

Exposition of the Gospel of John CHAPTER 52 CHRIST THE TRUE VINE (CONCLUDED)

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Transcript

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CHAPTER 52

CHRIST THE TRUE VINE (CONCLUDED)

John 15:7-16

Below is an Analysis of the second section of John 15:— 1. Fellowship and prayer, verse 7. 2. The Father glorified by much fruit, verse 8. 3. Fruit found in love, verses 9-10. 4. Fruit found in joy, verse 11. 5. Fruit found in peace, verse 12. 6. The proofs of Christ's love, verses 13-15. 7. The purpose of Christ's choice, verse 16. That the theme of this second section of John 15 is the same as was before us in its opening portion is clear from verses 8 and 16: in both of these verses the word "fruit" is found, and as we shall see, all that lies between is intimately connected with them. Before taking up the study of our present passage let us summarize what was before us in our last lesson. The vine and its branches, unlike the "body" and its head, does not set forth the vital and indissoluble union between Christ and His people—though that is manifestly presupposed; instead, it treats of that relationship which exists between Him and them while they are upon earth, a relationship which may be interrupted. The prominent thing is fruit-bearing and the conditions of fertility. Three conditions have already been before us. First, to be a fruit-bearing branch of the vine, one must be in Christ. Second, to be a fruit-bearing branch of the vine, the Father must purge him by the cleansing action of the Word. Third, to be a fruit-bearing branch of the vine, he must abide in Christ. The first two are solely of God's grace: they are Divine actions. But the third is a matter of Christian responsibility, and this what is enforced throughout John 15. As pointed out in the introduction to our last chapter, the broad distinction between John 14 and 15 is that in the former we have the grace of God unfolded; in the latter Christian responsibility is pressed. Further evidence of this will be found in the frequent repetition of two pronouns. In John 14 the emphasis is upon the "me"; in John 15 upon the "ye." In John 14 it is: "believe also in me" (verse 1); "no man cometh unto the Father but by me" (verse 6); "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also" (verse 7); "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?" (verse 9); and so on. Whereas in John 15 it is "ye are clean" (verse 3); "Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit" (verse 8); "continue ye in my love" (verse 9); "Ye are my friends, if" etc. (verse 14). The word "ye" occurs no less than twenty-two times in John 15! That which is of such deep importance for the Christian is the third condition noted above; hence our Lord's

repeated emphasis upon it. Mark how in John 15:4 the word "abide" occurs no less than three times. Note how the same truth is reiterated in John 15:5. Observe how John 15:6 is devoted to a solemn statement of the consequences of failure to "abide" in Christ. Observe also how this same word "abide" is found again in John 15:7, 9, 10, 11, and 16. Just as necessary and imperative as Christ's command "Come unto me" is to the sinner, so absolutely essential is His "Abide in me" to the saint. As then this subject of abiding in Christ is of such moment, we will now supplement our previous remarks upon it. First, to abide in Christ is to continue in the joyful recognition of the value of His perfect sacrifice and the efficacy of His precious blood. There can be no fellowship with the Lord Jesus, in the full sense of the word, while we harbor doubts of our personal salvation and acceptance with God. Should some soul troubled on this very point be reading these lines, we would earnestly press upon him or her the fact that the only way to be rid of torturing uncertainty is to turn the eye away from self, unto the Savior. Here are His own blessed words: "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth (abideth) in me, and I in him" (John 6:56), That means that I feed upon, am satisfied with, that Sacrifice of sweet savor which has fully satisfied God. Second, to abide in Christ is to maintain a spirit and an attitude of entire dependency on Him. It is the consciousness of my helplessness; it is the realization that "severed from him, I can do nothing." The figure which the Lord here employed strongly emphasizes this. What are the branches of a vine but helpless, creeping, clinging, things? They cannot stand alone; they need to be supported, held up. Now there can be no abiding in Christ while we entertain a spirit of self-sufficiency. To have no confidence in the flesh, to renounce our own might, to lean not unto our own understanding, precedes our turning unto Christ: there must be a recognition of my own emptiness before I shall turn to and draw from His fulness. "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me." In itself a branch has absolutely no resources: in union with the vine it is pervaded with life. Third, to abide in Christ is to draw from His fulness. It is not enough that I turn from myself in disgust, I must turn to Christ with delight. I must seek His presence; I must be occupied with His excellency; I must commune with Him. It is no longer a question of my sufficiency, my strength, or my anything. It is solely a matter of His sufficiency. The branch is simply a conduit through which flows the fruit-producing juices, which result in the lovely dusters of grapes. Remember that the branch does not produce, but simply bears them! It is the vine which produces, but produces through the branch, by the branch being in the vine. It is not that the believer finds in Christ a place of rest and support, whither he may go in order to produce his own fruit. This is the sad mistake made by those who are ever speaking of their own self-complacency, self-glorifying experiences, which shows that their souls are occupied with themselves rather than with Christ. It is of the greatest practical importance to know that Christ is "all and in all"—not only as our standing before God and our ultimate Perfection, but also as to our present life to the glory of the Father. "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). The connection between this verse and the ones preceding it is as follows. In John 15:4 and 5 the Lord had exhorted His disciples to abide in Him. In John 15:6 He had warned them what would be the consequences if they did not. Now He turns, or rather returns, to the consolatory and blessed effects which would follow their compliance with his admonition. Three results are here stated. First, the answer to whatever prayers they presented to God; the glorification of the Father; the clear witness to themselves and to others that they were His disciples. Thus would Christ most graciously encourage us. "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." What erroneous conclusions have been drawn from these words! How often they have been appealed to in order to justify the most unworthy views of prayer! The popular interpretation of them is that if the Christian will only work himself up to an importunate pleading of this promise before the throne of grace, he may then ask God for what he pleases, and the Almighty will not—some go so far as to say He cannot—deny him. We are told

that Christ has here given us a blank check, signed it, and left us to fill it in for what we will. But 1 John 5:14 plainly repudiates such a carnal conception—"And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us." Therefore, what we ask shall not be done unto us unless our will is subordinated to and is in accord with the will of God. What then is the meaning of our Lord's promise? Certainly it does not give praying souls carte blanche. For God to gratify us in everything we requested, would not only be dishonoring to Himself, but, oftentimes, highly injurious to ourselves. Moreover, the experience of many of those who frequent the throne of grace dissipates such a delusion. All of us have asked for many things which have not been "done unto" us. Some have asked in great earnestness, with full expectation, and they have been very importunate; and yet their petitions have been denied them. Does this falsify our Lord's promise? A thousand times no! Every word He uttered was God's infallible truth. What then? Shall we fall back upon the hope that God's time to answer has not yet come; but that shortly He will give us the desire of our hearts? Such a hope may be realized, or it may not. It all depends upon whether the conditions governing the promise in John 15:7 are being met. If they are not, it will be said of us "Ye ask, and have not, because ye ask amiss" (James 4:3). Two conditions here qualify the promise: "If ye abide in me." Abiding in Christ signifies the maintaining of heart communion with Christ. "And my words abide in you": not only must the heart be occupied with Christ, but the life must be regulated by the Scriptures. Note it is not here "my word," but "my words." It is not the Word as a whole, but the Word, as it were, broken up. It is the precepts and promises of Scripture personally appropriated, fed upon by faith, hidden in the heart. It is the practical heeding of that injunction, "Man shall not live (his daily life) by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." And mark that it is Christ's words abiding in us. It is no fitful, spasmodic, occasional exercise and experience, but constant and habitual communion with God through the Word, until its contents become the substance of our innermost beings. "Ye shall ask what ye will." But for what would such a one ask? If he continues in fellowship with Christ, if His "words" remain in him, then his thoughts will be regulated and his desires formed by that Word. Such an one will be raised above the lusts of the flesh. Such an one will "bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5), proving "what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2). Consequently, such, an one will ask only for that which is according to his will (1 John 5:14); and thereby will he verify the Lord's promise "it shall be done unto you." Such a view of prayer is glorifying to God and satisfying to the soul. For one who communes with the Savior, and in whom His Word dwells "richly," supplication is simply the pulsation of a heart that has been won to God. While the believer is in fellowship with the Lord and is governed from within by His Word, he will not ask for things "amiss." Instead of praying in the energy of the flesh (which, alas, all of us so often do), he will pray "in the Spirit" (Jude 20). "Why is there so little power of prayer like this in our own times? Simply because there is so little close communion with Christ, and so little strict conformity to His words. Men do not 'abide in Christ,' and therefore pray in vain. Christ's words do not abide in them, as their standard of practice, and therefore their prayers are not answered. Let this lesson sink down into our hearts. He that would have answers to his prayers, must carefully remember Christ's directions. We must keep up intimate friendship with the great advocate in Heaven, if our petitions are to be granted" (Bishop Ryle). "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit" (John 15:8). This is an appeal to our hearts. The "glory" of the Father was that which Christ ever kept before Him, and here He presses it upon us. He would have us concerned as to whether our lives honor and magnify the Father, or whether they are a reproach to Him. An unfruitful branch is a dishonor to God. What an inducement is this to "abide in Christ"! It is time that we now inquire as to the nature or character of the "fruit" of which Christ here speaks. What is the "fruit," the much fruit, by which the Father is glorified? Fruit is not something which is attached to the branch and fastened on from without, but is the organic product and evidence of the inner life. Too often

attention is directed to the outward services and actions, or to the results of these services, as the "fruit" here intended. We do not deny that this fruit is frequently manifested externally, and that it also finds expression in outward works is clear from John 15:6: "Severed from me ye can do nothing." But there is a twofold evil in confining our attention to these. First, it often becomes a source of deception in those who may do many things in the will and energy of the flesh, but these are dead works, often found on corrupt trees. Second, it becomes a source of discouragement to children of God who, by reason of sickness, old age, or unfavourable circumstances, cannot engage in such activities, and hence are made to believe that they are barren and useless. "We may say, in brief, that the fruit borne by the branches is precisely that which is produced by the Vine; and what that is, may be best understood by looking at what He was as God's witness in the world. The fruit is Christlike affections, dispositions, graces, as well as the works in which they are displayed. We cannot undervalue the work of faith and labor of love; but we would remember that 'the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance'; and those who are prevented from engaging in the activities of Christian service, may often be in circumstances most favorable to the production of the fruit of the Spirit" ("Waymarks in the Wilderness"). It is deeply important for us to recognize that the "fruit" is the outflow of our union with Christ; only thus will it be traced to its true origin and source. Then will it be seen that our fruit is produced not merely by Christ's power acting upon us, but, as it truly is, as the fruit of the vine. Thus, in every branch, is HIS word literally verified: "From me is thy fruit found" (Hos. 14:8), and therefore should every branch say, "Not I, but the grace of God." This is all one as to say that our fruit is Christ's fruit; for God's operations of grace are only wrought in and by Christ Jesus. Thus saints are "filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God" (Phil. 1:11). If there be any love, it is "the love of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:14); if there be any joy, it is Christ's joy (John 15:11); if there be any peace, it is His peace, given unto us (John 14:27); if there be any meekness and gentleness it is "the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:1). How thoroughly this was realized by the apostle, to whom it was given to be the most signal example of the vine sending forth fruit by His branches, may be gathered from such expressions: "I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me" (Rom. 15:18). "Christ speaking in me" (2 Cor. 13:3); "He that wrought effectually in Peter... was mighty in me" (Gal. 2:8); "Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20); "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). Thus, and thus only as this is recognized, all dependency upon and all glorying in self is excluded, and Christ becomes all in all. "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit" (John 15:8). There are four relationships which need to be distinguished. Life in Christ is salvation. Life with Christ is fellowship. Life by Christ is fruit-bearing. Life for Christ is service. The "fruit" is Christ manifested through us. But note the gradation: in John 15:2 it is first "fruit," then "more fruit," here "much fruit." This reminds us of the "some thirty-fold, some sixty, and some an hundred" (Mark 4:20). "So shall ye be my disciples" (John 15:8). With this should be compared John 8:31: "If ye continue in my Word, then are ye my disciples indeed." Continuance in the Word is not a condition of discipleship, but an evidence of it. So here, to bear much fruit will make it manifest that we are His disciples. Just as good fruit on a tree does not make the tree a good one, but marks it out as such, so we prove ourselves to be Christ's disciples by displaying Christlike qualities. "As the Father hath loved me, so I have loved you" (John 15:9). There is no change of theme, only another aspect of it. In the two previous verses the Lord had described three of the consequences of abiding in Him in order to fruitfulness; here, and in the three verses that follow, He names three of the varieties of the fruit home; and it is very striking to note that they are identical with the first three and are given in the same order as those enumerated in Galatians 5:22, where the "fruit of the Spirit" is defined. Here in John 15:9, it is love; in John 15:11, it is joy; while in John 15:12 it is peace—the happy issue of brethren loving one another. "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you." "As the Father loved Him

from everlasting, so did He love them; as His Father loved Him with a love of complacency and delight, so did He love them; as the Father loved Him with a special and peculiar affection, with an unchanging, invariable, constant love, which would last forever, in like manner does Christ love His people; and with this He enforces the exhortation which follows" (Dr. John Gill). "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you; continue ye in my love." (John 15:9). Christ's love to us is unaffected by our changeableness, but our enjoyment of His love depends upon our continuance in it. By this continuance in His love, or abiding in it, as it should be (the Greek word is the same), is meant our actual assurance of it, our reposing in it. No matter how mysterious His dispensations be, no matter how severe the trials through which He causes us to pass, we must never doubt His immeasurable love for us and to us. The measure of His love for us was told out at the Cross, and as He is the same to-day as yesterday, therefore He loves us just as dearly now, every moment, as when He laid down His life for us. To "abide" in His love, then, is to be occupied with it, to count upon it, to be persuaded that nothing shall ever be able to separate us from it. Dwelling upon our poor, fluctuating love for Him, will make us miserable; but having the heart fixed upon His wondrous love, that love which "passeth knowledge," will fill us with praise and thanksgiving. Very blessed but very searching is this. To "abide" in Christ is to abide in His love. Our growth proceeds from love to love. "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love." (John 15:10). Even still more searching is this. There can be no fruit for the Father, no abiding in Christ's love, unless there be real subjection of will. It is only in the path of obedience that He will have fellowship with us. Alas, how many err on this point. We are living in an age wherein lawlessness abounds. Insubordination is rife on every hand. In many a place even professing Christians will no longer tolerate the word "commandments." Those who would urge the duty of obedience to the Lord, are regarded as enemies of the faith, seeking to bring Christians into bondage. Satan is very subtle, but we are not ignorant of his devices. He seeks to persuade sinners that they must keep God's commandments in order to be saved. He tries to make saints believe that they must not keep God's commandment, otherwise they will be putting themselves "under law," beneath a yoke grievous to be borne. But let these specious lies of the Devil be tested by Scripture, and their falsity will soon appear. 1 Corinthians 9:21 tells us that we are "under the law to Christ." Romans 13:10 assures us that "love is the fulfilling of the law": the fulfilling mark, not the abrogating of it, nor a substitution for it. The apostle Paul declared that he "delighted in the law of God after the inward man," and that he "served the law of God" (Rom. 7:22-25). And here in John 15 the Lord Himself said to His disciples, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love. O fellow Christians, let no sophistry of man (no matter how able a Bible teacher you may deem him), and no deceptive art of Satan, rob you of this word of the Savior's; a word which we all need, never more than now, when all authority, Divine and human, is more and more flouted. Note that this was not the only time that Christ made mention of His commandments and pressed upon His people their obligations to keep them. See John 13:34; John 14:15; John 15:10; Matthew 28:20, etc. "Even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (John 15:10). Here is the final word against those who decry godly obedience as "legalism." The incarnate Son walked according to His Father's commandments. He "pleased not himself" (Rom. 15:3). His meat was to do the will of the One who had sent Him. And He has left us an example that we should follow His steps. "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk even as he walked" (1 John 2:6). The one who disregards God's "commandments" is not walking as Christ walked; instead, he is walking as the world walks. Let no one heed the idle quibble that the "commandments" of Christ are opposed to or even different from the commandments of the Father. Christ and the Father are one—one in nature, one in character, one in authority. "The commandments of Christ include the whole of the preceptive part of the inspired volume, with the exception of those ritual and political statutes which refer to the introductory dispensations which have passed away" (Dr. John Brown). And let it be said again, that

no Christian can abide in Christ's love unless he is keeping Christ's commandments! "Even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." The "even as" refers to the character of Christ's obedience to the Father. "His obedience was the obedience of love, and so must ours be. His obedience was but the expression of His love. External obedience to Christ's commandments, if not the expression of love, is, in His estimation, of less than no value, for He sees it to be what it is—vile hypocrisy or mere selfishness. No man will continue in His love by such obedience. His obedience was, in consequence of its being the result of love, cheerful obedience. He delighted to do the will of His Father. It was His meat to do the Father's will, and so must be our obedience to Him. We must run in the way of His commandments with enlarged hearts. We are to keep them, not so much because we must keep them as because we choose to keep them, or, if a necessity is felt to be laid upon us, it should be the sweet necessity resulting from perfect approbation of the law, and supreme love to the Law-giver. Christ's obedience to the Father was universal—it extended to every requisition of the law. There was no omission, no violation; and in our obedience to the Savior, there must be no reserves—we must count His commandments to be in all things, what they are—right; and we must abhor every wicked way. Christ's obedience to the Father was persevering. He was faithful unto death; and so must we be. This is His promise: To him that overeometh will I give to sit with me on my throne, even as I have overcome, and am set down with my Father on his throne' (Rev. 3:21). It is thus, then—only thus—by keeping the commandments of our Lord as He kept the commandments of His Father, that we shall continue in His love, as He continued in His Father's love" (Dr. John Brown). "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you" (John 15:11). The "these things" covers the whole of the ten preceding verses. The fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) is "love, joy, peace." Having mentioned love in the previous verse, Christ now goes on to speak of joy. Just as in John 14:27 there is a double "peace," so here there is a twofold joy. First, there is the joy of Christ Himself, that joy which had been His during His sojourn on earth. He mentions this in His prayer in John 17: "These things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves" (verse 13). How this reveals to us the inner life of the Savior! Abiding in His Father's love, He had a joy which certainly not His enemies and perhaps His friends would have credited the "Man of sorrows." His joy was in pleasing the Father, in doing His will and glorifying His name. Then, too, He rejoiced in the prospect before Him. "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross" (Heb. 12:2). This double joy of the incarnate Son, is mentioned in Psalm 16, where the Spirit of prophecy recorded the Savior's words long beforehand: "I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth" (verses 8, 9). This was the joy of communion and obedience. "Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore" (verse 11): this was the joy "set before him." "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you." The "these things" refers, more specifically, to the maintaining of communion with Christ, and the conditions upon which they may be realized. When fellowship with the Lord Jesus is broken, joy disappears. This was illustrated in the experience of the Psalmist. David had sinned; sinned grievously against the Lord, and in consequence, he no longer enjoyed a comforting sense of His presence. David was wretched in soul, and after making earnest confession of his sin, he cried, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation" (Ps. 51:12): salvation he had not lost, but the joy of it he had. It was the same with Peter: he "went out and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:62). A child of God can only be miserable when he is away from Christ. It is important for us to recognize and realize that we need Christ just as much for our everyday life, as we do for eternity; just as really for the fruit which the Father expects from us, as for our title to Heaven. "And that your joy might be full" (John 15:11). The grounds of the Christian's joy are not in himself, but in Christ: "Rejoice in the Lord" (Phil. 4:4). But the measure in which we enter into this is determined by our daily communion with the

Lord. "Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, and these things write we unto you that your joy may be full" (1 John 1:3, 4). Our joy ought to be steady and constant, not fitful and occasional: "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice" (Phil. 4:4). Joy is not "happiness" as the world uses the term; it is much deeper. The worldling finds his happiness in circumstances and surroundings; but the Christian is quite independent of these. Paul and Silas, in the Philippian dungeon, with backs bleeding, "sang praises unto God" (Acts 16:25). What a blessed triumphing over circumstances was that! Prison-walls could not cut them off from Christ! But how this puts us to shame! The reason why we are so often dull and despondent, the cause of our restlessness and discontent, is because we walk so little in the light of the Lord's countenance. May we earnestly seek grace to heed the things which He has "spoken unto us" that our joy may be "full." "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12). "Love is benignant affection, and the appropriate display of it. In this most general meaning of the term, 'love is the fulfilling of the law.' The exercise of this principle in supremacy, in a well-informed intelligent being, secures the performance of all duty. It cannot coexist with selfishness and malignity, the great causes of sin. In the degree it prevails, they are destroyed. 'Love does'—love can do—'no evil' (Rom. 13:10). Love does—love must do—all practical good. If evil is done—if good is not done—it is just because love is not there in sufficient force" (Dr. John Brown). It is important that we distinguish between love and benevolence. The benevolence of Christ knows no limits to any of His people. Just as the Father maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth the rain on the just and on the unjust, so Christ ever ministers to and supplies the every need of each of His people, whether they are abiding in Him or no. But just as He abides only in the one who is abiding in Him, just as he finds complacency only in him who keeps His commandments (John 14:21), so the Christian is to regulate his actions and manifest his love. "As a Christian I am to cherish and exercise love toward every one who gives evidence that he is a brother in Christ. It is only in this character that he has any claim upon my brotherly affection, and the degree not of my good will, for that should in every ease be boundless; yet my esteem of, and complacency in a Christian brother, should be proportioned to the manifestation which he makes of the various excellencies of the Christian character. The better he is, and shows himself to be, I should love him the better. My love should be regulated on the same principle as Christ's, whose benevolence knows no limit in reference to any of His people, but whose esteem and complacency are always proportioned to holy principles and conduct on the part of His people" (Dr. John Brown). "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). It is to be observed that these words follow right on after Christ saying, "love one another as I have loved you." In view of this, we believe that John 15:13 to 16 set forth a number of proofs of Christ's love, each of which manifested some distinctive feature of it, and that these are here advanced in order to teach us how we should love one another. The Lord places first the highest evidence of His love: He laid down His life for His people. It is to be observed that in the Greek the word "man" is not found in this verse. Literally rendered it reads, "greater than this love no one has, that one his life lay down for friends his." Christ emphasizes once more the great fact that His death, imminent at the time He spoke, was purely voluntary. He "laid down" His life; none took His life from Him. This life was laid down for His friends, and in thus dying on their behalf, in their stead, He furnished the supreme demonstration of His love to and for them. Romans 5:6-10 emphasizes the same truth, only from a different standpoint. There, the objects of Christ's atoning sacrifice are described as Divine justice saw them, they are viewed as they were in themselves, by nature and practice—ungodly, sinners, enemies. But here in John 15 the Savior speaks of them in the terms of Divine love, and as they were by election and regeneration—His "friends." "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Now in this verse the Lord not only speaks of His own unselfish, sacrificial, illimitable love, but He does so for the express purpose of supplying both a motive

and an example for us. He has given us a commandment that we "love one another," and that we love our brethren as He loved them. There is to be no limitation in our love: if occasion requires it we are to be ready to lay down our life one for another. The same truth is found in John's first Epistle: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16). "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." How these scriptures rebuke us! What is it worth if we hold the theory that we are ready, in obedience to God's Word, to lay down our lives for our brethren, when we fail so sadly in ministering to the common and daily needs and sufferings of God's children? "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18)! "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (John 15:14). Here is the second proof of Christ's love for His own. He had treated them with unreserved intimacy. He had brought them into close fellowship with Himself. He had dealt with them not as strangers, nor had He acted as men do toward casual acquaintances. Instead, He had, in infinite condescension, given them the unspeakable privilege of being His friends. And such they would continue, so long as they did whatsoever He had commanded them, for the Lord will not be on intimate terms with any who are out of the path of obedience. This was something far higher than the attitude which the Rabbis maintained toward their disciples, and higher still than the feeling which a master entertained for his servants. The Lord of glory deigned to treat his disciples and servants as friends! "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." It is to be carefully noted that Christ did not here say, "I am your friend?" Just now there is a great deal in the more popular hymnbooks about Jesus as our friend. How few seem to appreciate the desire of our Lord to make us His friends! The difference is very real. When a man who has attained the highest position in the nation notices a man of the laboring class and calls him his friend, it is a condescension, for he hereby exalts that unknown man to his own level. But for the insignificant man to say of the famous one, 'He's my friend,' by no means exalts that one; indeed, it might be considered a presumption, a piece of impudence. This familiarity, this calling Jesus our Friend, is dimming in people's hearts the consciousness that He is something more than that: He is our Savior! He is our Lord! He is really, in His own essential nature, our God" (Mr. C. H. Bright). The same rebuke is called for by those who term the incarnate Son of God their elder Brother! It is true that He, in marvellous grace, is "not ashamed to call us brethren," but it ill requites that grace for us to term Him our "Elder Brother." Let us ever remember His own word "Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am" (John 13:13). "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" (John 15:15). Here is the third proof of the love of Christ for His own. He not only treated the disciples as friends, but He owned them as such, and took them fully into His confidence. Our thoughts at once revert to Abraham, who is expressly called "the friend of God" (James 2:23). The reference no doubt is to what we read of in Genesis 18:17. God was about to destroy Sodom. Lot knew nothing of this, for he was at too great a moral distance from God. But the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" In Abraham God found delight, and therefore did He make him the confidant of His counsels. It is striking that Abraham is the only Old Testament saint directly termed the friend of God (see Isaiah 41:8). But Abraham is "the father of all them that believe," and here the Lord calls his believing children His "friends." The term speaks both of confidence and intimacy—not our confidence in and intimacy with Him, but He in and with us. He would no longer call them "servants," though they were such; but He makes them His companions. He reveals to them the Father's thoughts, bringing them into that holy nearness and freedom which He had with the Father. What a place to put them into! If they were not fit to receive these intimacies, He would be betraying the confidence of the Father! It is the new nature which gives us the needed fitness. "I have

called you friends." This is not to be restricted to the Eleven, but applies equally to all His blood-bought people. The King of kings and Lord of lords not only pities and saves all them that believe in Him, but actually calls them His friends! In view of such language, we need not wonder that the apostle said, "The love of Christ passeth knowledge." What encouragement this should give us to pour out our hearts to Him in prayer! Why should we hesitate to unbosom ourselves to One who calls us His "friends"! What comfort this should give us in trouble. Will He not minister of His own mercy and grace to His "friends"! And what assurance is here for the one who doubts the final issue. Weak and unworthy, we all are in ourselves, but Christ will never forsake His "friends"! "For all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you" (15:15). The "all things" here were those which pertained to His Mediatorship. Mark 4 supplies us with a striking illustration of how the Lord made His disciples His special confidants: "And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables . . . Without a parable spake he not unto them (the multitudes): and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples" (verses 11, 34). And again in the Gospel records we find the Savior distinguishing His disciples by similar marks of His love. To them only did He confide His approaching betrayal into the hands of wicked men. To them only did He declare that His place in the Father's House should be theirs. To them only did He announce the coming of the Comforter. In like manner Christ has revealed many things to us in His Word which the wise of this world know nothing about. "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say Peace and safety: then sudden destruction cometh upon them as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief" (1 Thess. 5:2-4). How highly we should value such confidences. How much would He reveal to us, now hidden, if only we gave more diligent heed to His commandments! Ever remember that "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him"! Ere passing to the next verse let it be pointed out again that the Lord was not only here referring to the evidences of His own love for us, but was also making known how our love should be manifested one toward another. "He that hath friends will show himself friendly" (Prov. 18:24). Then let us abstain from encroaching on a brother's spiritual liberty; let us not usurp dominion over a brother's faith; let us treat our brother not as a servant, still less as a stranger, but as a friend! "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" (John 15:16). "This love was at the foundation of all for them: and to it they owed, and we owe, that choice was on His side, not ours. 'Ye have not chosen me,' He says, 'but I have chosen you.' Thus in conscious weakness the power of God is with us: and as He sought us when lost, when there was nothing but our misery to awaken His compassion—so we may count assuredly upon Him, whatever our helplessness, to perfect the work He has begun. What comfort lies for us in the royal work, 'I have chosen you'! "But grace enables us to fulfill the conditions necessarily imposed by the holiness of the Divine nature, and cannot set these aside: therefore the closing words. They are in the same line with others that we have lately heard: which they emphasize only in a somewhat different way. Fruit that abides is that which alone satisfies God. How much that looks well has not that quality in it which ensures permanence. How much that seems truly of God reveals its character by its decay! This 'abiding' connects itself, in the Gospel of John, with the Divine side of things which is seen all through" (Numerical Bible). The following questions are to help the student prepare for our next lesson:— 1. What is the link between verses 17 to 27 with the context? 2. What is our Lord's central design in this passage? 3. Wherein is the depravity of man exhibited? 4. Why does Christ repeat verse 12 in verse 17? 5. What is the meaning of verse 19? 6. What is the force of "had not had sin," verses 22, 24? 7. Of what does the testimony of verses 26, 27 consist?

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