EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS
ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,
And many Explanatory Notes.

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JOHN XV. 7–11.

7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

9 As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.

10 If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s command­ments, and abide in his love.

11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might re­main in you, and *that* your joy might be full.

THERE is a wide difference between believers and believers. In some things they are all alike. All feel their sins; all trust in Christ; all repent and strive to be holy. All have grace, and faith, and new hearts. But they differ widely in the degree of their attain­ments. Some are far happier and holier Christians than others, and have far more influence on the world.

Now what are the inducements which the Lord Je­sus holds out to His people, to make them aim at emi­nent holiness? This is a question which ought to be deeply interesting to every pious mind. Who would not like to be a singularly useful and happy servant of Christ? The passage before us throws light on the sub­ject in three ways.

In the first place, our Lord declares, “If ye abide in Me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” This is a distinct promise of power and success in prayer. And what does it turn upon? We must “abide in Christ,” and Christ’s “words must abide in us.”

To abide in Christ means to keep up a habit of con­stant close communion with Him,—to be always leaning on Him, resting on Him, pouring out our hearts to Him, and using Him as our Fountain of life and strength, as our chief Companion and best Friend.—To have His words abiding in us, is to keep His sayings and precepts continually before our memories and minds, and to make them the guide of our actions and the rule of our daily conduct and behaviour.

Christians of this stamp, we are told, shall not pray in vain. Whatever they ask they shall obtain, so long as they ask things according to God’s mind. No work shall be found too hard, and no difficulty insurmount­able. Asking they shall receive, and seeking they shall find. Such men were Martin Luther, the German Re­former, and our own martyr, Bishop Latimer. Such a man was John Knox, of whom Queen Mary said, that she feared his prayers more than an army of twenty thousand men. It is written in a certain place, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” (James v. 16.)

Now, why is there so little power of prayer like this in our own time? Simply because there is so little close communion with Christ, and so little strict con­formity to His will. Men do not “abide in Christ,” and therefore pray in vain. Christ’s words do not abide in them, as their standard of practice, and therefore their prayers seem not to be heard. They ask and re­ceive not, because they ask amiss. Let this lesson sink down into our hearts. He that would have answers to his prayers, must carefully remember Christ’s directions. We must keep up intimate friendship with the great Advocate in heaven, if our petitions are to prosper.

In the second place, our Lord declares, “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.” The meaning of this promise seems to be, that *fruitfulness in Christian practice will not only bring glory to God, but will supply the best evidence to our own hearts that we are real disciples of Christ.*

Assurance of our own interest in Christ, and our con­sequent eternal safety, is one of the highest privileges in religion. To be always doubting and fearing is mis­erable work. Nothing is worse than suspense in any matter of importance, and above all in the matter of our souls. He that would know one of the best receipts for obtaining assurance, should diligently study Christ’s words now before us. Let him strive to bear much fruit in his life, his habits, his temper, his words, and his works. So doing he shall feel the “witness of the Spirit” in his heart, and give abundant proof that he is a living branch of the true Vine. He shall find inward evidence in his own soul that he is a child of God, and shall supply the world with outward evidence that can­not be disputed. He shall leave no room for doubt that he is a disciple.

Would we know why so many professing Christians have little comfort in their religion, and go fearing and doubting along the road to heaven? The question re­ceives a solution in the saying of our Lord we are now considering. Men are content with a little Christianity, and a little fruit of the Spirit, and do not labour to be holy in all manner of conversation. They must not wonder if they enjoy little peace, feel little hope, and leave behind them little evidence. The fault lies with themselves. God has linked together holiness and happiness; and what God has joined together we must not think to put asunder.

In the third place, our Lord declares, “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love.” The mean­ing of this promise is near akin to that of the preceding one. The man who *makes conscience of diligently ob­serving Christ’s precepts, is the man who shall continual­ly enjoy a sense of Christ’s love in his soul.*

Of course we must not misunderstand our Lord’s words when He speaks of “keeping His command­ments.” There is a sense in which no one can keep them. Our best works are imperfect and defective, and when we have done our best, we may well cry, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” Yet we must not run into the other extreme, and give way to the lazy idea that we can do nothing at all. By the grace of God we may make Christ’s laws our rule of life, and show daily that we desire to please Him. So doing, our gracious Master will give us a constant sense of His favour, and make us feel His face smiling on us, like the sun shining on a fine day. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.” (Ps. xxv. 14.)

Lessons like these may be *legal* to some, and bring down much blame on those who advocate them. Such is the narrow-mindedness of human nature, that few can look on more than one side of truth! Let the servant of Christ call no man his master. Let him hold on his way, and never be ashamed of diligence, fruitfulness, and jealous watchfulness, in his obedience to Christ’s commands. These things are perfectly consistent with salvation by grace and justification by faith, whatever any one may say to the contrary.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. The Christian who is careful over his words and tempers and works, will generally be the most happy Chris­tian. “Joy and peace in believing” will never accom­pany an inconsistent life. It is not for nothing that our Lord concludes the passage: “These things have I spoken unto you, that your joy might be full.”

NOTES. JOHN V. 7–11.

7.*—*[*If ye abide in Me...done unto you.*] In this verse our Lord continues to encourage the disciples to “abide in Him,” by holding up to them a gracious promise. Abiding in Christ, their prayers will obtain signal and special replies. They shall ask what they will, and it shall be done for them.

The doctrine here laid down and implied is a very remarka­ble one. There are some Christians whose prayers are more powerful and effectual than those of others. The nearer a man lives to Christ, and the closer his communion with Him, the more effectual will his prayers be. The truth of the doctrine is so self-evident and reasonable, that no one on reflection can deny it. He that lives nearest to Christ will always be the man that feels most, and prays most earnestly, and fervently, and heartily. Common sense shows that such prayers are most likely to get answers. Many believers get little from God, because they ask little, or ask amiss. The holiest saints are the most earnest in prayer, and they consequently get the most.

We should note that our Lord says not only “if ye abide in Me,” but adds, “and my words abide in you.” This means, “If my doctrine and teaching abide fresh in your memories, and is continually influencing your lives.” Our Lord guards us against supposing that a mere indolent abiding in Him, with a dreamy, mystical kind of religion, is what He means. His words must be burning like fire within us, and constantly actu­ating our characters and lives.

When He says “ye shall ask what ye will,” we must of course understand that His promise only includes things accord­ing to God’s mind and for God’s glory. Paul asked for the “thorn in the flesh” to depart; but his prayer was not granted. We need not, however, hesitate to believe that there is a special and peculiar power in the prayers of eminent saints. “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” (James v. 16.) The prayers of Luther, Latimer, Knox, Welsh, Baxter, Herbert, Romaine, and other great saints, are specially noted by their contemporaries as possessing power.

The Greek word rendered “it shall be done,” means literally “it shall come to pass.”

8*.—*[*Herein...Father glorified...disciples.*]In this verse our Lord supplies two more reasons why His disciples should abide in Him, and strive to bring forth much fruit of holiness. One reason is, that it will glorify His Father in heaven. Their good works will recommend their religion, and make the world honour the God who has such servants. The other reason is, that it will give evidence of their being real, true, genuine disciples. Their lives will prove plainly that they are followers of Christ.

The expression “so shall ye be,” is literally “all ye shall be.” It must mean, “Ye shall be known and recognized by all men as my disciples, and shall feel in your own hearts the witness of the Spirit that ye are such.”

Poole remarks, “In Scripture, ‘being’ often signifieth appear­ing,” as in John viii. 31, and Romans iii. 4.

9.*—*[*As...Father...loved...I...you.*]This remarkable statement seems intended to show the depth and magnitude of our Lord’s love to His people. We can form no adequate idea of the love of the Father towards the Son. The feeling of one eternal Person in the Trinity to another Person is a high thing into which we cannot enter. Yet even such is the love of Christ to­wards those who believe in Him,—a vast, wide, deep, unmeas­urable love that passeth knowledge, and can never be fully comprehended by man.

[*Continue ye in my love.*]This must mean,—“Continue rest­ing your souls on this love of mine towards you, and live un­der a constant sense of it. Remain clinging to it, as within a fortress and place of refuge.” Christ’s free, and continued, and mighty love should be the home and abiding place of a be­liever’s soul.

The word rendered “continue” is the same that is rendered “abide” in verse 4, and ought to have been the same here.

10.—[*If...keep commandments...love.*]Once more our Lord returns to the subject of practical obedience to His laws, as the grand secret of a happy and comfortable religion. “If you keep my commandments, you will live in the enjoyment of a continued sense of my love to your souls, and feel inwardly that you are my saved people.” The doctrine here laid down is one of the great principles of experimental Christianity. Holy living and assurance of an interest in Christ are closely connected. Our own happiness and enjoyment of religion are inseparably bound up with our daily practical living. He that expects assurance, while he neglects Christ’s commandments, and gives way to daily inconsistencies of temper and conduct, is expecting what he will never get. “Hereby we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.” (1 John ii. 3.) Let those who will call such doctrine “legal.” As a matter of fact, it will always be found true.

[*Even as I...his love.*]The statement of this sentence is one of those which man can never fully grasp. That Christ kept the Father’s commandments perfectly, while we can only keep His imperfectly, and that He abides in the Father’s love con­tinually and without defect, while our abiding in His love is at least fitful and uncertain, are truths which no intelligent Chris­tian can dispute. In this, as in everything else, our Lord’s ex­ample and pattern are propounded to us as things which we must strive to follow, though at a long distance, and not always with sensible comfort. But we may remember that, even when Jesus said on the cross,—“My God, why hast thou forsaken Me? “—He was still abiding in the Father’s love.

11.*—*[*These things...might be full.*]In this verse our Lord gives two reasons why all the things in His discourses were addressed to the disciples. One was that “his joy might abide” or re­main “in them,”—that they might have a comfortable share of their Master’s joy in their salvation and redemption. The other was that their own individual joy might be filled up and per­fected. Two joys are named, we must observe. One is that special joy mentioned in Hebrews xii. 2, which our Lord feels in the redemption of His people. The other is that joy which His people feel from a sense of Christ’s love to their souls.

Here, as elsewhere, we should note, that the joy of believers is a thing that admits of degrees and increase.

Cyril, on this verse, remarks that it is the mark of prosperous Christians to rejoice in those things in which Christ rejoices; and that this is the special object of the phrase, “my joy,”—“that ye may continually rejoice in those things in which I re­joice, and so your own inward happiness may be increased.”