

If You Abide In Me....

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 January 2019

Preacher: Rev. Ruaridh Maclean

[0 : 00] Let's turn back to John chapter 15 and we'll consider verse 7 of this chapter. If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.

These are amazing words and they're also challenging words. They give us great hope of answered prayer but they also challenge us about our attitude before God.

Whether our confidence is truly in him or is our confidence in ourselves.

How do we respond to his word? Do we respond to his word by faith? Or do we simply accept it as being true but don't engage with it in our lives?

So these words are amazing words but challenging words also. I want us to think through this verse in three sections effectively.

[1 : 34] The beginning of this question is if you abide in me. The next section is if my words abide in you.

This is a continuing question and my words abide in you. It is continuing to ask what our response to him is.

Then there's great statement at the end. You will ask what you desire and it shall be done for you.

Now I want to think through these three sections of the verse in this way.

First of all, thinking about staying confident in God. Secondly, thinking about staying committed to God.

Thirdly, thinking about staying in communication with God. Prayer is a form of communication.

[2 : 39] First of all, let's think about staying confident in God. Thinking about these words if you abide in me.

Now the modern world is full of people telling us to be confident. Believe in yourself we're told.

Believe that you can do something and if you apply your mind to it you'll be able to do it.

Now I don't want to totally knock having a positive attitude. Sometimes we can have the opposite kind of way of thinking and have a negative attitude and say there's no way I could possibly do this.

Neither attitude is the right attitude. The right attitude is to look to God and then thrusting him to go forward.

Now spiritually speaking, as Jesus makes abundantly plain in this chapter itself, he can do nothing except by his grace and his strength.

[3 : 53] We need his power and work in us. And so when we think about serving God, when we think about responding to God and to his word, we need to have a certain sense of humility or we should have a certain sense of humility if we're going to respond in a way that is according to God's word.

Recognising that our lives are in God's hands. We can't do anything except by his grace and his provision.

Even on a human level, the Apostle James, the letter to the churches, the general epistle of James, speaks to us very clearly of how we need to look to the Lord in whatever we do.

And the example that he gives is of a person who says, I'm going to go and spend a year here and do business and I'll make money. I'll buy and sell and make a profit.

But that's not the attitude that we should have. It's not that it's wrong to go and buy and sell and make a profit. It's the fact that we should never leave God out of the picture and we should acknowledge that it's only going to go well with us if God ordains that it be so.

[5 : 29] If the Lord wills, James says to us, this is what we should say, if the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.

And he says, but now you boast in your arrogance, all such boasting is evil. So we need to recognize and acknowledge God in our lives if we are to live in a truly biblical way, if we are to live

in a way that is wise according to the Scriptures.

And to do otherwise is according to the Scriptures, foolish. To believe that everything is in our own control and that there is nothing beyond our own control.

That betrays an evil, James says. And it's a boasting and a confidence that betrays an evil in our hearts because it is a denial of the reality of how we stand before God.

So what confidence does this verse encourage us to have? Well, the words, if you abide in me, do encourage us to have confidence.

[6 : 49] They encourage us to have confidence in the Lord. They encourage us to remain or abide in him.

But what exactly does that mean? Well, in the context of the chapter, we see Jesus speaking about the vine.

Now, I suppose vines are not something particularly familiar to us because you can grow vines in Scotland.

I have a friend who has vines in back, but it's not a very common thing. You can't grow them outside, they need to be in a polytunnel or something like that.

So we're maybe not quite as familiar with them in our own immediate context. But I'm sure that most of us have some familiarity with the vine through what we've seen in books and on TV.

[7 : 50] Now, the way that they work in vineyards is that they'll have the stock of the vine.

And instead of spending years growing the stock, growing a fresh stock and branches all in one, or often what they'll do is that they'll graft branches onto the stock of the vine so that when the branches that have been growing on the vine stock are no longer productive, they'll cut off the ones that are unproductive and graft in newer ones, but they'll grow much more quickly than they would on their natural stock because they're grafted into an older, more mature stock.

But the picture that Jesus is using there is how dependent the branches are on the stock of the vine to actually find strength and nourishment.

That's the picture that he's using. And he's saying that we are the branches and he is the vine. We are to draw our strength from him.

We are to recognise that he must be our strength and our confidence. That he is the one that we must trust in and rely on.

[9 : 21] And abiding in him is really depending on him for the strength and the enabling that we need.

And to have confidence that he is able to do that for us. Because a person who has no confidence that God can do that for them is not going to abide in him.

They're not going to look to Jesus for that strength and that grace. They'll simply depend on themselves or on something else or someone else.

But God encourages us to have confidence in him, in his ability to work in us and to enable us to live for him in a way that we simply could not live if we depended merely on our own strength.

We must turn to him and trust him. So our confidence must be in him. We should stay confident in him and in his ability.

[10 : 31] And we can get discouraged. Those who are believers can get discouraged at times. Discouraged that they're not seeing progress and growth in their Christian lives.

Or those who are maybe seeking the Lord may grow discouraged because they haven't seen that transformation that they're looking for. The change in their heart that they are looking for.

Keep seeking, keep trusting, stay confident in God's ability to work in your life. Because he is able and he will work in the lives of those who seek him.

And he will turn their hearts and transform their hearts and come into their hearts and their lives, into their experience to be their strength and to do in them and for them what they simply could not do for themselves.

But we're also encouraged here to stay committed to God and to his Word. If you abide in me and my words abide in you.

[11 : 43] If my words abide in you.

What does that mean? Well it means this, that we are to receive the Word of God and to live by them.

And again the clue is in this imagery of the vine. Because nourishment and life comes to the branches of the vine via the sap that flows from the vine stock.

That's a picture. But the reality for the Christian is that through the Word of Christ and the Spirit of Christ applying that Word in our lives that is how we are to grow and flourish.

Now this isn't just a matter of accepting that the Word of Christ is through, that the Word of God is through. It's to recognize that this Word is the very means of life for us.

[13:03] It's the means that God has ordained for sustaining our spiritual lives and for causing growth in our spiritual lives and to bring fruitfulness in our spiritual lives and without it every Christian, spiritually speaking, would shrivel up and die.

Their spiritual lives would shrivel away to nothing. And that's why it's so important to lay hold of this Word, to have it and to hold onto it and to seek that God would help us to apply it to our lives and to live by it if you abide in me and my words abide in you.

Now when we understand that our spiritual life is so dependent on this Word, we become committed to this Word.

Absolutely and totally committed to this Word, deeply committed to this Word because we recognize that we need this Word. Every day, every moment we need this Word.

What is your commitment to this Word? Have you understood how important this Word is? Does this Word touch your daily life?

[14:47] If it doesn't, then this Word is not abiding in you in this way yet and you need to turn to the Lord and seek His grace and ask Him to help you to understand this Word and how truly important and vital this Word is.

Do you believe it and obey it? Does it shape your thinking? Does it transform your mind?

Let God's Word bring life. That's not going to happen if your Bible always stays on the shelf.

If the Word isn't part of your day-to-day experience, let His Word dwell in you richly.

Matthew Henry, the great Bible commentator, wrote these words. It is in the Word that Christ has said before us and offered to us.

[16:13] It is in the Word that we receive and embrace Him. And so where the Word of Christ dwells richly, there Christ dwells.

If you want to know more about Jesus, if you want to know more of Jesus in your life, turn to the Word. It's not going to come any other way.

That reality of knowing more of Jesus in your life. He encourages us to let these words abide in us.

This Word brings Jesus into our lives. As His Holy Spirit applies this Word, it's like the very windows of heaven being opened for blessing to be poured out on us.

Are we committed to this Word? Does it abide in us? Lastly, let's think about staying in communication with God.

[17:46] Where this reality of being confident in God, being confident in His Word and living by that Word, being committed to that Word, where these things are through, it has an impact on the way that we live our lives, obviously.

One of the ways that it has an impact is that it transforms the way that we pray.

Let's think about this aspect of prayer. The verse finishes with these great words. Ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. It's speaking about prayer.

Jesus is speaking there about prayer. These words speak about communicating with God. We're encouraged to stay in communication with God, to keep praying and to pray words that are answered.

One of the things that maybe discourages us when we pray is that sometimes we feel like our prayers aren't being answered.

[19:07] There are a whole host of possible reasons for that, but there are two things here, of course, that Jesus is highlighting. One of them is that we maybe actually don't have any confidence that God will answer the prayer, because we don't actually place our confidence in God as we should.

And the other is that His Word is not shaping our hearts and our minds in a way that would lead us to pray in this kind of way.

We probably very easily fall into the trap of simply praying the things that we want, humanly speaking.

Now, it's not that it's wrong to pray for the things that we desire, that we are looking for. After all, Jesus says, you will ask what you wish and it shall be done for you.

But Jesus isn't saying that we can ask absolutely anything and God will answer that prayer. If we ask for daft things, stupid things, God isn't going to answer that kind of prayer.

[20 : 31] If we ask for things that are totally out of bounds according to the Scriptures, He's not going to give us that thing.

And that's why the Word becomes so important in this, because it shapes our thinking and it brings us to the place where we actually begin to ask for the things that are truly God-honoring.

Because we abide in Him. He is the focus of our lives and His Word shapes our thinking in such a way that we only really want the things that He wants.

And so of course He's going to answer that kind of prayer. He delights to answer that kind of prayer, where His children understand Him and His purposes and what He desires to do in them and for them.

And God delights to answer such prayers. We can be very slow to come to actually praying such prayers.

[21 : 53] And the reason that we don't most of the time revolve around these things that Jesus highlights. Whether we abide in Him, whether our confidence is in Him and we are committing our way to Him.

And the things of God are the things that are most important to us. And where His Word informs everything that we do.

This is God's desire for each one of us. That we would live in such a way. Placing our confidence in Him by depending on Him.

Looking to Him for that strength that we need. And looking for that strength, not just for ourselves, but for the glory of His name.

Because we see that there is nothing more important in this world than to live for God and for His glory.

[23 : 11] That there is nothing more important than this world than to live for Him and to witness for Him and to testify for Him. To acknowledge Him in our lives.

And to seek to point others to Him. To seek to help others to help others see how great a God He is. How great a Savior He is.

So these words are deeply challenging. But also deeply encouraging.

Encouraging us to place our confidence in Him. Encouraging us to immerse ourselves in His Word. Encouraging us to pray these great prayers that flow from a life that is committed to God and His Word in that way.

[24 : 25] Again, quoting Matthew Henry. He said this.

Shall have through Christ their hearts desire. I'll say it again. It's a little bit tricky to grasp the first time.

Those that abide in Christ as their hearts delight shall have through Christ their hearts desire.

Living for Jesus in this way has a transforming effect. The greatest effect of all that it has is that it brings Jesus right to the center.

Jesus becomes more important to us than anything else in life. And of course when that happens we have the answer to our greatest prayer.

[25 : 35] Which is to have Him and to know Him. And of course that also flows out into that great prayer of praying that others would also know Him in the same way.

Because if Jesus means the world to us we'll desire that other people would also know Jesus for themselves.

And so we see that this isn't just about our flourishing as individuals.

And that's it. It's not confined to that. It goes out. Jesus speaks about the branches becoming fruitful.

And that's the great fruitfulness surely that we should look for. That our lives would be a means of pointing others to Jesus. And that through our witness and testimony that others would come to know Jesus for themselves.

[26 : 47] So may each one of us abide in Him. And may His Word abide in us.

And may we pray this kind of prayer. And may we see these prayers answered in our families, in our workplaces, in our community, in our congregations.

To God's glory. Let's pray. Heavenly Father we thank You for Your Word. We thank You for its challenge. We thank You for its encouragement.

We pray Lord that You would help each one of us to take Your Word to heart. May it be like seed planted in good soil that would sprout, grow and bring forth fruit to the glory of Your Name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Let's conclude singing from Psalm 20 in the Scottish Psalter version, page 224.

[28 : 04] We're going to sing verses 6 through 9. Now know I, God his King doth save.

He from his holy heaven will hear him, with a saving strength by his own right hand given. In chariots some put confidence. Some horses trust upon.

But we remember will the name of our Lord God alone. We rise and upright stand when they are bowed down and fall. Deliver Lord and let the King us hear when we do call.

May outconfidence also be firmly placed in our Lord. Now know I, God his King doth save.

He from his holy heaven will hear him, with a saving strength by his own right hand given.

[29 : 35] In chariots some put confidence. Some horses trust upon.

But we remember will the name of our Lord God alone.

We rise and upright stand when they are bowed down and fall.

Deliver Lord and let the King us hear when we do call.

Now, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.