



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 15:1-17

“Abiding in Christ”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Tonight in our study of the upper room discourse we’re turning to John chapter 15, and our subject is “Abiding in Christ.” No one who reads the 15th chapter fails to note that it begins with one of the “I am” statements of our Lord. “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.” This is the last of the famous seven “I am” statements. Remember among them he has said, “I am the bread of life.” He has said that he is the door, that he is the good shepherd. He has said he is the resurrection and the life, and he has said that he is the way. He is the light of the world. He’s the resurrection and the life and so, now the last, “I am the true vine.” In a sense this is most fitting that this is the last one because this is the climax of the Christian life, abiding in Christ.

Thomas a’Kempis once wrote a book called *The Imitation of Christ*. And there is a sense in which imitation of our Lord Jesus Christ is very appropriate. We are called upon to follow in his steps, the steps of the example that he has left us. But if we really were to try to define the Christian life we would not really define it as an imitation of Christ so much as a participation of Christ, or in Christ’s life. “To me, to live is Christ,” the apostle said. And so the idea of abiding in Christ, the idea of participation by virtue of union

with him is much more true to the New Testament and the New Testament's emphasis than the imitation of Christ. So this is the last of the statements, and it stresses very, very much the union that we have in Christ. “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.”

The theme of this passage is fruit bearing. I don't know whether you've counted the use of the term fruit through the section or not, but it does occur about eight times in verses 1 through 17. And so it is one of the emphases, I think the emphasis, of the section, fruit bearing. It only occurs two times elsewhere, and so here is a combination of stress upon the producing of fruit in the Christian life. So the doctrine is fruit bearing, not salvation that comes before us primarily.

Now if you study this in the Greek text, and some of you here do have a Greek testament and others of you might be interested in this, usually through the New Testament the writers use what Greek scholars call connectives. Now connectives are little words such as we use often in English, therefore, for, because, on account of this, for this reason, and the Greeks love to use connectives because their thought was very logical as a general rule. That thing that distinguishes this section of John chapter 15 is the fact that there are no connectives in these verses. And so it's not easy to follow the thought of the author, our Lord Jesus. It's very helpful to have a little because or therefore or for this reason because that enables us to understand what is on the mind of the author as he carries his thought through, but in this case we do not have that. And so consequently it's more difficult to follow the argument of the author, but in the light of that and bearing that in mind, let me say that we begin in verse 1 by noting the new position in union which is introduced by these words, “I am the true vine and my Father is the husbandman.”

Now we have had two chapters in what we have called the upper room discourse, chapters 13 and 14, and then remember last week when we were studying verse 31 of chapter 14 at the conclusion of it we read the Lord said, “Arise let us go from here.” And

so the words that follow in chapter 15 and chapter 16 were probably spoken in the court of the house where he had been. In chapter 18 and verse 1 after the prayer of chapter 17, the famous high priestly prayer, we read, “When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron.” So we are to think then of our Lord as moving along the way and talking to the disciples as they make their way toward the brook Cedron.

This figure of the vine and the branches: the Father, the husbandman; the Lord, the vine; the believers, the branches, is related to union and I think that probably it is given us as an illustration of the truth that he’s just been speaking about in chapter 14 because remember in chapter 14 in verses 16 through 24 we had several expressions of union but one particular one at verse 20, “At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.” Now, what better illustration of the oneness of our Lord with the disciples or believers than the illustration of a vine and branches because truly the life of the vine is in the branch and the branch is in the vine? So, just as he is in the Father and the Father is in him, and just as he is in them and they are in him, so the illustration illustrates that fact by, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.”

The occasion of the use of the idea of vine may have been related to the golden vine on the temple gates, or it may have been related to the fact that in the Old Testament Israel is often likened to a vine. If you’ve read the Old Testament much you’ll remember that in passages like Psalm 80 and Isaiah chapter 5 and Jeremiah chapter 2, Ezekiel chapter 15, I know you just have these chapters on your fingertips, Ezekiel chapter 19 and Hosea chapter 10, all of these chapters have parts of them that make Israel a vine or liken Israel to a vine, and so it is probably true that our Lord has used the figure of Israel as the vine in the background. The interesting thing about all of these passages that I have mentioned is that in these passages in which the vine is used as an illustration of Israel, Israel appears as a faithless or disobedient nation. So the vine is suggestive of Israel, but in the context it is the context in each instance of a disobedient Israel. So the vine

became, later on, a symbol of Israel. And it's found, for example, on coins that the Maccabee, years later after the time of the New Testament used, Israel pictured as a vine.

Now when the Lord Jesus says in verse 1, “I am the true vine,” the adjective true is the word that means genuine, as over against spurious. So, “I am the genuine vine,” suggests that he is the true Israelite, the true Israelite who believes. He's the true seed of Abraham. He's the true seed of Shem. So he is the true seed, the true Israelite, the believing Israelite, as a matter of fact, the one believing Israelite naturally. So he presents himself then as the one in whom Israel will ultimately find her blessing. He is the true vine. He also says that his “Father is the husbandman,” so we are to think of the Father in heaven as the one who is cultivating the vine and the branches, the vine, the Lord Jesus, the branches, the believers.

Let's look on now, secondly, at the new position in union as it is described in verses 1 through 8 and first of all, notice the outline of it in verse 1 through verse 3. Well we read verse 1. Let's read verse 2 and 3. “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 ye are clean on account of the word which I have spoken unto you.” The fruit on the branches of the vine is dependent upon two things. Well it's dependent upon the removal of some of the branches, and it's dependent upon cleansing. Look at what he says in verse 2, “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away.” Now notice it's a branch in him. Now that is true to the Greek text.

I read a thesis not long ago, a very good thesis, written by a very good student at the seminary here in the city. It was while I was there on the faculty. And I gave the thesis a good grade because he argued his case very well. But he sought to show that to abide in Christ meant simply to be a believer, and that every believer was one who abode in Christ. But the difficulty with the thesis was this little expression, “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away.” And it is impossible for us to understand this as being a reference to those outside of Christ because it says, “Every branch in me.” Now

he sought to read it, “Every branch that beareth not fruit in me.” But the position of the words in the Greek text supports the rendering of the Authorized Version. Isn't that nice, the English text is correct. “Every branch in me,” he is talking about believers, but he says that if this branch does not bear fruit, he takes it away. So it is clear then that the health of the vine depends upon the removal of some of the branches that are in him. Now, what does that removal signify? Well we will talk about that in just a moment.

The second thing that is necessary for the fruit of the branches is stated right after that. “And every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.” Now that's the word that is related to the word in the next verse translated clean. “Every branch that beareth fruit, he cleanseth it.” Now what's the reference to this? Well the chances are the reference here to cleansing or purging is a reference to those gentler activities of a vine dresser in which he preserves the health of the vine. And so it would be washing away things that on the vine might inhibit the proper growth of the vine. So he says then that the health of the vine depends upon two things, removal of certain ones that are in the vine and then the cleansing of others.

Now the lesson of this is very clear, discipline, the discipline of removal and the discipline of the milder form, the cleansing. Amiel once said, “Trial only stops when it's useless. That's why it scarcely ever stops.” And so any good vine dresser who's caring for his grape vines is going to be constantly concerned about the health of the vine. He will be clipping off branches. He will be keeping off from them any kind of decay or corruption that will prevent the proper growth of the grapes. Now our heavenly Father is just like that. He is the husbandman. The Lord is the vine. We are the branches. And he's very, very anxious that this particular vine produce fruit to the glory of God, and when it's necessary, he will take a branch out. He will remove it. And when it's necessary he will engage in a milder form of discipline. In fact, it's interesting to note here because, in verse 3, because the branch bears fruit, he does exercise discipline. Isn't that interesting? In other words, we are not to think of the Lord's disciplining of us as

always seeking to bring us back into fellowship with him. There is discipline that is corrective when we have disobeyed the Lord, and there is discipline that is educative. Is that right, or educative? At least it is designed to lead us on to a deeper experience of divine things. So discipline is both corrective and educative. I like that word better than the one I just creatively invented. So it is both types, and we must bear that in mind.

Well I should mention verse 3, “Now ye are clean,” because someone might question is he suggesting that perhaps we are not in the vine? Perhaps we are not really clean since he says that there must be some cleansing work going on? So he adds, “Now ye are clean on account of the word which I have spoken unto you.” So he says to the eleven that you really do belong to me in spite of the fact that it is necessary to remove some of the branches at times and to cleanse some of the others at other times. If you’ll turn back to chapter 13, and verse 10, you will see the force of this. Chapter 13 verse 10 we read, “Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not except to wash his feet, but is entirely clean: and ye are clean, but not of you. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, ye are not all clean.” He refers to Judas. So, the eleven are true believers. They are clean. Judas was not, and so here, “Now ye are clean on account of the word that I have spoken to you.” It’s an encouragement to them.

But there are obligations that arise out of our union with Christ, and in the 4th verse we see those obligations expressed. He says, “Abide in me, and (see to it that) I in you.” I’ve added some words there because I want to give the force of that particular statement. It could be rendered in different ways. Let me say that. “Abide in me and let me abide in you,” it could be rendered, or it could be rendered, “Abide in me and I shall abide in you.” I rather think in the light of the context that it means, “Abide in me and see to it that I abide in you.” So this is the obligation, the branches position must be realized in practice. And this statement, “Abide in me and I in you,” is in the tense that suggests the entrance into this state of abiding. In other words, emphasis rests upon it. I want you to abide in me, and I want to abide in you. See to it that I abide in you.

What is it for our Lord to abide in us? Well the word “meno” which is translated here “abide” is the word that is rendered back in chapter 1 and verse 38 in the Authorized Version by an English word that I think expresses a great deal of the truth of abiding. Chapter 1 and verse 38 we read, “Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where abidest Thou?” Where dwellest Thou? So to abide is to dwell. To abide in Christ is to dwell in Christ. So abide is to dwell. It means to draw all of our spiritual sustenance and strength and resources from the Lord Jesus, abide, not strive, not struggle, but abide.

This is expressive of an important facet of the doctrine of sanctification. There are many people that think that you are saved by grace and sanctified by works. They think that you are saved by not doing anything because Christ has done it all, and then in order to be sanctified we must work like the devil. [Laughter] Well it's true, the devil does work. But no that is not biblical teaching. Just as we are saved by grace because of what Christ has done, we are sanctified by grace because of what the Holy Spirit continues to do in us. It was the Holy Spirit who brought us to faith in Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who continues to build us up in Christ. It is the Holy Spirit that led us to trust him and gave us new life. And it is the Holy Spirit that continues to bring us into likeness to Jesus Christ. And just as he sovereignly did it and we were unable to frustrate him by our free will, so we are unable to frustrate him in his sanctifying ministry. He will complete his task. Oh he will allow us for a time to struggle but the time is coming when he will be successful. He will be the one who completely sanctifies us. And if he permits some to struggle along, even at the end when we are caught up to meet him in the air, he will finish the work, and will say, “See I told you I would do it.” And so we will be ultimately like him.

Now, to “abide” in him, then, means “to rest” in Christ allowing the Holy Spirit to sanctify us through the experiences of life. We're not talking about a kind of passive

sitting down and doing nothing. We have the responsibility to abide, just as when we tell people you must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved, but you cannot believe of yourself. Men are still responsible though it is God who sovereignly saves, so in the Christian life it is the Holy Spirit who sovereignly sanctifies but we are responsible to abide. We are responsible to do works of righteousness. We are responsible to produce works of faith, but they are produced by the Holy Spirit. We cannot of ourselves do it. So, just as when we were saved, we get down upon our knees and confess our unwillingness, and turn to the Lord who is able to make us what we cannot make ourselves, Christians, so in sanctification, the same procedure takes place. We cannot please the Lord of ourselves. We get down upon our knees and ask God, in faith, for the power of the Holy Spirit to please him in our life. This beautiful illustration of the work of the Lord Jesus, so beautifully, illustrates the abiding of the believer, not striving. After all, what is the branches responsibility? Why the branches responsibility is simply to remain in the vine. It draws all of its strength, all of its resources from the vine, from the root, from the trunk, from the vine. The vine does everything for the branch, and so, the Lord Jesus does everything for the branches that are in him.

Now when we talk about this, let me make one distinction, to be in Christ is union, to abide in him is communion. Being in Christ is the source of our life. To abide in Christ is the source of our spiritual fruit. Now we are in Christ because the Holy Spirit plants us in him. We abide in him because of the continuing work of the Holy Spirit. We are new creations in Christ and consequently the Holy Spirit works to enable us to abide in him that fruit may be produced. That raises the question of salvation, and I want to ask you to turn with me for just a moment to the 6th verse because this one's related to the 2nd verse. He says, “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 there are those who believe that this passage has to do with people, as I say, who are either saved or lost. All saved people abide, and if a person does not abide, he is lost. I

suggest to you that that is not what our Lord is teaching here. He’s talking to believers, and he’s talking about two different conditions among them.

Well, what about this verse though, “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?” Doesn't that sound like the lake of fire? Well some have taken it that way, but I ask you to remember this, this is a figure of speech. He’s talking about vines and branches. He’s talking about a wooden grape vine, and he’s talking about branches. So when he says in the 6th verse, “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch,” these words that he uses are figurative. We are like a branch cast forth. And like a branch when the sap begins to fail to flow through the branch, you can see the branch wither. Now I know you don't need any illustration after the winter we’ve had. Go out and look at your shrubbery. You’ll see many pieces of your shrubbery that have shrunk because the sap is no longer flowing through them. In fact, you can probably see the whole tree, or the whole shrub. And when he says, “And men gather them,” he’s talking about the branches. “And casting of them into the fire,” is not the fire of hell fire, it’s the fire of a man who takes up his branches that are broken off in which there is not life and burns them because the winter is over, and they are burned.

Dr. Chafer, who was one of my revered teachers, had a rather unique interpretation of the 6th verse. Now, Dr. Chafer never took Greek, and consequently, he had one or two rather bizarre interpretations based on the Authorized Version. It was remarkable how accurate he was even though he didn't know Greek, and I don't want to discourage anybody who doesn't know Greek because you can know a whole lot more than people who know Greek if you’ll just study your Bible because many people who know Greek have never really studied their Bible very much. And the word of God is written so that if anyone really wants to know the Scriptures, he can gather a few translations and give himself to it in prayer and searching of the word of God, and he’ll know a great deal more than most students of the Greek text.

But Dr. Chafer laid a great deal of stress upon the fact that it says, “Men gather them and cast them into the fire.” And he said what this means is that if you do not abide in Jesus Christ, well then, “Men gather them and burn them,” in the sense that men see that you’re not really giving a good testimony of our Lord Jesus Christ, and they bring reproach upon Christianity because of your faithlessness in your Christian life. So “Men gather them and burn them,” means that men hold up true Christians to ridicule, Christians who claim to be outstanding Christians, but who really are very, very weak in their Christian life and very inconsistent. We often are inconsistent, and behind our backs, it’s amazing how many people really question our Christianity.

Just the other day, in connection with someone rather close to me, another friend rather close, who may not be a Christian, after some of the works of this particular professing Christian said to me, “How can that person be a Christian?” in the light of the things that they are doing? Now the Christian would have been horrified that anyone would have brought any accusation against their Christianity. Dr. Chafer would say that’s what was happening. Men were taking that particular branch and burning it, that is, exposing it to ridicule because of its unfaithfulness and inconsistency in the Christian life.

Well let me just say this, there is no word for men in the Greek text here, and as a matter of fact, this is a particularly somatic type of construction, and it is a way of avoiding the use of a certain voice, and we are not to lay stress upon men gathering them and casting them into the fire. He’s really speaking about believer’s judgment. Will you turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 3? In 1 Corinthians chapter 3 the apostle writes about the judgment of believers, and he uses this very figure of burning in fire. Listen as I read verse 14 through 17 of 1 Corinthians 3. Now this has to do with those who are working in the local church, but the principle pertains to believer’s judgment. “If any man's work abide which he hath built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ, 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 by fire.” So, here the figure of a fire is used for the judgment of a believer’s works.

The figure in John 15:6 is the figure of Christian judgment because of inconsistency in the Christian life. “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.” In other words, there is Christian judgment at the judgment seat of Christ for unfaithfulness, failure to abide in our Lord Jesus Christ. That I think is the meaning of that verse, and that gives us light on the meaning of verse 2, “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it (or cleanseth it), that it may bring forth more fruit.” So to take away is to take away in order that there may be believer’s judgment. So it is believer’s judgment.

Now we read in verses 5 through 8 of some of the outflow from abiding. 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.” Now we can do nothing without Christ in the Christian life. Isn’t that interesting? Salvation is of the Lord, we say. Sanctification is of the Lord too, just what we’ve been saying. You cannot do anything apart from Christ. That’s why when we all get to heaven; those that have any crowns at all will cast them at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ because we’ll recognize that it is something that has been done by him. But with him, a great deal may be done. “He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.”

Now then notice verse 6, well we’ve talked about verse 6. Let’s notice verses 7 and 8 where we have the consequences of the abiding. Here we read, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. In this is my Father glorified, ye bear much fruit; so shall ye prove yourselves to be my disciples.” Now I’ve rendered the verb “genomy” at that place by “prove yourselves to be,” because that is a recognized meaning, and it makes very good sense here. I think

that’s the meaning. But now let’s stop for a moment, and I want you to notice a couple of expressions that help us to understand what it is to abide in Christ. Look again at verse 4, “Abide in me and I in you,” then notice verse 7, “If ye abide in me,” but now instead of “I abiding in you,” we have “My words abide in you.” That’s what it is for Christ to abide in us. For him to abide in us you can see by the substitution is the equivalent of his words abiding in us. So to abide in Christ is to have his words abiding in us. Isn’t that interesting? That indicates, of course, that there is the most profound piety in the study of the words of the Lord Jesus. In fact, we can put it this way as others have put it; profound piety and the study of the words of the Lord Jesus go together. So to know what it is to abide in Christ is to know what it is for his words to abide in us. You cannot abide in Christ if his words do not abide in you. That’s why we study the Bible. As we study the Scriptures and as his words really abide in us, it is our Lord abiding in us. That’s why the Bible is so important. His words abiding in us is the equivalent of our Lord abiding in us. How important it is then.

Now notice specifically the consequences. First of all, there is God glorifying answered prayer. “Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you,” answered prayer. “In this is my Father glorified,” God will be glorified. And then, “Ye shall bear much fruit; prove yourselves to be my disciples.” So as we abide in Christ, as his words abide in us, through the study of the Scriptures as we come to experience the abiding of the word of God in us, the result is answered prayer, glorification of God, and the evidence to others that we are truly his disciples and that is much fruit.

I went back to Birmingham, Alabama last month. I never realized how pretty that city is in the spring until I went back again in April. It’s been many years since I was back in Birmingham in April. But in the residential area, in the southern part of the city which I went in, there are two mountains in Alabama. They’re called mountains over there. They would be giant mountains for Texas I presume, but they are called Red Mountain and Shades Mountain, and there is a very beautiful residential area in the

southern part of the city. I don't know what leads me to say this, but in my opinion, it's the most beautiful residential area in the South. It is magnificent.

Well everything was in bloom. Every house looked as if it were part of a garden. Dogwood was everywhere. Dogwood grows wild, not simply white, but pink, which is the prettiest I think, pink dogwood. The azaleas were blooming. The crab apples were blooming. The spiraea was blooming; everything that you can think of and it was just like one giant garden all over the rather expansive part of the city of Birmingham. Some of the houses of course, were so outstanding that you stopped the car and just looked. Well all of that beautify glorified the owners of those yards. The beauty of the garden was a glorification of those who were responsible for it. So our Lord says a person, when he abides in Jesus Christ, there will be much fruit. It will be God glorifying. There will be answered prayer, and others will say there is truly a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Did you notice the degree in fruit bearing? In verse 2 we read, “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit,” but then in verse 5 we read, “He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit,” and in verse 8, “In this is my Father glorified, ye bear much fruit.” That reminds me of the parable of the soils in which there are three kinds of soils that do not bring any fruit, evidently, representative of different types of people who have contact with the gospel, but do not respond to it. But in the good ground, that's given by God sovereignly, in the good ground there is fruit, but some thirty fold, some sixty fold, some a hundred fold. There is some fruit and there is some much fruit. So here our Lord's words are in harmony with it. You see this illustration of union with Christ is what Paul talks about when he talks in doctrinal terms, not figurative terms as our Lord, of what it is to be in Christ.

Well I must hasten on. Verse 9 through 17 give the new position in union and lay stress upon the realization of it. Now the figure was somewhat impersonal, but here personal expressions of abiding come forward and you will notice that the expression of abiding that our Lord uses is the idea of obedience. Listen, verse 9, “As the Father hath

loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. (or abide 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." So what we have here is love abiding in the love of God in Christ leads to obedience, and then in a moment he will mention joy. He will say in verse 11, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." So here we have then the expression of abiding realized in our life, and it is abiding in his love. And that love produces obedience and leads on to joy.

Godet, one of the older commentators on the Gospel of John, has said on abiding in love, "He has not to evoke it. He has but to remain under its beams." This is what Paul means when he says, "You are not under law, but you are under grace." We abide in his love by virtue of our salvation. You might have expected our Lord to say that sadness would result from this because he's on the way to the cross. Just a few hours and he'll be hanging on the cross, crying out, "My God. My God. Why hast Thou forsaken me?" But he says in the 11th verse, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." Paul speaks about the glorious gospel of the happy God in 1 Timothy chapter 1 and verse 11, and if there is ever a picture of the glorious good news of the happy God, it is here. Christians are beings who should abide in the joy of the Lord in the midst of all of the experiences that come to us.

J. Sidlow Baxter, in one of his books speaking about the kind of sanctimoniousness that so many Christians put on their faces in order to let others think that they are really pious, I remember a Bible teacher once saying, "If you lie about that, you will lie about other things too." Mr. Baxter went on to say, "Away with sepulchral sanctimoniousness! A religion which wears grave clothes, begs to be buried, and the sooner the funeral the better!" Really the Christian life is a life of joy, and so the Lord Jesus says to abide in him is to abide in his love and that means obedience and joy.

Now he weaves into this the new commandment, and in verse 12 and following through verse 16, he gives further words about that. His love is the great example. So he says, “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 whatever I command you.” So, what’s the meaning of our Lord’s love? Well there are three things that stand out. It’s sacrificial love, verse 13, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” We could preach the Doctrine of the Atonement from this. But since we occasionally do the in Believers Chapel, we’ll pass it by tonight so that someone will no longer be able to say, “Every time Dr. Johnson comes across the Doctrine of the Atonement he talks about it,” [Laughter] every time except once, tonight, historic occasion.

The second thing that we notice about the love of Christ is the intimacy of it, verses 14 and 15, “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.” They’re not able to understand him yet, but he has made them known to him. And then he says in the 16th verse, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you,” the third characteristic of the love of Jesus Christ is the free initiative of it. It is not love produced by the decision of our free will, but it is a love that has as its initiative Jesus Christ’s heart itself. “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you.” Now strictly speaking that’s not a text that has to do with the doctrine of eternal election. It has to do primarily with their work as an apostle. They did not choose him. He chose them to be among the eleven apostles, but of course, the same principle of free unmerited election is true in their choice for the apostolate as is true in their choice for salvation. Why is love mentioned so often in these verses? Well evidently because we need it. We need to have it stressed among us, that we are in the family of God and obedience expresses itself in love for others.

Dr. Chafer used to love this section, and he would say that, “You will notice from abiding in Christ we have three great blessings.” He loved to repeat this, “Prayer effectual, joy celestial, fruit perpetual.” And that of course is true. Now let me tell you a story as I conclude. Dr. Ironside in his commentary on the Gospel of John, which I read many years ago, told a story about a man who was translating the Bible in Chinese. Well he wanted a very good scholar to help him, and so he chose an imminent confusionist to be his guide, and he engaged him to do the translation work. They sat together day after day, and they went through the verses of the New Testament translating them laboriously into the Chinese dialect that this confusionist knew. Well he was, being a Christian man, he didn't want to make it too obvious that he was trying to convert the confusionist, and he thought that he would wait until he had a little more opportunity to speak to him, and then he didn't want to lose his helper. And so as he went along he worked on the translation until finally they were able to produce a splendid translation, but he never said anything to him.

And he realized that now was the time to say something to him. And so he said to the scholar, “You’ve been a great help to me. I could not have gotten along without you, and now I’d like to ask you, as we’ve come along through the New Testament, has not the beauty of Christianity appealed to you? Would you not like to be a Christian?” And the scholar looked at him and said, “Yes. 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.” [Laughter]

Well the missionary said, “But I am a Christian.” And the confusionist said, “I don't want to offend you sir, but I’ve observed you and listened to you all the way along. You’re not a Christian. If I understand right a Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ. And Jesus as a new commandment, ‘Give I unto you that you might love one another.’ And I’ve listened to you talk about others who are not present saying very unkind things about them. You’re not a Christian. And then I’ve noticed that Christianity teaches perfect trust,

and I translated for you a passage that says, ‘My God shall supply all of your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.’ But if your check arrives a little late from the mission board, you’re all upset and worried. So I have to conclude, sir, that you’re not really a Christian. I think that if I could see a Christian, I’d like to be one.”

Well the missionary was so upset over this that he literally sobbed before the Lord and before this man, and asked for his forgiveness for his coldness and neglect. Dr. Ironside said the scholar turned and went off saying to himself, “Well I wonder if after all I haven't seen a true Christian.” If we abide in Christ, his words will abide in us. We will obey the words of our Lord Jesus in our life...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]