

John 15:4–13

A Ministry in the Word

Scripture Reading

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

Abiding — Too Deep for Quick Words

The subject of abiding in the vine is not shallow. The silence it sometimes produces is not because there is nothing there, but because there is too much. Darby defines it as uninterrupted communion and dependence on Him. And from that communion flows a result — we come to know Him. And from knowing Him flows the asking of verse 7, and from the asking flows the answer. These are not separable things; they are a single connected whole. You cannot have the blank check of verse 7 without the abiding that precedes it. The package cannot be opened in pieces.

Without Me Ye Can Do Nothing — Then Ye Can Do Everything

Verses 4 and 5 have a strongly negative character. The branch cannot bear fruit of itself. Without Me ye can do nothing. Nothing — as absolute a word as there is. This is not a small limitation; it is a total one. And it connects with the Lord's own words in John 8:28: *I do nothing of myself*. The one who said that to His disciples was Himself the pattern of dependence — holy Man, ever in unbroken dependence on the Father. And He who said *I do nothing of myself* immediately said, *my Father hath not left me alone, for I do always those things that please him*. Nothing — and then everything. That is God's order: the negative first, then the positive.

The Apostle Paul understood this experientially. In 2 Corinthians 12, writing of himself as a man in Christ, he speaks of his thorn and the Lord's answer: *my grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness*. And his conclusion: *when I am weak, then am I strong*. That is a fruit-bearing branch explaining where the fruit came from. The weakness was precisely the condition in which the vine could work. Independence — the fleshly tendency to say, I can do it — is the thing that most obstructs the flow from vine to branch.

It Shall Come to Pass to You — The Passive Voice of Verse 7

Verse 7 is often called a blank check: *if ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you*. Darby renders it: *it shall come to pass to you*. The fruit comes to pass to the branch. It comes to pass. It is not achieved; it happens. And this is morally significant: fruit that the branch can boast of is not true fruit. True fruit comes from the vine and comes to pass through the branch, not from the branch's own initiative. That is why it is inappropriate to offer to the Lord the products of fleshly talent and creative effort as though they were fruit for God. The question always is: where did this come from? Did it come from the vine? Or did it come from the branch working on its own?

The blank check has a preamble. You shall ask what you will — but whose will is it, after abiding in Him? Abiding in the vine transforms the will. Psalm 37:4 says, *delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.* The desires of the heart that delights in the Lord are not the same as the desires of the heart that is turned to itself. And Isaiah 58:13 shows how that delight works: not doing one's own ways, nor finding one's own pleasure, nor speaking one's own words. There is a step before asking that must be taken. And that step is abiding — the kind of abiding that changes what we want to ask for.

Dependence — The Contrast Between Verses 5, 6, and 7

Verse 5 is independence: without Me ye can do nothing. Verse 6 is the result of independence: cast out, withered, gathered, burned. Verse 7 is dependence: abide in Me, and My words abide in you, and you shall ask what you will. A branch has no existence independent of a vine — it was produced by the vine. The most natural thing for a branch to do is to abide in the vine. Yet many branches reach down independent roots trying to draw from something other than the vine — from the first principles of the world, from philosophy, from earthly resources. And whatever is drawn through those roots will not be fruit. It will be leaves at best, waiting for the burning.

My Words Abide in You — The Two Sides of Abiding

Verse 7 binds together two things: abiding in Him, and His words abiding in us. These are not separable. The person of Christ and the word of Christ belong together. To have one without the other is to have neither properly. Chapter 14:23 gives the same truth: *if a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him.* The abiding is mutual — He in us as we are in Him. It is not a one-way street. As we love because He first loved us, so He makes His abode with us as we keep His

words.

The loss of first love at Ephesus had to do with this — not only with diminished personal affection for Christ, but with leaving the high heavenly ground that had been committed to that assembly. To be drawn down to earthly things is always to be drawn away from the vine. Satan's purpose is to get the branch onto a lower plane. The word of Christ, richly dwelling in the soul, is the guard against that downward pull.

Herein Is My Father Glorified — Much Fruit

Verse 8 gives the Father's object: *herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit*. The fruit is not for the branch's glory — it is for the Father's glory and for the Son's. Verse 16 adds: *that your fruit should abide*. Not only quantity — much fruit — but quality: fruit that remains, fruit that endures. Not wood, hay, or stubble, which can be accumulated cheaply and in large amounts. But the fruit that the Spirit produces through the branch abiding in the true vine: love, joy, peace — things that have the character of eternity about them. That is what glorifies the Father. And when the armies of heaven follow the Lord Jesus out of glory at His appearing, it will not be to their glory — it will be entirely for His. The fruit, then as now, is His, not ours.

— *Study ends* —