

Chapter 3 - Trusting Him to Keep You

"I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which I also am apprehended of Christ Jesus." PHIL.3:12

MORE than one admits that it is a sacred duty and a blessed privilege to abide in Christ, but shrinks back continually before the question: Is it possible, a life of unbroken fellowship with the Saviour? Eminent Christians, to whom special opportunities of cultivating this grace have been granted, may attain to it; for the large majority of disciples, whose life, by a divine appointment, is so fully occupied with the affairs of this life, it can scarce be expected. The more they hear of this life, the deeper their sense of its glory and blessedness, and there is nothing they would not sacrifice to be made partakers of it. But they are too weak, too unfaithful--they never can attain to it. Dear souls! how little they know that the abiding in Christ is just meant for the weak, and so beautifully suited to their feebleness. It is not the doing of some great thing, and does not demand that we first lead a very holy and devoted life. No, it is simply weakness entrusting itself to a Mighty One to be kept--the unfaithful one casting self on One who is altogether trustworthy and true. Abiding in Him is not a work that we have to do as the condition for enjoying His salvation, but a consenting to let Him do all for us, and in us, and through us. It is a work He does for us--the fruit and the power of His redeeming love. Our part is simply to yield, to trust, and to wait for what He has engaged to perform.

It is this quiet expectation and confidence, resting on the word of Christ that in Him there is an abiding place prepared, which is so sadly wanting among Christians. They scarce take the time or the trouble to realize that when He says "Abide IN ME," He offers Himself, the Keeper of Israel that slumbers not nor sleeps, with all His power and love, as the living home of the soul, where the mighty influences of His grace will be stronger to keep than all their feebleness to lead astray. The idea they have of grace is this--that their conversion and pardon are God's work, but that now, in gratitude to God, it is their work to live as Christians, and follow Jesus. There is always the thought of a work that has to be done, and even though they pray for help, still the work is theirs. They fail continually, and become hopeless; and the despondency only increases the helplessness. No, wandering one; as it was Jesus who drew you when He spake "Come," so it is Jesus who keeps you when He says "Abide." The grace to come and the grace to abide are alike from Him alone. That word Come, heard, meditated on, accepted, was the cord of love that drew you nigh; that word Abide is even so the band with which He holds you fast and binds you to Himself. Let the soul but take time to listen to the voice of Jesus. "In me," He says, "is thy place--in my almighty arms. It is I who love thee so, who speak Abide in me; surely thou canst trust me." The voice of Jesus entering and dwelling in the soul cannot but call for the response: "Yes, Saviour, in Thee I can, I will abide."

Abide in me: These words are no law of Moses, demanding from the sinful what they cannot perform. They are the command of love, which is ever only a promise in a different shape. Think of this until all feeling of burden and fear and despair pass away, and the first thought that comes as you hear of abiding in Jesus be one of bright and joyous hope: it is for me, I know I shall enjoy it. You are not under the law, with its inexorable Do, but under grace, with its blessed Believe what Christ will do for you. And

if the question be asked, "But surely there is something for us to do?" the answer is, "Our doing and working are but the fruit of Christ's work in us." It is when the soul becomes utterly passive, looking and resting on what Christ is to do, that its energies are stirred to their highest activity, and that we work most effectually because we know that He works in us. It is as we see in that word IN ME the mighty energies of love reaching out after us to have us and to hold us, that all the strength of our will is roused to abide in Him.

This connection between Christ's work and our work is beautifully expressed in the words of Paul: "I follow after, if that I may apprehend that whereunto I also am apprehended of Christ Jesus." It was because he knew that the mighty and the faithful One had grasped him with the glorious purpose of making him one with Himself, that he did his utmost to grasp the glorious prize. The faith, the experience, the full assurance, "Christ hath apprehended me," gave him the courage and the strength to press on and apprehend that whereunto he was apprehended. Each new insight of the great end for which Christ had apprehended and was holding him, roused him afresh to aim at nothing less.

Paul's expression, and its application to the Christian life, can be best understood if we think of a father helping his child to mount the side of some steep precipice. The father stands above, and has taken the son by the hand to help him on. He points him to the spot on which he will help him to plant his feet, as he leaps upward. The leap would be too high and dangerous for the child alone; but the father's hand is his trust, and he leaps to get hold of the point for which his father has taken hold of him. It is the father's strength that secures him and lifts him up, and so urges him to use his utmost strength.

Such is the relation between Christ and you, O weak and trembling believer! Fix first your eyes on the whereunto for which He has apprehended you. It is nothing less than a life of abiding, unbroken fellowship with Himself to which He is seeking to lift you up. All that you have already received--pardon and peace, the Spirit and His grace--are but preliminary to this. And all that you see promised to you in the future--holiness and fruitfulness and glory everlasting--are but its natural outcome. Union with Himself, and so with the Father, is His highest object. Fix your eye on this, and gaze until it stand out before you clear and unmistakeable: Christ's aim is to have me abiding in Him. And then let the second thought enter your heart: Unto this I am apprehended of Christ. His almighty power hath laid hold on me, and offers now to lift me up to where He would have me. Fix your eyes on Christ. Gaze on the love that beams in those eyes, and that asks whether you cannot trust Him, who sought and found and brought you nigh, now to keep you. Gaze on that arm of power, and say whether you have reason to be assured that He is indeed able to keep you abiding in Him.

And as you think of the spot whither He points--the blessed whereunto for which He apprehended you--and keep your gaze fixed on Himself, holding you and waiting to lift you up, O say, could you not this very day take the upward step, and rise to enter upon this blessed life of abiding in Christ? Yes, begin at once, and say, "O my Jesus, if Thou biddest me, and if Thou engagest to lift and keep me there, I will venture. Trembling, but trusting, I will say: Jesus, I do abide in Thee. "

My beloved fellow-believer, go, and take time alone with Jesus, and say this to Him. I dare not speak to you about abiding in Him for the mere sake of calling forth a

pleasing religious sentiment. God's truth must at once be acted on. O yield yourself this very day to the blessed Saviour in the surrender of the one thing He asks of you: give up yourself to abide in Him. He Himself will work it in you. You can trust Him to keep you trusting and abiding.

And if ever doubts again arise, or the bitter experience of failure tempt you to despair, just remember where Paul found His strength: "I am apprehended of Jesus Christ." In that assurance you have a fountain of strength. From that you can look up to the whereunto on which He has set His heart, and set yours there too. From that you gather confidence that the good work He hath begun He will also perform. And in that confidence you will gather courage, day by day, afresh to say, "I follow on, that I may also apprehend that for which I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." It is because Jesus has taken hold of me, and because Jesus keeps me, that I dare to say: Saviour, I abide in Thee. "