

Lesson 8 ABIDE

Abide in Me, and I in You - John 15:4

I. Introduction

- a. When a new graft is placed in a vine and it abides there, there is a **twofold** process that takes place. The first is in the wood of both the stem and the graft.
- b. The graft shoots its little roots and fibers down into the stem, and the stem grows up into the graft, and what has been called the structural union is made. This is a type of **interlocking** between the vine and the graft.
- c. The graft **abides** and becomes one with the vine, and even if the vine was to die, the graft would still be one wood with it.
- d. Then there is the **second** process, in which the sap of the vine enters the new structure, and uses it as a passage through which sap can flow up to show itself in young shoots and leaves and fruit.
- e. Here is the **vital union**. Into the graft which abides in the stock, the stock enters with sap to abide in it.
- f. When our Lord says: "Abide in me, and I in you," He points to something analogous to this **grafting-in**. The statement, "Abide in me": refers to something more that believers have to do and paves the way for a fuller experience of God.

II. The Fuller Experience of God

- a. If we would desire the fuller experience what we have to do is to trust and obey, to detach ourselves from all else, to reach out after Him and cling to Him, **to sink** ourselves into Him. Phil 3:8 *Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, KJV*
- b. As we do this, through the grace He gives, a bond is formed, and the heart is prepared for the **fuller** experience. This fuller experience begins with abiding in Him but goes beyond that. Ps 27:8 *When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek. KJV*
- c. The fuller experience of God available to believers of **every age** is captured in the OT idea of "seeking the face of God".
- d. This was the obsession of the Psalmist (nearly **30** times), expressing himself in the name of his people, desiring to be before Yahweh's face. The ancient Jews were convinced that the invisible face of God lived in the midst of Israel.
- e. The presence of the Divine face was considered the strength of the people (Ex 33.14: Is 63:7). The devout of Israel **earnestly** sought to see the face of God (Psalm 42:3) and to seek it (Amos 5:4) as a sign of profound blessing. Ps 119:135 *Make thy face to shine upon thy servant; and teach me thy statutes. KJV*
- f. In Christian theology, to seek the face of God is sometimes referred to as the **Beatific Vision**. This denotes the immediate knowledge of God which the angelic spirits and the souls of the justified enjoy in Heaven.
- g. It is called "**vision**" to distinguish it from the mere intellectual knowledge of God which the human mind may attain in the present life.
- h. The beatific theory posits that in the beholding of God face to face the created intelligence finds perfect **happiness**. Thus the vision is termed "beatific".
- i. Variants of the beatific vision are suggested by the **experiences** of Jacob at Peniel, Moses on Sinai, the apostles at the transfiguration, while some suggest that Paul also was also given this vision. 2 Cor 12:7 *And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, KJV*
- j. According to Aquinas, the beatific vision surpasses both **faith and reason**.
- k. Rational knowledge does not fully satisfy humankind's innate desire to know God, since reason is primarily concerned with **sensible** objects, and thus can only infer its conclusions about God indirectly.
- l. The theological virtue of faith, too, is incomplete, since, according to Aquinas, it always implies some **imperfection** in the understanding; some incompleteness due to our human limitations.
- m. In spite of our limitations, however, the earnest believer does not wish to remain merely on the level of faith, but to understand what is believed; to know it **perfectly**.
- n. Thus only the fullness of the beatific vision **satisfies** this fundamental desire of the human soul to know God. Quoting Paul, Aquinas notes "*We see now in a glass darkly, but then face to face*" 1Cor. 13:12
- o. While the Beatific Vision may be sought by believers presently, most will not reach that level of experiencing God in this life. That fact however, should **not deter** the believer from the goal of seeking His face.
- p. Whether the beatific vision is attained in this life or not, ultimately it is the final reward for the elect of God to partake in and to "enjoy the same happiness wherewith God is happy, seeing Him in the way which He **sees Himself**". 1Cor 13:12 *For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. KJV*

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III. The Role of the Believer

- a. The fuller experience **begins** with: "I in you," as God strengthens us with might by the Spirit in the inner man, and Christ dwells in the heart by faith. Eph 3:16-17 *That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; ¹⁷ That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; KJV*
- b. While it is the Spirit who **initiates** this interlocking transaction between the believer and the Godhead, the believer has a corresponding part to play as the spiritual grafting-in process plays out.
- c. Many believers pray and long very earnestly for the filling of the Spirit and the indwelling of Christ, and wonder **why** they do not make more progress.
- d. The reason is often this; the "I in you" cannot come because the "abide in me" is **not maintained** by the believer. "There is one body and one spirit"; before the Spirit can fill, there must be a body prepared.
- e. In the language of our metaphor, the graft must have grown into the stem, and be abiding in it **before** the sap can flow through to bring forth fruit.
- f. This abiding is found, at least partially, in the acts of our obedience from the **heart** as we follow Christ. It is in external things, denying ourselves, forsaking the world, and in the will seeking to be conformable to Him.
- g. Believers are **incapable** of changing the inner being; that is the province of the Spirit. But the work of the Spirit is often limited by our inconsistent external obedience.
- h. As we thus seek to abide in Him, we are **occupied** with Him and this in itself is a fuller experience. If we are abiding we shall be able to receive and enjoy the "I in you." PS 119:173 *Let thine hand help me; for I have chosen thy precepts. KJV*
- i. The work enjoined to us: "Abide in me," this will **prepare us** for the work undertaken by Him: "I in you."

IV. The Mystery of IN

- a. The two parts of the injunction have their unity in that central deep-meaning word "**in**."
- b. There is no **deeper** word in Scripture. God is in all. God dwells in Christ. Christ lives in God. We are in Christ. Christ is in us: our life taken up into His; His life received into ours.
- c. This is a divine **reality** that words cannot express; we are in Him and He in us.
- d. The words, "Abide in me and I in you," just tell us to **believe it**, this divine mystery, and to count upon our God the Husbandman, and Christ the Vine, to make it divinely true.
- e. No thinking or teaching or praying can **grasp** the depth of our being "in Christ"; it is a divine mystery of His love and of the nature of the union between us.
- f. While the fullness of meaning of our being **IN** Christ may escape our understanding, let us believe it and rejoice in its spiritual reality.

V. Application

- a. Let us just look upon this infinite, divine, omnipotent Vine loving us, holding us, working in us. Let us in the faith of His working abide and rest in Him, ever turning heart and hope to Him alone.
- b. And let us be occupied with Him and count upon Him to fulfill in us the mystery: "Ye in me, and I in you."
- c. Even though we may not see Him face to face, we ought to at all times live as though we are before His face for "His eyes are ever beholding the children of men".
- d. In what ways would your life be different if you lived every moment as though you were before His face?