16, He said it this way:

Matthew 16:25 "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

What does He mean? The one who clings to living his life for himself – that is, he loves his own life – will end up losing it. You live life for self, and in fact, you end up with less and less real life. And worse, you die physically, and experience an eternal death in hell, because you rejected the Lord of Life. You lose the very thing you wanted – life.

But if you are willing to be like that grain of wheat which gives up on its own life, then you will live. For us, it is not falling to the ground and dying, it is accepting Christ's death as our own death. It is believing that the life you have lived outside of Christ deserves death as its wages, and turning away from it, believing that God will crucify your old life with Jesus.

Romans 6:3-4 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Galatians 5:24 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

That is the first thing someone must do to have eternal life. That is what you must do to be saved. Recognise your independent life is a life of rebellion to God, and accept Christ's death as your own death.

For a believer, there is a sense in which that continues. It is not that you must die again and again, but you must keep counting Christ's death to be true of you, and so keep turning away from a selfish, independent life.

Romans 6:11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Galatians 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live

You should count the fuel tank of sin to be empty in your life. If the fuel tank is empty, why bother getting in the car? So count the death of Christ to sin to be your death to sin. Count yourself separated, cut off from it. By faith walk away from the pride and selfishness of sin, because you are dead to it.

To one who asked him the secret of his service, George Mueller said: "There was a day when I died, utterly died;" and, as he spoke, he bent lower and lower until he almost touched the floor—"died to George Muller, his opinions, preferences, tastes, and will—died to the world, its approval or censure—died to the approval or blame even of my brethren and friends—and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God."

Matthew 16:24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

If you fail to do this, you will always fail to be Christlike. This is ground-floor Christian living. This is the bottom line, atomic-level Christianity. If you do not keep counting the death of Jesus to be your death and thereby dying to sin, you will never live to righteousness. Death comes before resurrection. That leads us to the second point.

We can only Live like He did if His Life is now our Life

Remember we saw that Jesus said that He was in the Father and the Father in Him? Then we saw that such is the relationship of Christians to Christ:

John 14:20 At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

John 6:56 "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.

To be a Christian is to accept His death as your own death, and His life as your own life. He dies, and your sinful life dies with Him. He rises, and His righteous life becomes yours.

Once again, to illustrate, Jesus uses plants:

John 15:1-5 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ² "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 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. ⁵ "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.

Here Jesus says He is a vine, and His Father the one who tends the vine. In verse 5, He says Christians are branches.

The branches are supposed to bring forth fruit, and the Father wants fruit. So he prunes and lifts

branches (v2).

Now think about that illustration for a moment. Jesus is suggesting that we are organically linked to Him. We are part of Him. Just as the vine drinks in water and nutrients from the soil and feeds the branches with life-giving sap, so Christians have the very life of Christ dwelling in them.

That's why Paul could say:

Galatians 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. "

How does Jesus dwell in us? By His Spirit.

John 14:16-20 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever -- "the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. ¶ "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.

1 John 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.

1 John 4:13 ¶ By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

Again, this is part of the first thing we do when we are saved. We come to God, believing that our old life needs to die, and we accept His death as our death. But then the other side of the coin is that we accept His life as our life. We receive Him as our Lord, Saviour and Life.

John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

1 John 5:12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

For a believer, there is a sense in which that continues. You continue to yield to the life and Lordship of Jesus Christ. You submit to Him.

In John 15, Jesus used the word 'abide'. If you are in Christ, then you remain there. You stay in a close, loving relationship, where His life is your life, and you live for nothing else except Him. You remain in a life of knowing Christ and making Him known.

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. ⁵ "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.*

If you remain connected to Me, and allow My life to have free course through your heart and mind, you will bring forth fruit. Abiding speaks of yielding, trusting, submitting, loving, being devoted. It contains all the ideas of a close, loving relationship. I think it is safe to say that there is a way that Christians fail to abide in Christ. We break off contact. We turn away from His commands. We pursue a selfish agenda. We separate what belongs to God from what belongs to me. We put God aside in a box, and live our own lives. That's not abiding.

It is to the life of Christ in you, what a blood clot in one of your arteries is to your health. Abiding is allowing the life of Christ to flow unhindered in us. That leads us to our last point. This

life of Christ dwelling in us by His Spirit flows through us in a way we might not expect.

We can only live like He did if His Word is in us

*John 15:7-10 "If you abide in Me, **and My words abide in you**, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. ⁸ "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. ⁹ " As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. ¹⁰ **"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.***

Exactly how do we allow His life to have free course in us? Answer: When His Word is in us; when His commandments are in us; when His will is known to us and pulsing through us,

Part of being truly born again is that the Word of God is no longer external information, but more like an internal blueprint. To be unsaved is to have no place for the Word within.

John 8:37 " I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you.

1 John 1:10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

To be a Christian is to have His Word in you. Christ's life cannot be separated from his Word. Christ the living Word makes His will known to us through the written Word. I don't mean that you have necessarily memorised hundreds of verses. I mean that the Word of God is to you something deeply lodged within, so that the Words of God are to you like your own thoughts at time; where they intermingle with your thinking; where His commands rest upon you like a kind of instinct telling a bird to fly north instead of West.

1 John 2:14 I have written to you, fathers, Because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, And you have overcome the wicked one.

1 John 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.

And for the Christian, there is a responsibility here:

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

You are to take in the Word and let it have a rich and abundant dwelling place in your life. You are to study it, meditate on it, memorise it, analyse it, read about it, listen to it and teach it to others. If you do not search for wisdom, you will not walk in wisdom. If you do not place your roots down into the Scriptures, you will not be that tree planted by the waters, whose leaf does not fade.

It is quite simple. For Christ's life to live in you, you must die to your own. You must accept Him as your life. His Word must reside in you. From there, you keep on counting yourself to be dead to sin, abiding in a relationship of loving submission, and saturating yourself with the Word.

Lots of people want to claim Christ is in them. But they do not really want what that means: the death of the old life, His life in its place, and a new life of obeying His will as it pulses through your life.

And it is scary to face the death of your old life. But what if I told you that you aren't really living until you give up that old life, and make room for the new? What if I told you that Christ's life within you is real life, abundant life, life in fullness? Would you still hang on to your old life? Would you still cling to the stalk and abide alone?

Come to Him for life. When you are in Him, and He is in You, you will live like He lived, which is real life.