

will; and so maintain both God's integrity and their own. Oh, 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 still deeper meaning with which they come 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. And 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 fulness. One of these ever-growing, never-exhausted words, opening up to us step by step the fulness 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: 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 fruits. 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 the 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 loves his Lord. But still, why is it that the fleshly nature has yet so much power, that the spontaneous 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, the 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 the 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: 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