

“IF YOU ABIDE IN ME” – THE ALL INCLUSIVE CONDITION

By Rev. Andrew Murray

***'If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you.'*-JOHN 15 v 7**

In all God's intercourse with us, the promise and its conditions are inseparable. If we fulfil the conditions, He fulfils the promise. What He is to be to us depends upon what we are willing to be to Him. 'Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.' And so in prayer the unlimited promise, Ask whatsoever ye will, has its one simple and natural condition, if ye abide in me. It is Christ whom the Father always hears; God is in Christ, and can only be reached by being in Him; to be IN HIM is the way to have our prayer heard; fully and wholly ABIDING IN HIM, we have the right to ask whatsoever we will, and the promise that it shall be done unto us.

When we compare this promise with the experiences of most believers, we are startled by a terrible discrepancy. Who can number up the countless prayers that rise and bring no answer? The cause must be either that we do not fulfil the condition, or God does not fulfil the promise. Believers are not willing to admit either, and therefore have devised a way of escape from the dilemma.

They put into the promise the qualifying clause our Saviour did not put here-if it be God's will; and so maintain both God's integrity and their own. O if they did but accept it and hold it fast as it stands, trusting to Christ to vindicate His truth, how God's Spirit would lead them to see the Divine propriety of such a promise to those who really abide in Christ in the sense in which He means it, and to confess that the failure in the fulfilling the condition is the one sufficient explanation of unanswered prayer. And how the Holy Spirit would then make our feebleness in prayer one of the mightiest motives to urge us on to discover the secret, and obtain the blessing, of full abiding in Christ.

'If ye abide in me.' As a Christian grows in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, he is often surprised to find how the words of God grow too, in the new and deeper meaning with which they come to him. He can look back to the day when some word of God was opened up to him and he rejoiced in the blessing he had found in it. After a time some deeper experience gave it a new meaning, and it was as if he never had seen what it contained. And yet once again, as he advanced in the Christian life, the same word stood before him again as a great mystery, until anew the Holy Spirit led him still deeper into its Divine fullness.

One of these ever-growing, never-exhausted words, opening up to us step by step the fullness of the Divine life, is the Master's precious 'Abide in me.' As the union of the branch with the vine is one of growth, never-ceasing growth and increase, so our abiding in Christ is a life process in which the Divine life takes ever fuller and more complete possession of us. The young and feeble believer may be really abiding in Christ up to the measure of his light; it is he who reaches onward to the full abiding in the sense in which the Master understood the words, who inherits all the promises connected with it.

In the growing life of abiding in Christ, the first stage is that of faith. As the believer sees that, with all his feebleness, the command is really meant for him, his great aim is simply to believe that, as he knows he is in Christ, so now, notwithstanding unfaithfulness and failure, abiding in Christ is his immediate duty, and a blessing within his reach. He is specially occupied with the love, and power, and faithfulness of the Saviour: he feels his one need to be believing.

It is not long before he sees something more is needed. Obedience and faith must go together. Not as if to the faith he has the obedience must be added, but faith must be made manifest in obedience. Faith is obedience at home and looking to the Master: obedience is faith going out to do His will. He sees how he has been more occupied with the privilege and the blessings of this abiding than with its duties and its fruit.

There has been much of self and of self-will that has been unnoticed or tolerated: the peace which, as a young and feeble disciple, he could enjoy in believing goes from him; it is in practical obedience that the abiding must be maintained: 'If ye keep my commands, ye shall abide in my love.' As before his great aim was through the mind, and the truth it took hold of, to let the heart rest on Christ and His promises; so now, in this stage, his chief effort is to get his will united with the will of his Lord, and the heart and the life brought entirely under His rule.

And yet it is as if there is something wanting. The will and the heart are on Christ's side; he obeys and he loves his Lord. But still, why is it that the fleshly nature has yet so much power, that the spontaneous motions and emotions of the inmost being are not what they should be? The will does not approve or allow, but here is a region beyond control of the will. And why also, even when there is not so much of positive commission to condemn, why so much of omission, the deficiency of that beauty of holiness, that zeal of love, that conformity to Jesus and His death, in which the life of self is lost, and which is surely implied in the abiding, as the Master meant it? There must surely be something in our abiding in Christ and Christ in us, which he has not yet experienced.

It is so. Faith and obedience are but the pathway of blessing. Before giving us the parable of the vine and the branches, Jesus had very distinctly told what the full blessing is to which faith and obedience are to lead. Three times over He had said, 'If ye love me, keep my commandments,' and spoken of the threefold blessing with which He would crown such obedient love. The Holy Spirit would come from the Father; the Son would manifest Himself; the Father and the Son would come and make their abode.

It is as our faith grows into obedience, and in obedience and love our whole being goes out and clings itself to Christ, that our inner life becomes opened up, and the capacity is formed within of receiving the life, the spirit, of the glorified Jesus, as a distinct and conscious union with Christ and with the Father. The word is fulfilled in us: 'In that day ye shall know that I am in my Father and ye in me, and I in you.' We understand how, just as Christ is in God, and God in Christ, one together not only in will and in love, but in identity of nature and life, because they exist in each other, so we are in Christ and Christ in us, in union not only of will and love, but of life and nature too.

It was after Jesus had spoken of our thus through the Holy Spirit knowing that He is in the Father, and even so we in Him and He in us, that He said, 'Abide in me, and I in you. Accept, consent to receive that Divine life of union with myself, in virtue of which, as you abide in me, I also abide in you, even as I abide in the Father. So that your life is mine and mine is yours.' This is the true abiding, the occupying of the position in which Christ can come and abide; so abiding in Him that the soul has come away from self to find that He has taken the place and become our life. It is the becoming as little children who have no care, and find their happiness in trusting and obeying the love that has done all for them.

To those who thus abide, the promise comes as their rightful heritage: Ask whatsoever ye will. It cannot be otherwise. Christ has got full possession of Them. Christ dwells in their love, their will, their life. Not only has their will been given up; Christ has entered it, and dwells and breathes in it by His Spirit. He whom the Father always hears, prays in them; they pray in Him: what they ask shall be done unto them.

Beloved fellow-believer! Let us confess that it is because we do not abide in Christ as He would have us, that the Church is so impotent in presence of the infidelity and worldliness and heathendom, in the midst of which the Lord is able to make her more than conqueror. Let us believe that He means what He promises, and accept the condemnation the confession implies.

But let us not be discouraged. The abiding of the branch in the Vine is a life of never-ceasing growth. The abiding, as the Master meant it, is within our reach, for He lives to give it us. Let us but be ready to count all things loss, and to say, 'Not as though I had already attained; I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which I also am apprehended of Christ Jesus.' Let us not be so much occupied with the abiding, as with Him to whom the abiding links us, and His fulness. Let it be Him, the whole Christ, in His obedience and humiliation, in His exaltation and power, in whom our soul moves and acts; He Himself will fulfil His promise in us.

And then as we abide, and grow evermore into the full abiding, let us exercise our right, the will to enter into all God's will. Obeying what that will commands, let us claim what it promises. Let us yield to the teaching of the Holy Spirit, to show each of us, according to his growth and measure, what the will of God is which we may claim in prayer. And let us rest content with nothing less than the personal experience of what Jesus gave when He said, 'If ye abide in me, ask whatsoever ye will, it shall be done unto you.'

NOTE

On a thoughtful comparison of what we mostly find in books or sermons on prayer, and the teaching of the Master, we shall find one great difference: the importance assigned to the answer to prayer is by no means the same. In the former we find a great deal on the blessing of prayer as a spiritual exercise even if there be no answer, and on the reasons why we should be content without it. God's fellowship ought to be more to us than the gift we ask; God's wisdom only knows what is best; God may bestow something better than what He withholds.

Though this teaching looks very high and spiritual, it is remarkable that we find nothing of it with our Lord. The more carefully we gather together all He spoke on prayer, the clearer it becomes that He wished us to think of prayer simply as the means to an end, and that the answer was to be the proof that we and our prayer are acceptable to the Father in heaven. It is not that Christ would have us count the gifts of higher value than the fellowship and favour of the Father. By no means. But the Father means the answer to be the token of His favour and of the reality of our fellowship with Him. 'To-day thy servant knoweth that I have found grace in thy sight, my lord, O king, in that the king hath fulfilled the request of his servant.' A life marked by daily answer to prayer is the proof of our spiritual maturity; that we have indeed attained to the true abiding in Christ; that our will is truly at one with God's will; that our faith has grown strong to see and take what God has prepared for us; that the Name of Christ and His nature have taken full possession of us; and that we have been found fit to take a place among those whom God admits to His counsels, and according to whose prayer He rules the world. These are they in whom something of man's original dignity hath been restored, in whom, as they abide in Christ, His power as the all-prevailing Intercessor can manifest itself, in whom the glory of His Name is shown forth. Prayer is very blessed; the answer is more blessed still, as the response from the Father that our prayer, our faith, our will are indeed as He would wish them to be.

I make these remarks with the one desire of leading my readers themselves to put together all that Christ has said on prayer, and to yield themselves to the full impression of the truth that when prayer is what it should be, or rather when we are what we should be, abiding in Christ, the answer must be expected. It will bring us out from those refuges where we have comforted ourselves with unanswered prayer.

reveal the terrible feebleness of our spiritual life as the cause of our not knowing to pray boldly in Christ's Name. It will urge us mightily to rise to a life in the full union with Christ, and in the fullness of the Spirit, as the secret of effectual prayer. And it will so lead us on to realize our destiny: 'At that day: Verily, verily, I say unto you, If ye shall ask anything of the Father, He will give it you in my Name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be fulfilled.' Prayer that is really, spiritually, in union with Jesus, is always answered.