

**Articles and Sermons :: Ask Whatever You Wish****Ask Whatever You Wish - posted by awakenwithin (), on: 2007/8/18 18:59**

Ask Whatever You Wish

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By John Piper January 10, 1993  
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John 15:7

If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you.

Our focus this morning is verse 7, "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you." The verse has two halves, a condition and a result. The condition—the if clause—is, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you . . ." The result—the then clause—"then ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."

Last week we talked about the condition—especially the meaning of Jesus' words abiding in us. If we are to have consistent answers to prayer, the words of Jesus must abide in us. That is, as we saw from verses 4 and 5, Jesus himself must abide in us speaking. We do not just stock ourselves with dead ideas which he spoke once, but we receive and believe and remember and meditate on the truths that he spoke once and is speaking now as he abides in us.

Four Truths About Prayer

Today I want to focus on the result clause of verse 7—"ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." If the words of Jesus abide in us, then the result will be that you pray with power and effectiveness.

There are four truths about prayer that come from meditating on this verse in its wider context in the writings of John.

**1. Fruit-Bearing**

Prayer is for fruit-bearing.

God designed prayer to give his disciples the joy of bearing fruit while God himself gets the glory. We can see this in the connection between verses 7 and 8 and then in verse 16.

"By This Is My Father Glorified . . ."

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you. (v. 8) By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples.

In John's way of writing the phrase "by this" at the beginning of verse 8 probably refers backward to verse 7 and forward to the rest of verse 8. "By this is my Father glorified"—that is, by your asking him for things and his giving them to you. He gets glory as the one who is rich and good enough to answer prayer. But also . . . "By this is my Father glorified"—that is, that you bear much fruit. The implication is that God gets glory when we bear much fruit because we have prayed and God has answered. Therefore the primary point of prayer is fruit-bearing. Prayer is for fruit-bearing.

The Logical Connection in Verse 16

This is confirmed explicitly in verse 16. Jesus says to his disciples, "You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he may give to you."

The logical connection between the two parts of this verse are tremendously important. Jesus says that he chose and appointed his disciples that they should go and bear fruit that remains . . . "that whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he may give it to you." Shortened down it says, "I have given you a fruit-bearing mission in order that your prayers might be answered!" This only makes sense if prayer is for fruit-bearing.

You would expect the verse to be just the reverse: God will give you what you ask in order that you might have a fruit-bearing mission. But Jesus says it the other way around: I give you a fruit bearing mission in order that the Father might answer your prayers. The point: prayer malfunctions when it is not used in fruit-bearing. Prayer is for fruit-bearing. Therefore, since I want you to pray and to get answers to your prayers, I chose you and I appointed you to go and bear fruit. Because prayer is for fruit-bearing. If you are not devoted to fruit-bearing, you have no warrant for expecting answers to prayer. Prayer is designed for fruit-bearing.

**2. Not Gratifying Natural Desires**

Prayer is not for gratifying natural desires.

### Natural Desires Always Subordinate to Kingdom Desires

Now I know that Jesus taught us to pray, "Give us this day, our daily bread." And what could be more natural than the desire to eat? And I know that there are dozens of instances in the Bible of people praying for desires as natural as the desire for protection from enemies and escape from danger and success in vocation and fertility in marriage, recovery from sickness, etc.

My point is not that those desires are wrong. My point is that they should always be subordinate to spiritual desires; kingdom desires; fruit-bearing desires; gospel-spreading, God-centered desires; Christ-exalting, God-glorifying desires. And when our natural desires are felt as a means to these greater desires, then they become the proper subject of prayer.

Just before Jesus said to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," he said, make it your heart's desire that God would hallow his name and that the kingdom would come and that the will of God would be done on earth. When your heart is caught up with those great desires, then having something to eat is not merely a natural desire, but a means to some great God-centered end. And then it is the proper subject of prayer.

For God's Name and Kingdom and Will

Prayer is for God's name and God's kingdom and God's will—it is for fruit-bearing in all those great things. If our protection, and our escape from danger, and our eating and having clothes and houses and lands and education and vocational success leads to those great God-centered ends (the name of God and kingdom of God and will of God), then we pray about them with confidence.

This is what David meant when he said in Psalm 37:4, "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart." The desires of the heart cease to be merely natural desires when the heart delights above all else in the Lord. Delighting in the Lord—in the hallowing of his name and the seeking of his kingdom and the doing of his will—transforms all natural desires into God-related desires. They are transposed up into a different key.

Be Devoted to God's Interests

Prayer is not for gratifying natural desires. It is for fruit-bearing, for the glory of God. Another way of saying it is this: if you want God to respond to your interests, you must be devoted to his interests. God is God. He does not run the world by hiring the consulting firm called Mankind. He lets mankind share in the running of the world through prayer to the degree that we consult with him and get our goals and desires in tune with his purposes.

The evidence for this in the writing of John is 1 John 5:14, "This is the confidence which we have before him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us." Prayer is not for gratifying our natural desires. It is for gratifying our desires when those desires have been so purified and so saturated with God that they coincide with his plans. "If we ask anything according to his will."

John puts it another way in 1 John 3:22, "Whatever we ask we receive from him because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight." In other words prayer is not for gratifying natural desires. Prayer is for satisfying the desires of people who are devoted to God's desires.

James put it yet another way in James 4:3, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures." Prayer is not for gratifying natural desires. Prayer is for fruit-bearing.

If we want to have power and effect in praying, we must devote ourselves to getting our desires into alignment with the fruit that God means to produce through us—and that fruit always has to do with the hallowing of his name and the coming of his kingdom and the doing of his will the way the angels do it in heaven.

### 3. The Preparatory Work of Jesus' Words

The words of Jesus abiding in us prepare us for fruit-bearing prayer.

The Key to Praying with Power

If prayer is not for gratifying natural desires but for bearing fruit for God, the major challenge of prayer is to become the kind of person who is not dominated by natural desires (to become what Paul calls a "spiritual person" as opposed to a merely "natural person" or "carnal person"). The key to praying with power is to become the kind of persons who do not use God for our ends but are utterly devoted to being used for his ends.

This is why Jesus says, "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you." The words of Jesus abiding in us make us the kind of persons who are not dominated by natural desires, but are devoted to fruit-bearing for God's glory.

Examples from John's Writings

Let me give you a few examples that show this from John's writings.

In 1 John 1:10 he says, "If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." If the words of Jesus were abiding in us, we would have known ourselves better—that we have sinned. The words of Jesus abiding in us is the key to a true and humble assessment of ourselves that keeps us in line with God's purposes.

In John 17:8 Jesus prays, "They have received and truly understood that I came forth from thee." In other words receiving the words of Jesus is the key to a true and exalted assessment of who Jesus is—the Son of God sent from the Father. And no one can pray in accord with God's purposes without a true grasp of who Jesus is in the world and what his purposes are in coming from the Father.

In 1 John 2:14b John says, "I have written to you, young men, because . . . the word of God abides in you, and you have

overcome the evil one." So the words of Jesus abiding in us triumph over Satan and free us from the deceptions that would put us at odds with God and make natural desires dominate our lives.

In John 14:24 Jesus says, "He who does not love me does not keep my words." So if we keep the words of Jesus—if they abide in us—they will define for us the path of love. And that is precisely the path where prayer was designed to bear fruit.

In John 8:47 Jesus says, "He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God." In other words if the words of God abide in you, you know that you are chosen of God (cf. John 8:31). The abiding of Jesus' words in you is evidence of your election and a ground of your assurance. And that assurance is indispensable in praying with faith and hope.

In John 15:3 Jesus says, "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you," and in John 17:17 he prays, "Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth." When the Word of God abides in us, we are made clean and holy. And that means: in line with the fruit-bearing purposes of God.

What the Word Gives Us

Other examples could be given, but these are enough to show that the words of Jesus abiding in us prepare us for fruit-bearing prayer. It's the Word that gives us

a humble view of ourselves, and  
an exalted view of Jesus, and  
triumph over the devil, and  
a knowledge of the path of love, and  
the assurance of our election, and  
the power of holiness.

In other words it's the abiding Word of Jesus that puts us in tune with the fruit-bearing purposes of God to glorify himself. So the fourth and final truth about prayer is this.

4. Being Saturated by the Words of Jesus

The more we are saturated by the words of Jesus, the more our prayers will be answered.

Or to put it in a rhyme:

More saturated by the word  
More surely will our prayers be heard

Conclusion

The challenge of prayer in 1993 is the challenge to become the kind of people who do not live at the level of mere natural desire, but who live to bear fruit for God—to hallow his name and seek his kingdom and do his will. And the key to becoming that kind of person is letting the words of Jesus—the Word of God (John 3:34; 14:10; 17:8)—abide in us. Being filled and saturated by the words of Scripture brings us so close to the mind of God that we pray in tune with his purposes and receive whatever we ask.

I think this is a progressive experience, not a once for all one. That's why the final point is: the more we are saturated by the words of Jesus, the more our prayers will be answered.

If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will and it shall be done for you.

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