



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 15:18 – 16:14

“Rejoice Ye Pure in Heart”

TRANSCRIPT

[Audio Begins]...today is in John chapter 15 as we continue our exposition of the Upper Room Discourse in the Gospel of John. John chapter 15, verse 1 through verse 17. You may remember that at the conclusion of the preceding chapter, chapter 14, the Lord had said to the eleven, “Arise, let us go hence.” And evidently, this that is found in chapter 15 was spoken perhaps in the court of the house in which he had observed the last Passover and the first Lord's Supper with the eleven. In verse 1 he says,

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

(Now, later on in the exposition of the word I would like to say just a few sentences with reference to this statement and particularly, “he purgeth it.” That is a word that means literally to cleanse. It, in some people's minds, has been taken to mean to prune. And it's possible that that is the force of it. It is something I'm afraid that we cannot with absolute certainty know. So, it's possible that he means, ‘He taketh it away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he pruneth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.’ But it may simply be cleanse and our Lord may be thinking about the meaning of the passage, the meaning of the words, and giving the spiritual meaning instead of continuing the illustration at that point. But we'll say something about it in a moment). Now ye are clean (on

account, not through, but) on account the word which I have spoken unto you. 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.”

Now, this, of course, is a continuation of the figure and so we are to think of the fire here as a figure of speech and most likely a figure of disciplinary judgment. Incidentally, when it says, ‘and men gather them, and cast them into the fire,’ there is no word for men in the text. It’s really, ‘they gather them, and cast them into the fire.’ And that is simply a Semitic way of expressing what takes place. I did have a teacher many, many years ago who liked to make a great deal over the men, which is found in the Authorized Version. It wasn’t found in the Greek text, but since he was not a Greek scholar he made a great deal over the word men and suggested that what it referred to was what people said about an unfaithful Christian. That in effect they said they’re not living the life that they profess and since they were critical of unfruitful Christians, that was the casting of them into the fire and the burning of them. But it is simply a way that the Hebrews had of expressing an indefinite subject. ‘They are gathered, and cast 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.”

Now, I don’t think I’ll have time to say anything about this. This word translated ‘be’ ‘so shall ye be my disciples,’ is a word that also means prove to be. And that is the force here clearly because we do not become disciples by bearing fruit. That would overthrow everything said in the New Testament by our Lord and the apostles. We become disciples through faith apart from works.

And so what he is talking about is simply by bearing fruit we demonstrate that we are his disciples. And that’s a regular meaning that this verb has. We should render it ‘so shall you prove to be my disciples.’ Now we continue with verse 9,

“As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. (It is a marvelous thing to think about that the things that our Lord had revealed to him as the son of man by his Father are the things that he has made known unto us. And these things have come down to us in 1983. Think of it. We are able actually to enter into the understanding and know the things that the Lord Jesus was told by his Father. That’s an amazing privilege that we have). Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. These things I command you, that ye love one another.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Now, we bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we come to Thee in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And we express to Thee our gratitude for this amazing wonderful privilege that we have of entering into the knowledge of the things that Thou didst reveal to the Son of God as he lived and ministered here upon the earth. What a magnificent thing it is to have the words that Thou hast spoken to him committed to writing through the apostles and preserved for us in the 20th century.

O God, forgive us our sin of neglect, our failure to ponder. And make these things so much a part of our lives that by Thy grace we may be able to please Thee and the keeping of the commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are grateful on this the Lord’s day we give Thee thanks again. We thank Thee for the privilege of the ministry of the word. And we would ask Lord that as we have this meeting together that the blessing of our great God may rest upon the singing of the hymns, upon all aspects of the ministry, the reading of the word, the preaching. May the result be that the church of Jesus Christ represented here be strengthened.

Bless Lord in the ministries that go forth from the Chapel over the radio and on the printed page and through the tapes. We are grateful for the wide outreach of this ministry from such a small place. And we give Thee thanks. We would particularly remember those who are in our calendar of concern for many do need, Lord, the ministry which Thou alone canst give. And we pray for them, strengthen them and strengthen those who minister to them, members of the family and friends. And give encouragement. We commit them to Thee.

We pray that all of the ministry of comfort and consolation and strengthening that belongs to our great triune God in heaven may be theirs as Thou dost will to minister. We thank Thee and praise Thee for this country and for its leadership. And Lord, we pray Thy blessing upon us in these critical days in which we live. Especially do we pray a blessing upon the whole body of Christ. We are so different in so many ways, but united in the common faith that we have in Jesus Christ. Build up the church, strengthen her, bless the ministry, accomplish and complete the work that Thou wouldst do through the church. We pray. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] The passage that we are looking at today in the exposition of the word of God contains the last of our Lord’s “I am” statements recorded in the Gospel of John. It really is very fitting that this one should be the last. We think of some of those magnificent sayings such as “I am the bread of life,” “I am the good shepherd,” “I am the door,” “I am the way, the truth, and the

life.” And these are magnificent statements. But most of them have to do to this point with entrance into the life that we have in Christ. But this is a statement that is different. “I am the true vine.” And it is particularly fitting that it should be the last of our Lord’s statements since abiding in Christ is the divinely intended everyday experience of the enjoyment of eternal life in our bodies of flesh. So it seems to me rather fitting that this should be the last of the statements “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman,” because it pertains to the Christian life that the Lord would have us to live.

We know that these statements are statements that reflect the deity of the one who makes them because they are built upon the great statements of the Old Testament such as “I am who I am,” “I am he,” which we find so often in the Book of Isaiah as statements of the deity. And so the Lord Jesus, by framing these statements in this pattern “I am,” designed them to get over the impression that the one who was speaking to the apostles and giving them these marvelous words of truth was the “I am” of the Old Testament. That is Jehovah God the covenant keeping God.

Now this one I say is particularly fitting because it has to do with the kind of experience that is to characterize us as believers after we have believed in Christ.

Incidentally, if there should be some in this audience, and I’m quite sure that there are some who fall into this category, who have not yet come to understand their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, the way in which they may come into the possession of eternal life, this truth is not yet for you. This is truth pertaining particularly to those who have come to be in Christ through faith in him as the one who has offered the atoning sacrifice. So this is truth that is particularly designed for those who have believed in Jesus Christ.

Thomas à Kempis wrote a famous book called *The Imitation of Christ*. And there is a sense in which believers are called upon to imitate our Lord. But the Christian life is not only an imitation of Christ. In fact, it is not most fundamentally an imitation of Christ. It is really a participation in Christ. When the Apostle Paul describes his life, he says, “For me to live is Christ. Not “For me to live is to imitate Christ.” But “For me to live is Christ.” In other words, he speaks of a union that is

so closely consummated by the divine being that for him to live is for Christ to live. So, “For me to live is Christ.”

In fact, the apostle says in another place, “He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.” That’s about as close a kind of union as it is possible for one to have. So, when we talk about the Christian life we should not forget that it is basically a participation in the life of Christ. The Christian is one who by the grace of God having Christ living within him through the spirit is the instrumentality by which our Lord continues to live his life. So he continues his ministry through us, through the body. That’s why the church is called the body of Christ, because he continues his ministry through the church and through the individual members.

Benjamin Jowett, or J. H. Jowett, the great preacher said, “Some people visit Christ, others abide in him.” He was trying to express the fact that some of us as Christians have a rather strange kind of existence. At one moment, we are truly an instrumentality for the glorification of God. At another moment, we are not. Well, I hope that we shall not just visit Christ in our Christian life, but that we shall learn what it is to dwell in him. Abiding is his term.

The theme of this section, it seems to me, is clearly fruit bearing. It’s not vine planting, but fruit bearing.

Now the reason I say this is because the word fruit occurs eight times in these sixteen verses. Only two times does it occur elsewhere in the gospel. But here is a concentration of emphasis upon fruit. So he’s talking about Christians bearing spiritual fruit against the background of the imagery of the grapevine.

It’s not easy to trace our Lord’s thought through this section incidentally. I like, because I like to think that my thinking is sometimes logical, I like to have a section in which the authors use little terms like for this cause, therefore, on this account, wherefore, because in this way I can link one thought to another and notice the connections, one statement being the grounds for another or one another statement being an inference drawn from a preceding statement. And if you’re used to

listening to the Apostle Paul, you notice the use of the particles that make the connections between sentences and in this way they are help in following the apostle’s thought.

Well, this section is not so easy because perhaps you haven’t noticed it, maybe you have, but there is not a single connective in these seventeen verses. It’s as if our Lord has given us seventeen statements that are connected simply by thought and not by a specific connecting particle. So it requires a little more analysis and a little more subjection to the thought that our Lord is stressing to get something of the connection.

Well, now let’s take a look at it with that in mind and you’ll notice that he begins in the first verse by speaking about the new position in union. He introduces it here with this opening statement, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.” So leaving the Upper Room with the eleven making his way now on to Gethsemane, out in the court perhaps because it seems that he’s left the room since he said, “Arise, let us go hence,” in the preceding verse. The Lord is continuing his instruction of the apostles in preparation for the time when he will not be with them. “I am the true vine.”

Now it doesn’t take a great deal of spiritual discernment to know as you think about a grapevine or a vine here, and undoubted that it was the grape, then our Lord is trying to portray by this figure union with him. “I am the true vine.” In a moment, he will say, verse 5, “I am the vine, ye are the branches.” And so here we have the figure of our Lord as the vine, we are the branches, and he says, “My Father is the husbandman.” In other words, he’s the one who cares for the vine.

Now we also in reading this must not forget that the figure of the vine is not something new. The Lord Jesus did not at this moment introduce this figure into the biblical teaching. For when one reads the Old Testament more than once we notice the figure of a vine. Most of the time and in the great passages of the Old Testament the reference is to the Nation Israel. Israel is likened to a vine in a number of places. Israel is likened to a vine in Psalm 80. Israel is likened to a vine in Isaiah chapter 5, verse 1 through verse 7. And the figure is spelled out in those verses. Israel is likened to a vine in Jeremiah chapter 2 and verse 21. In the whole of Ezekiel chapter 15 the figure of the vine is

again used of the Nation Israel. And then in Hosea chapter 10 and verse 1, Israel is likened to an empty vine. So the figure of the vine was well-known and when the Lord Jesus used it, well the natural thought would be of all of those passages in the Old Testament that represented the relationship between the Nation Israel and the Lord God by the figure of the vine.

Now in every case in these references that I've mentioned, Israel is chastised for being an unfaithful vine. So the figure of the vine was suggestive of Israel, but it also was suggestive to Israelites of the unfaithfulness of the nation.

Now when the Lord Jesus says, “I am the genuine vine. I'm the true vine,” it's obvious that what he is trying to say is that “There is one faithful vine and I am the faithful vine,” as over against the Nation Israel.

Now that's undoubtedly before him. And particularly, since on the temple there was a figure of a vine engraved there. The Israelites, the apostles, would have caught something of the flavor of what he was saying and no doubt would have been interested in what he was saying. “I am the genuine vine.”

Now, of course, there are some things that immediately appear. We wouldn't have to have anything but this one verse to know a few things of the meaning of this passage. For example, we could reason from this that spiritual fruit is not therefore a human achievement. If he is the vine and we are branches who are united to the vine, anyone who knows anything about viticulture—aren't you surprised that I have at my commands such technical terms? [Laughter]

Well, I planted three grapevines last year. And I have three grapevines and I want you to know I have grapes on them too. And I'm looking forward to eventually enjoying at least a few of those grapes. My son-in-law came by to visit about a month ago and I showed him the little tiny grapes that are on there and my heart fell into my shoes when he reached over and pulled one of them off [Laughter] and tasted it and said, “Yes, it is a grape, but it sure is bitter.”

Well, in viticulture you would learn immediately, of course, that the fruit is not the product of the grapes themselves. And the fruit does not come from the branch. The fruit comes from the

life that is in the vine. And so if he is the vine and we are the branches that would tell us right at the beginning that fruit is not from human achievement. We are connected with the source of fruit, the life that is in the vine, who is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one faithful Israelite. He is the one true seed. That’s what Paul talks about in Galatians when he says that he is “The Seed of Abraham.” And we are only seed of Abraham when we are united to him. He’s the only faithful man who has ever lived. And therefore, to be united to him is to be united with the source of life. So he’s the one faithful Israelite. Fruit does not come from our achievement; it comes from the achievement of the Lord Jesus.

Now sometime after this a man by the name of Paul will be called to the apostolate and he will write his letters to the churches. And in those letters he will constantly talk about being in Christ, in him, in whom. For every time that Paul mentions the doctrine of justification by faith, he mentions union with Christ ten times. It has been calculated.

Now that expression “in Christ” is something that is parallel with what our Lord is saying. In fact, it is to spell out what is meant by “I am the vine, ye are the branches,” that Paul has given that marvelous expression of “in Christ.” We are in Christ and therefore justified. We are in Christ and therefore in touch with the life that is life indeed. Well, that’s the beginning. And here we have that figure introduced. “I am the true vine, my Father is the husbandman.”

Now this new position is then described. And a further development of the figure takes place. Notice that our Lord continues by saying, “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.” Fruit on the branches is dependent upon the removal of branches or upon the pruning or cleansing of branches.

Now I must confess I have a slight difficulty in understanding precisely with absolute certainty what our Lord is saying. And I think I’ve studied this passage for a fairly lengthy time, about thirty years. And I still am not absolutely certain of the precise point that our Lord is making. It’s possible that he’s talking about salvation truth when he says, “Every branch in me that beareth

not fruit he taketh away.” In other words, with Israel as the background and thinking about the nation, he may be saying, “They profess to be in relationship with Jehovah God. They profess to have the truth of God. But they’re not bearing fruit and so every branch in me by profession that does not bear fruit he takes away.” In the 6th verse, it’s evident that it is taken away for judgment. And so one might conclude from this that our Lord is speaking about the simple fact that every true believer must produce spiritual fruit.

Now I think that is a truth. I think it is true that every true believer must produce fruit. The apostle will say later on when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ all of us, every one of us, shall receive praise from the Lord God.

Now we don’t have to see that fruit, but it has to be there. In other words, the life of God will manifest itself.

Now it doesn’t have to manifest itself much. We cannot set any standard about how much fruit should be manifested because one true piece of fruit that is manifested by any one person is evidence of divine working, for no fruit can come from men who are out of Christ. That’s clear. They that are in the flesh cannot please him. So only one truly fruitful act is sufficient to evidence there is a contact with the source of life, the Lord Jesus.

Now it’s possible he is saying, “Those who are truly connected with me will bear fruit. And those who make profession of being in me and who do not produce fruit, they will be taken away for judgment.” That’s possible. On the other hand, it is also possible, I think, to understand these verses to refer not to salvation truth, but to the truth of sanctification, the Christian life, in this way. When he says, “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away,” we will take that expression “in me” to be truly in him. It always is incidentally. So far as I know, that expression is never used of a non-Christian. So let’s take it that way. Then, “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away” would be taken away for disciplinary action by the Lord God. In other words, if as believers we do not bear fruit, we have to bear some, but if our life is characterized by persistent rebellion against the Lord God, then discipline takes place in the family of God as it did in Corinth.

For this cause. Disorders at the Lord’s table. Paul said, “Some of you are weak, some are sickly, and some have fallen asleep.” In other words, discipline ultimately is physical death, not spiritual death for the believers, physical death for the believers. So, “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away.” Verse 6 explains further, “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered (This is a figure remember. He’s trying to explain figuratively what takes place); and they are gathered, they are cast into the fire, and they are burned.”

Now Paul says something that I think is parallel with this in 1 Corinthians chapter 3 and verse 11 through verse 15 where he writes these words.

“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day (that is the day of judgment) will declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire (Paul uses the figure also of the believers judgment of his works); and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is (Not how much, but of what kind). If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as escaping through a burning house.”

Now our Lord’s figure is very similar to that. “If a man abide not in me, he’s cast forth as a branch, he’s withered, men gather them, cast them into the fire, and they are burned.” So understanding it in that way then our Lord is talking about disciplinary action made necessary because those who are in the vine are not producing fruit.

Now we notice some other things in this 2nd verse. “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it.” Many of the commentators think that means simply to prune. It’s possible since it means cleanse literally that it has to do with a broader spectrum of everything that a man skilled in viticulture—I like that word—viticulture does to keep his fruit on the vine.

Now, of course, he must do things like pruning his vines. He must also spray his vines. He must do all of the things necessary to preserve the fruit.

Now, I didn't plant these three vines in order to have a good illustration, but now that I have planted them I have a good illustration. I planted last year three vines. One, a Seibel. One, a Catawba grape. One a Niagara grape. What they look like when they are ripe, I haven't the slightest idea. I really wanted a Thompson grape because I like them, but they don't do well in Dallas. So I planted these three grapes. I was amazed. They grew. [Laughter] And they grew well. They climbed all over my wall. And now one thing you notice about grapevines, they're not very pretty. Don't know whether you've noticed that or not. They're not pretty. Their leaves are too big and there are other things about them that indicate they're not pretty. The thing that's important in a grapevine is the fruit.

So as I read my book on viticulture it said the second year prune the grapevine severely. They had climbed all over my wall. I hated to do this. Martha was thinking about a divorce when I got out my pruning [Laughter] shears and began to make a mark about where I might cut them. But I cut them all the way back this far and they had grown all over the wall, I cut them back this far because to tell you the truth because in traveling in Europe and traveling through the areas where the wine is produced I noticed that all of their grapevines were just little stalks. But they produced the fruit whereby the wine came. So I cut mine all the way back like this in order to have fruit. In other words, it's extremely important in viticulture—how do you like that word? I just love that word. [Laughter] I ought to make this two sermons instead of one. I could pronounce it several more times. But it's important in viticulture to prune your vine.

Now the reason you do that is in order that it may produce fruit and produce more fruit. I had nothing last year and now I have five or six clusters of grapes on each of my three vines. So, “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it (pruneth it), that it may bring forth more fruit.”

Now that’s interesting. In other words, even the branches that bear fruit are purged or cleansed or pruned because the husbandman desires more fruit. That explains a lot of things that happen to us. A lot of the things that happen to us are not because the Lord is not happy with us, it’s because he is happy with us, but desires more fruit. In other words, the actions of the Lord God are designed occasionally for our education and for further fruit that his purposes might be accomplished. We tend to look at an individual who’s suffering and say, “What’s he done wrong? Where has he sinned?” But often it’s because the husbandman desires more fruit.

One of the old commentators said, “Trial only stops when it’s useless.” That’s why it scarcely ever stops. Because it’s part of God’s husbandry, tending the vine. And we are vines. And so he tends us. And if he prunes here and prunes there and sprays here and sprays there, well that’s his work of making us fruitful in order that we will be useful in what he is doing.

Now, of course, this has some obligations and our Lord speaks about it in verse 4 where he says, “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.” In other words, the branch’s position in the vine must be maintained. “Abide in me.” That’s a very strong word in the original text. It’s in a tense that expresses a decisive command. “Abide in me.” The Lord is stressing this point of abiding.

Now what is abiding? Well, now this word is a word that is used of dwelling in other parts in this gospel. I might say to you, “I dwell on Ashridge Drive.” That means that I abide there. So, to abide in Christ is to dwell in Christ. That’s the simple meaning of abiding. It is to dwell in him. To be in him comes when we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Being in him is union with him. To abide in him is communion with him. Being is the source of life. Abiding is the source of fruit. So we come to be in Christ through faith, but through abiding in him, dwelling in him, fruit is produced.

Now there is a contrast between abiding and not abiding. He will go on and say in verse 5, “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.” Of course, that indicates right at the beginning that

no one can please the Lord who is not in Christ. Remember, they that are in the flesh cannot please him. No possible way. We must be in Christ.

Now the fact that he says, “Without me ye can do nothing,” I think is some justification for us affirming that with him we can do something. In fact, I think I would like to turn it around and say with him we can do a whole lot. “Without me ye can do nothing.” With him we can do a great deal. So, abide in him. The contact is to be maintained. To rest in him, to dwell in him. Let the life of the vine flow through the branch in order that fruit may be produced upon the branch. It’s very important it seems to me then for us to abide in him. Not strive to be in him. Not strive to stay in him. The branch, you don’t hear the branches out in your yard among your flowers and trees and plants, you don’t hear them squirming and trying to stay in the vine do you? No, they simply rest in the vine and the life of the vine flows through the branches and the fruit is produced or the flowers are produced, whatever may be the particular fruit of it.

One of the older commentators, Archbishop Ussher, we referred to him not too long ago, the Bible chronologist, was an old man and in his old age he had a severe case of the gout. And in the morning he would have himself carried to a chair on the east side of the house in order that the sun might shine through the window and he could sit in his chair with the sun’s rays upon him because it was good for his gout. And then as noon approached he was taken to a window on the south side and later in the afternoon the sun from the west would also shine upon him. So he would try to spend his whole day as much as possible letting the rays of the sun shine upon his body.

Well, that’s abiding. He was trying to abide in the rays of the sun. And so likewise in the Christian life. We don’t have to strive. It’s resting in the work that the Lord Jesus is constantly doing through the spirit in us. He saves us by his grace and he sanctifies us by his grace. He saves us by his mighty power, delivering us from the penalty, the condemnation, the guilt of sin. He saves us as believers, delivering us from the power of sin just as sovereignly and just as much in grace. So many Christians believe they’re saved by grace and then they’ve got to work in their own strength to please the Lord in the Christian life. But that is to deny the principle of grace. That’s to deny the

fact that without him we can do nothing. So, we are saved by grace, by sovereign grace. We are sanctified also by his sovereign grace. That’s why the Christian life is not to believe in Jesus Christ, become saved, and then put yourself under the Lord to keep the law. And so many people try to do that in their own strength. So, he says, “Without me ye can do nothing.”

Well, Mr. MacLaren once said with reference to this that we are to get more of the sap into the branch and there will be more fruit. And so part of the life of a believer is to so abide in Christ that more of the life of Christ may flow through us.

Now in the verse that follows the 6th verse he talks about the consequences of not abiding and since we’ve spoken of that as disciplinary judgment, if that’s the meaning of it, we’ll pass on and notice the consequences of abiding in verses 7 and 8. “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.”

Now I’d like for you to notice that in verse 4 he says, “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.”

Now in verse 7 and 8 he says, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you.” In verse 4 he said, “Abide in me, and I in you.” Here he says, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you.” Can you not see that that phrase, “My words abide in you,” is substituted for the phrase in verse 4, “I in you.” “Abide in me, I in you.” Verse 7, “If ye abide in me, my words abide in you.” [break in audio] abide in us. For our Lord to abide in us is for his words to abide in us. That is why the word of God is so important. We remain in him. His words abide in us. We are concerned with what the Lord Jesus says to us. We seek by the grace of God to have our lives conformed to his word, resting in him, allowing the Holy Spirit to use the Scriptures to form us into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that is the way the Father is glorified.

When you go in a beautiful garden and you see the beautiful flowers, go in some of the botanical gardens, and immediately, at least I think about who is responsible for this beautiful garden. And you may say well it’s Lord so and so, or it’s such and such, and you glorify the husbandman with

the praise that you render and so, in the case of the life of abiding in the Lord Jesus Christ. Beautiful flowers glorify the owner of the garden, so the fruit that flows from a Christian glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ. Not the preacher. The aim of the preacher so Paul says is that “There may be as a result of his ministry thanksgiving from many hearts because of the grace that is shown them that will redound to the glory of God.” The apostle speaks about that so strongly.

I’m teaching a class in Grace Theological Seminary on Paul and the ministry and expounding the Greek text of the section in 2 Corinthians where the apostle talks about the ministry. And that’s what he says is his goal. He wishes through his ministry that there will be many responsive and that they will offer praise to the Lord for the grace that has been shown to them and the result will be the glorification of God. Not the preacher. And he talks about preachers who go around huckstering the word of God, handling the word of God deceitfully. One of the ways in which they do is to build up their own reputation instead of to glorify the Lord God who is responsible for the ministry.

One of the boys in the class in Winona Lake said to me just the other day when we were talking about this because we were talking about occasionally some preachers who use the pulpit really to glorify themselves. And he said, “Well, a preacher friend of mine said once that it is a short step between the pulpit and the stage.”

Now the apostle, I think, would have felt the same way. It is a short step and he wanted his ministry to glorify the Lord God. So, the Lord Jesus says, “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 you prove to be my disciples.”

Notice that there are degrees in fruit bearing. In verse 2 we read, “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.” And then in verse 8 he says, “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.” So there is fruit, there is more fruit, there is much fruit. It’s very much like our Lord’s parable of the soils in which he speaks of the good ground bringing forth fruit. Some thirty-fold fruit, some

sixty-fold more fruit, some one hundred-fold much fruit. So, there are degrees in fruit bearing. This is all, however, the product of the Lord God.

Now then in the last few verses of the section which we'll just cover very briefly, our Lord speaks through the apostle of the new position in union realized. After all, this is an impersonal figure. And it finds personal expression in loving obedience. Notice. Verse 9, “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.” In other words, love leads to obedience, which in turn leads to joy. That's just the opposite from the way we often think, isn't it? To love our Lord, yes. But then to have to obey the word of God, have to follow the words of Scripture, that's very sad for some. They think that's the worst kind of life, you know, to think “I've got to obey the words of God.” That's the source, my dear Christian friend, of true joy, obedience. No one was happier, no one was more joyful than the Lord Jesus Christ, and no one more concerned to do what God asked him to do. That's the secret of joy. So to love is to obey is to be joyful. Magnificent. That's why Paul talks about “the glorious gospel of the happy God,” 1 Timothy chapter 1. The God who longs for his children to be obedient that they may be happy and healthy. And you'll notice too that throughout the whole section is, we don't have to evoke this, but simply remain under the beams of the love of God and the result will be fruit and obedience to the word of God.

Now the explanation of his commandment in the last verses is that we should love one another. Verse 12, “This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.” And he goes on to describe the love as first the love of sacrifice. Verse 13, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” It's the love of intimacy. “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his master doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.” To know our Lord's love is to know sacrificial love. To know the intimacy of relationship with him is described here. And those who are obedient to the words of God will enter into that relationship of the Lord Jesus in which they enjoy friendship with him.

Wouldn't it be a sad thing to leave this life and go to heaven, you Christians, and not know down here something of the friendship of the Lord Jesus Christ? That ought to be something to stir our hearts by his marvelous grace to experience while we are here in the flesh for the glory of God. And it's the love of free initiative. You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you. To love is to love the unlovely. If our Lord had not loved the unlovely, if he had not loved those who hated him, he would not have any friends. But he has friends because he has loved those who hated him. Nine times our Lord says here, “Abiding is a response in love.” One might ask, “Why nine times?” Well, because we need it.

There's an old story in mythology about a knight who encountered a hideous dragon in the forest. And disregarding the ugliness of the monster, this bold young knight walked up to it and kissed it three times whereupon it became a beautiful maiden. And, of course, they lived happily ever after. MacLaren who told the story comments, “Christ kisses his enemies making them his friends. And if he had never died for his enemies, he would never have possessed his friends.” Or as John puts it, “We love Him, because He first loved us.”

There's a story too that I like. It's a story of a missionary who was ministering in China and trying to translate the Bible into a particular dialect in China. He had a Confucianist scholar who was his helper in translation. They became very close. As he was translating the Bible, day by day they would discuss the Chinese language, the Confucian scholar would explain to him the things that he should put in his translation in order to express the ideas about which he was concerned. And the Christian did not say anything about challenging this Confucian scholar to faith until finally he got near the end and he said he felt he should say something.

And so, he said something to the Confucian scholar like this. He said, “You've been a great help to me. I couldn't have gotten along without you and now I'd like to ask you as we've come through the New Testament, hasn't the beauty of Christianity appealed to you? Wouldn't you like to be a Christian?” And the Confucian scholar looked at him and said, “Yes. To tell you the truth it does appeal to me. It's the most wonderful system of ethics and philosophy I've ever known. I

think that if I could once see a Christian, I might become interested.” But said the missionary, “I am a Christian.” And then the Confucianist said, “You’re no Christian. No, no. Pardon me, I don’t want to offend you, but I’ve observed you and listened to you all the way along. You’re not a Christian. If I understand it right, a Christian is a follower of Jesus.

And Jesus says, ‘A new commandment give I unto you that you love one another.’ But I’ve listened to you talk about others who are not present saying unkind things about them. You’re not a Christian. And then I’ve noticed that Christianity teaches perfect trust. I translated for you a passage that says something like this. ‘My God shall supply all of your need through his riches and glory in Christ Jesus.’ But if your check from the mission board arrives just a day or two late, you become all concerned and upset over it. I have to conclude that you’re not a Christian. I think if I could see a Christian, I’d like to be one.” And the missionary who was a true Christian at that point was broken-hearted of course and he burst out into tears and sobbed before the Confucian scholar and then turned to him and asked for his forgiveness. And the Confucian scholar as he left was heard to say, “Well, I wonder if after all I haven’t seen a Christian.” Well, a Christian is like that. He’s not perfect. But he is a person who does produce some fruit. We’re a long way from being sanctified.

Well, you know, I cannot—I’m sorry. I’m going to keep you a couple of more minutes because I cannot leave this without saying one thing that needs to be said. And that is that people have the wrong idea about what love is. Let me again try to impress upon you that the love that our Lord is talking about is the love that sacrifices, but not sentimental affection that avoids the confrontation when necessary.

John Warburton was a well-known preacher of a number of generations ago. He wrote something that has impressed me. He said, “I do and am constantly maintaining both privately and publicly as far as ever the Lord has enabled me the wonders, the glories, the beauties and the preciousness of love. And yet I must be branded as being a man that is an enemy to love. But if by love, these people who brand me as an enemy of love mean that I ought to unite with Arians and Socinians who deny the deity of my Lord and Savior whom I proved again in my very soul that he is

the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the prince of peace, if by love they mean that I ought to meet and unite occasionally with people that can testify and say without a blush that election is a damnable doctrine and they hate it with their hearts, that imputed righteousness is imputed nonsense and a doctrine that ought to be abhorred and spurned by all which is the very garment and covering that hides all my shame, the very robe that adorns my naked soul and so very many times has been the joy and rejoicing of my heart and which I have found to be so many times the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. If they mean by love that I ought to unite with people that can say and testify that we may be a child of God one day and a child of the devil another, that Christ died and atoned for the sins of Esau, as well as of Jacob, for Cain as well as Abel, for Judas as well as for Peter, and that there are thousands in hell for whom Christ died. If they mean by love that I ought to unite and call these brethren who profess to believe in the doctrine of grace and call themselves Calvinists, but can declare at times that those blessed doctrines which are so precious and glorious to my soul are nonessential things. That is, if I understand their meaning right, they view them as useless things and that it is of no consequence whatsoever whether we receive or believe these doctrines or not provided we do but unite with all sorts and pray for all and be candid and mild and esteem all as partakers of grace, I confess from my heart if all this be love I am destitute of it. And instead of being grieved for my want of it, I glory in it.”

You see, the love of the Bible is a love for truth, truth. And it is important that our love be love in purity. But it is also important that it be sacrificial love. And we must combine the two. Love for truth and the love of sacrifice. To love truly is to love in holiness and purity. May God help us to combine the two.

I know what you're thinking perhaps at this point is such a life obtainable? Can I really abide in Christ like this? Think who said these words. “I am the true vine, my Father is the husbandman. You are the branches and you are clean on account of the word that I have spoken to you.” What the vine is to the branches, deity is to us. Abide. He will give the fruit. May God help us to abide.

“Rejoice Ye Pure in Heart” by S. Lewis Johnson
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Evan Hopkins used to say at the Keswick conferences at the conclusion of the conference,
“Now go out and have yourself a good believing time.” May God help you to do that.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee for these marvelous encouraging words from the
Lord Jesus Christ, the true vine, and wonder of wonders. We are the branches...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]