



Chapter 4

THE BIG *If*

Ask whatever you wish and it will be given you. Wow! Is that a promise or is that a promise? Is this the prayer life we experience? If not, why not? Perhaps if we look closely at the context in John 15:7, we may find the answer.

*If you remain in Me
and (if) My words remain in you,
ask whatever you wish,
and it will be given you.*

Yes, this is the amazing promise Jesus gave to His disciples. Its ramifications are mind boggling. Perhaps this is why it's so tempting for us to move quickly to the promise, giving little thought as to how it is accomplished. It's easy to leap to the conclusion without taking time to arrive, isn't it? But before we can experience the reality of this powerful promise, there seem to be conditions that must be addressed.

It's important for us to realize that the Lord had only precious moments left to spend with His disciples.

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His agonizing death loomed only hours away as He here extends this profound and loving proposal to His disciples. It is one of the most beautiful in His legacy to mortal men. He knows well that such potential cannot be offered without built-in protection, lest it work to their detriment rather than blessing.

The Terms

The provisions of this agreement are explicit. Our Lord leaves no room for conjecture. He takes off from the very first word:

If....

The dictionary says *if* means “on the condition”. We are immediately alerted that something is involved here which does not happen automatically. Conditions must be met. *If* they are met, then the conclusion is predictable. *If* not, then whatever follows does not apply.

So what are the conditions and who is responsible for meeting them? We learn the *who* in a fast hurry:

you....

If- you....! This is an open contract. It’s available to anyone who will rise to the challenge. When *you* read it *you* have a decision to make. Will *you* accept the challenge or pass it by? The promise is there, *if you* want to take advantage of it. But *if you* choose to ignore it, you can just continue on your way. Remember, though, *if you* don’t fulfill your part of the bargain, don’t expect to claim the desired end.

Not all of God's gifts to us come in contract form, that is, with conditions attached. Some happen no matter what. Nothing we do or don't do makes the sun come up in the east and go down in the west each day.

God's *love* is unconditional. We do nothing to earn it, nor can we suppress it. The shepherd loves the rebellious little lamb that spends all its time in the furthest corner of the pasture every bit as much as the one tagging along at his heels, but he's able to show his love more to the one who stays close. Such is God's unconditional love for us.

By contrast, John 15:7 addresses very definite conditions which cannot be ignored and for very good reasons. Would you give your child an unexploded land mine to play with as a toy? Even so, the Lord could not turn this powerful promise loose on people who are not prepared nor informed about its use.

"Okay", you say, "how do I fulfill my end?" The first thing we are told is to....

remain....

The word *remain* is the Greek word *meno*, meaning to stay (in a given place, state, relation or expectancy) to abide, continue, dwell, endure, be present, remain, stand"

Obviously, to *remain* is to stay put in one place, the way you sometimes expect your kids to wait for you at the mall. *Remaining* is not flitting hither and yon. It's not an on/off, erratic arrangement. To *remain* in this instance is a solid commitment. A consistent relationship. A fixed residence, if you will. One who *remains* can always be found in the specified place.

Now, if you were to pick a place where you would be staying continuously, what kind of an environment would you choose? How about somewhere that is safe, and bright, and comfortable, and happy, and peaceful, and loving, and.... (you fill in the rest). Wherever could such a place be found? Jesus says....

in Me....

“*If - you - remain - in Me....*”. But then what exactly does this mean, to *remain - in* Jesus? In the context of John 15, this status is illustrated by the allegory of a branch’s relationship to the vine.

In order for a branch to survive and bear fruit, it must be attached to the vine. Life-giving nourishment surges up from the roots of the vine through the stem to the branch. Thus the branch shares the life of the vine. If, however, the branch is separated from the vine, the life-flow is severed and the branch is left to shrivel and die. In other words, as long as the branch *remains in* the vine, it flourishes and bears fruit. Should this relationship cease to exist, so also does the life of the branch.

Jesus said that He is the vine and we are the branches. As a branch remains *in* the vine, we must *remain in* Him in a constant, abiding relationship. Thus, as His life flows through us, we grow in Him and bear fruit.

This, then, is the first condition of the contract. We are to *remain in* Jesus. The Amplified Bible says we must *abide vitally united to*. In fulfilling this condition, we participate in the Everlasting Covenant with our Lord and Savior. We are one with Him, sharing His life, growing through His strength, bearing His fruit. Total commitment!

But this is only the first condition of the contract. There is another factor to be considered. Thus, the next word:

and....

This tells us that a parallel condition is about to be addressed. The first stipulation is a vital part of the contract, but the second is of no less significance.

(if)....

Although *if* is not stated as part of this second provision, it is nonetheless implied and understood. Thus, there is another decision that must be made which is equally important but separate and apart from the first. Again, you have the option to pursue it or ignore it, as you choose. Again, to claim the promise is to accept the terms, both of them.

The first condition mentioned by Jesus requires that we *remain in* Him. This may be construed as a somewhat passive role to just “stay put” *in* Him. The second specification, however, requires a more active role, that of taking hold of something and making it a vital part of our life.

and (if) My Words remain in you....

Our Lord Jesus here makes explicit reference to specific, literal text. “*My words*”, says Jesus. If “*My Words remain in you....*” It might be easy for Christians today to assume that this can be accomplished by just

reading the Bible. But could this second stipulation be met by mere reading?

Of course it can't be denied that reading the Word is an essential part of the Christian life. But could it be said that the actual *words* of Scripture *remain in* one's heart and mind as a permanent resource with merely a reading or even a study of the Word? Some people with photographic memories grasp precise wording readily, but most of us retain very little of literal text from just reading. Consequently, what we retain may be mostly our own impressions of what we think Scripture is saying or someone else's interpretation of it. Jesus doesn't refer to *our interpretation* of His Word, or *our opinion* about what we've read. The stipulation made by Him is well defined, leaving no leeway for the insertion of our own ideas. According to this verse, in order for us to comply with the terms of this contract, we must have a literal grasp of truth.

In other chapters we have discussed the difference between *reading* the Word and *memorizing* it. Only by memorization can the *words* of Scripture in context be transferred from the page of the Book into our hearts, minds and souls where it can *remain in* us. Not *with* us as we might carry our Bible *with* us, but *in* us, a viable part of our life. Only by memorizing verbatim can we fulfill this second condition of the contract.

There is another aspect of truth yet to be considered which profoundly affects this entire scenario.

The Written Word and the Living Word

It is important for us to realize that the One here talking about the *written* Word is Himself the *living* Word. The written Word is God's partial revelation to us through the Scriptures, but we are told that full revelation came through His Son.

*God, who gave to our forefathers many different glimpses of the truth in the words of the prophets, has now, at the end of the present age, given us the truth in the Son. (Hebrews 1:1-2)**

So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen His glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father. (John 1:14, NLT)

Those in the Old Testament had only the *written* Word and the promise of the *living* Word who would be revealed to them at a future time. We have the *written* Word, but we can also personally know the *living* Word, the One who is Himself the personification of the *written* Word, our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the One who humbly offers this gracious proposal to any who will accept it.

“...if you will live your life in Me...” (says Jesus).*

We can almost hear Him saying, “*if - **only** - you will live your life in Me...*” But why would our Lord make this emphasis?

As we travel down the “Life Road” we have a handbook, the Bible. This book tells us about the way of joy and victory. It spells out the importance of the do’s and don’t’s, the why’s and the wherefore’s. It warns that we have a fierce adversary and that there are dangerous pitfalls. In the end, though, we find it is futile for us to have all this information because it’s far beyond our human capabilities to live this life we read about. If the story ended there, it would be a sad one indeed.

Praise God, our Guide Book also tells us about One who not only paid the price for all of our sins and failures, He is our boundless source of strength and power to live according to the *Book*. He fulfilled everything written in the Scriptures. He brought the *Words* to life. He *is* the *Word of God* personified. He trod the road of humanity, tempted and buffeted, as we, but without deviation. He emerged victorious over life’s trials and temptations. Because of Him we too can walk the way of life and love. But only as we *remain in* Him can this be accomplished.

So, the two conditions are irrevocably linked. We can live the life of the *written* Word only in the power and strength of the *living* Word. But there is a reverse that is also true. Whereas the *written* Word cannot function in our lives apart from the *living* Word, Jesus makes it plain that our relationship with Him, the *living* Word, does not exist independent of the *written* Word.

“...*if you live your life in Me,*” (says Jesus)
“*and (if) My words live in your hearts....*”*

So, for us to be united with Jesus as a branch is one with the vine, and to long for His will to be fulfilled in our lives is half the contract. But equally important is having the written Word living in our hearts so that we have a clear understanding of what His will is for us. We must memorize it so its meaning is not diluted. Thus, there is no confusing our own thoughts and ideas with the text. God's holy, infallible Word must *live in* our hearts.

Consequently, if we live our life in Jesus, the living Word (we have a personal, vital relationship with Him) *and* if we have the written Word living in our hearts (we know God's will as it is revealed to us in His Word so we can actually pray His Word back to Him) then our will is one with our Lord's.

Then and only then are we ready to receive the promise, the consummation of the contract: "*...you can ask for whatever you like and it will come true for you.*"*

"...if you live your life in Me," (says Jesus)*

...you are one with Him. His life and power are flowing through you in consistent fellowship.

*"...and (if) My words live in your hearts..."**

...you are memorizing His Word so that it is a permanent part of your existence. You know God's unadulterated will for you, according to His Word, and long for it to be fulfilled in your life.

*"...you can ask for whatever you like, and it will come true for you."**

...then ask to you heart's content. Your requests will be granted.

Fruit

Lest there be any question as to why this beautiful promise is extended to us mortals, Jesus adds:

*“This is to My Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples.”
(John 15:8)*

The whole purpose of our life and prayers is that the Father be glorified and that we bear *fruit* for His glory.

Fruit! What is *fruit*? Some contend that *fruit* in the New Testament means those we have won to the Lord. This may be true, but there are specific verses that refer to *fruit* as it relates to traits of character evident in the life of a mature Christian:

*Romans 6:22 But now that you are employed by God, you owe no duty to sin, and you reap the fruit of being made righteous, while at the end of the road there is life for evermore.**

*Galatians 5:22 The Spirit... produces in human life fruits such as these: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, fidelity, tolerance and self-control....**

Ephesians 5:8-9 Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.

Hebrews 12:11 Now obviously no “chastening” seems pleasant at the time: it is in fact most unpleasant.

*Yet when it is all over we can see that it has quietly produced the fruit of real goodness in the characters of those who have accepted it in the right spirit.**

We often think that those bringing glory to our heavenly Father and *bearing fruit* for Him are highly talented figures much in the public eye. Our generation has a tendency to put great emphasis on *working for the Lord* and the significant accomplishments of those who receive the raves. In fact, it seems some of us may be so busy doing the Lord's work we have little time for Him. I have lived in this trap.

The Lord, however, expresses much more interest in what we *are*, our quiet relationship with Him, rather than a great flourish that may draw accolades from others. He may or may not be glorified with flashy public displays of abilities; but He longs to see quiet fruit demonstrated in our lives. This, He says, will bring glory to the Father.

We were created for the Lord's pleasure. How exactly do we give Him pleasure? Jesus said: "*This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit...*" The branch doesn't work to create fruit; fruit is an automatic product of the branch's relationship with the vine. As the vine provides the nourishment, the branch bears fruit. All the branch does is to *stay put*. The vine does the rest. And the Father is glorified.

It's another deception of our great adversary that keeps us focused on activity rather than on the quiet fruit of righteousness borne for our Lord's glory and for His glory alone. Jesus does not address the "doers" in these verses nor does He single out specific persons or types of

personalities. His invitation is open to anyone and everyone who is willing to accept the challenge and follow it through to fulfillment.

Our Lord at this moment, has His hand out to *you*, very humbly offering this promise to *you*. This is not a command. He merely extends the invitation: “*If (only) you*” will accept the conditions, then... “*you can ask for whatever you like and it will come true for you.*”^{*} Not to fulfill selfish desires; not to accommodate human reasoning, but that you in your own little, personal world may *bear much fruit* for the *Father’s glory*.

This is a private, personal decision, between you and your Lord. Hebrews 12:11 speaks about the fruit of real goodness being *quietly* produced. The fruit borne in your life is not for public display. It’s not for the benefit of other people who are not directly affected. No one else may even know about it. (Only as the Father, Himself, may choose to use you to touch the lives of others.) It is between you and your Father. It is for *His* glory. It is your offering of love to the Father.

Who you are, or what you have been in the past makes no difference. *If* you abide by the terms, the promise is yours and the Father will be glorified.

After writing this chapter, I ran across Andrew Murray’s very eloquent comments which speak profoundly of this passage:

“If ye abide in me, and *my words abide in you*, ask whatsoever ye will, it shall be done unto you.” We see what this means. In the words the

Savior gives Himself. We must have the words *in us*, taken up into our will and life, reproduced in our disposition and conduct. We must have them *abiding* in us: our whole life one continued exposition of the words that are within, and filling us; the words revealing Christ within, and our life revealing Him without. It is as the words of Christ enter our very heart, become our life and influence it, that our words will enter His heart and influence Him. My prayer will depend on my life; what God's words are to me and in me, my words will be to God and in God. If I do what God says, God will do what I say.

"If my words abide in you:" the condition is simple and clear. In His words His will is revealed. As the words abide in me, His will rules me; my will becomes the empty vessel which His will fills, the willing instrument which His will wields; He fills my inner being. In the exercise of obedience and faith my will becomes ever stronger, and is brought into deeper inner harmony with Him. He can fully trust it to will nothing but what He wills; He is not afraid to give the promise, "If My words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, it shall be done unto you." To all who believe it, and act upon it, He will make it literally true.

His prayer:

Blessed Lord! Thy lesson this day has again discovered to me my folly. I see how it is that my

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prayer has not been more believing and prevailing. I was more occupied with my speaking to Thee than Thy speaking to me. I did not understand that the secret of faith is this: there can be only so much faith as there is of the Living Word dwelling in the soul.

And Thy word had taught me so clearly: Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak; let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God. Lord, teach me that it is only with Thy word taken up into my life that my words can be taken into Thy heart; that Thy word, if it be a living power within me, will be a living power with Thee; what Thy mouth hath spoken Thy hand will perform. **

*If you live your life in Me
and (if) My words live in your hearts,
you can ask for whatever you like
and it will come true for you.*

*This is how My Father will be glorified —
in your becoming fruitful
and being My disciples.**

* *Phillips translation*

** *Andrew Murray, With Christ In The School Of Prayer (From Lesson 22)*