

## "Abide in me"

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On that touching occasion when the Lord was alone with His disciples, communicating His farewell words of comfort, and imparting to them His last instructions, again and again He presses the deep necessity, as well as the blessedness, of abiding in Him. We hear Him say,

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing . . . If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." (John 15: 47).

Again, the beloved Apostle, who heard these farewell words from the lips of the Lord, passes them on to believers in his Epistle. There we read:

"He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked."

"And now, children, abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming."

"Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not."

(1 John 2: 6, 28; 1 John 3: 6).

If, then, these verses set before us the blessedness of abiding in Christ, we may well pause to enquire, What are we to understand by the Lord's words, "Abide in Me"? Do they not imply a walk in such nearness to Christ that the soul delights in all His loveliness and moral excellences, and thus finds in Him its object and perfect pattern?

Again, does not abiding in Christ suppose a heart in communion with Christ, that delights to confide in Him and learn of Him?

Above all does not abiding in Christ imply a life lived under the influence of His presence, realised by faith? If a saintly and Christlike man of God visited our home, would not his presence have a restraining influence upon everyone in the home? We should probably be a little more careful than usual of our words and ways. If this would be the effect of the presence of a man of like passions with ourselves, what would be the effect of the realised presence of Christ, Himself? At times sad scenes have taken place, even among the Lord's people, in which we may have had our humbling part, when envy and strife prevailed, and believers have thoughtlessly, or even maliciously, wounded one another with bitter and offensive words. We may try to excuse our strong words. But should we not do well to ask ourselves, "What would have happened if the Lord had silently, but visibly, walked into our midst?" Should we not have to confess that under the influence of His presence many a bitter and offensive word would never have been uttered?

How good, then, it would be if we could ever remember that though the Lord is not visible to sight, yet He hears, He sees, He knows. Well indeed does the Psalmist ask, "He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? He that formed the eye, shall He not see? . . . He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?" (Psalm 94: 9, 10).

To walk, then, in the consciousness that He listens to our words; that He sees our every act; that He reads our thoughts, is to walk under the blessed influence of His presence and thus abide in Him.

Furthermore, these Scriptures, that exhort us to abide in Christ, tell us also the blessedness we

shall enjoy if we do abide in Him.

First, we learn that abiding in Christ we shall bring forth fruit. The importance of this is pressed upon us by being stated both negatively and positively. We are told that unless we abide in Christ we cannot bring forth fruit. Then we are told that if we abide in Christ, and He in us, we shall bring forth much fruit. From another Scripture we learn that the fruit of the Spirit is "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, self-control" (Gal. 5: 22, 23). What are these lovely qualities but a description of the beautiful character of Christ? So we may surely say that the fruit of which the Lord speaks is the reproduction of His own character in the lives of believers.

The fruit, in this passage, is not service or the exercise of gift, however important in its place. Of necessity gifts are confined to the few: but it is open to all, young and old alike, to express something of the loveliness of Christ in their lives. Any little setting forth of the graces of Christ goes up as fruit to the Father, and goes out as testimony to the world. This, then, is the great object for which we are left in this dark world, to shine as lights by exhibiting something of the beautiful character of Christ. This will only be possible as we abide in Christ. We shall never exhibit the character of Christ by simply trying to be like Christ. If, however, we seek His Company, and come under His influence, by abiding in Him, we shall be changed into His image from glory to glory.

Yet sure, if in Thy presence  
My soul still constant were,  
Mine eye would, more familiar  
Its brighter glories bear.  
And thus, thy deep perfections  
Much better should I know,  
And with adoring fervour  
In this Thy nature grow.

Secondly, the Lord's words plainly tell us, that, abiding in Christ our prayers will have an answer. If under the blessed influence of His presence, with His words abiding in our hearts, our thoughts would be formed by His thoughts and our prayers would be in accord with his mind. Thus praying, we should have an answer to our prayers.

Thirdly, the Apostle John tells us, in his Epistle, that "abiding in Him" will lead to a "walk even as He walked" (1 John 2: 6). How did Christ walk? Of Him we read, "Christ pleased not Himself." Speaking of the Father, the Lord Himself could say, "I do always those things that please Him". This is the perfect pattern for the believer's walk for the Apostle Paul can say, we "ought to walk and please God" (1 Thess. 4: 1). Again, the same Apostle exhorts believers to "walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us" (Eph. 5: 2).

Thus, may we not say, the outstanding marks of the Lord's path were the entire absence of self-will in doing the Father's will, and the serving of others in love. For us, it is only possible in any measure to tread such a path of perfection as we abide in Christ. How good, then, like Mary of old to sit at His feet and hear His words. Thus under His influence to recall His path, to trace His footsteps, to listen to His words of love and grace, to see His hand stretched forth to bless, and, behind all His perfect walk and ways and words to discern the spirit of One who ever set aside all thoughts of self, in order to serve others in love.

We may know the doctrines of Christianity; we may rightly hold the great essential truths of our faith, but, as one has said, "no amount of knowledge however correct, no amount of intelligence, however exact, will ever put upon your soul the impress of the mind of the Lord Jesus Christ." If we are to wear the impress of Christ — if, as we pass along we are to have some sense of Him, we must be in His company, and walk with Him. Every man is formed by the company that he keeps: the character of the one in whose company we walk, is the character we shall reflect. We must abide in Christ and thus walk with Christ, if we are to be like Christ and walk as He walked.

Fourthly, the Apostle John further tells us that if abiding in Christ our walk will be such that we shall not be ashamed before Christ at His coming. Oftentimes there is much in our walk, and ways, and speech, and manners, that passes current with men, and even among the people of God, and of which we may judge very lightly when viewed by human standards. If, however, we were to judge ourselves, and our words, and ways, in the light of the coming glory of the appearing of Christ, should we not find much that we should have to condemn, and confess with shame, as far short of the standard of glory.

Only as we abide in Christ, under the influence of His presence, and so walk in self-judgment, shall we be preserved from all that which would cause shame in the day of glory.

Fifthly, we are reminded by the Apostle John, that "Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not" (1 John 3: 6). From the preceding verses we learn what the Spirit of God means by sin, for we read, in v. 4, "sin is lawlessness". The essence of sin is doing one's own will without reference to God or man. The world around is increasingly marked by lawlessness — everyone doing that which is right in his own eyes. The result being that, in spite of civilization, education, and legislation, the world system is breaking up, and society, and nations are increasingly disintegrating. Wherever the spirit of lawlessness prevails, disintegration will follow, whether it be in the world or among the people of God. As believers we are ever in danger of being affected by the spirit of the world around. Thus it has come to pass that through lack of watchfulness the same principle of lawlessness, that is breaking up the world system, has wrought division and scattering among the people of God.

If, in a school, each pupil was allowed to do his own will the school would inevitably break up. If each member of a family followed his own will the family would be wrecked; and if each individual of a company of believers pursues his own will, disruption must follow. The spirit of lawlessness, in whatever sphere it shows itself, will lead to disintegration, and the greater the sincerity of those who pursue their own will, the greater the harm they will cause. There is no greater cause of disruption among the people of God than the determined self-will of a sincere man.

How then are we to escape the evil principle of lawlessness, or self-will? Only by abiding in Christ; for the Apostle says, "Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not." Only as we are held under the influence of the One who could say, "I come . . . not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me," shall we escape the self-will that is the very essence of sin.

These, then, are the blessed results, as brought before us in Scripture, of abiding in Christ. If answering to the Lord's words by seeking to abide in Him, our lives would bear fruit by expressing something of the lovely character of Christ.

Our prayers, being according to his mind, would have an answer.

Our path would show forth something of the beauty of His walk.

Our ways would be consistent with the coming glory of Christ.

Our walk would be preserved from the lawlessness of the flesh that has its origin in the devil,

that is the root cause of the ruin of man and the sorrows of the world.

How good, then, to heed the Lord's word, "Abide in Me . . . for without Me ye can do nothing." We may be gifted and have all knowledge, and zeal, we may have long experience, but it still remains true that without Christ we can do nothing. Gift, and knowledge, and zeal, are not power. All these things will not enable us to overcome the flesh, to refuse the world, or escape the snares of the devil. We may have all these things yet without Christ, we may stumble at the smallest trial and fall into the greatest evils.

If, then, "without Christ" we can do nothing, let us seek to abide in Him and not dare to go forward for one day, or take a single step, without Him.

Oh keep my soul, then Jesus,  
Abiding still with Thee,  
And if I wander, teach me  
Soon back to Thee to flee.