

# Our Holiness: Abiding in Christ's Love

by Sinclair Ferguson

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of abiding in the love of Jesus Christ for real holiness, highlighting the original pattern of this love as the love that the Father has for the Son.*

**Duration:** 1:07:52

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, John 15:1-12

**Topics:** "Christian Community", "Divine Love"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the uniqueness of each individual and the importance of exploring and understanding one another within the church community. He highlights the value of simply being together and experiencing fellowship without the need for specific activities. The speaker also discusses the abundant grace that Jesus pours out towards his disciples, drawing them into a deep love and union with him. He challenges the listeners to grasp the love and union in which they are called to abide, and to not neglect the essential aspect of experiencing the love and affection of God as a Christian.

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## Transcript

Well, we're turning back this morning to the second passage chosen for us in the 15th chapter of the Gospel according to John, and particularly to the section verses 1 through 11, but I'll also refer to the rest of the chapter as we work our way through it, in which our Lord Jesus, as it happens at the center point of the teaching of the farewell discourse, that begins with the enactment of his saving grace in the foot washing, and ends, as it were, with the transcript of his high priestly intercession in John chapter 17, and accidentally, I suppose, from our point of view in the providence of God chapter 15, has been allotted the central part of this, and it gives to us what at first sight looks like a metaphor that the Lord Jesus is using, I am the true vine and my father is the vine dresser, but in the course of the passage becomes obviously more than a metaphor, becomes an extended metaphor that grows into this remarkable allegory that the Lord Jesus uses of the relationship between himself and his people as a vine and branches, and the father's ministry as the vine dresser or the gardener, and the spirit's ministry ultimately as the paraclete, the counselor or the helper in chapter 15 verse 26. But let me begin with a question. You know the old story about the man who asked a rabbi, why is it that rabbis always answer questions with questions, and the rabbi said, why not? And I did ask you a question last night for your homework, if you were in our position here and you were asked to give a series of addresses on the topic of holiness, would you have divided them in the following way, planned in the purpose of the father, purchased at the high cost of the blood of Jesus Christ, and then finishing, of course, with walking in the Spirit, but would you have slid in

between these two? Would you have devoted an entire exposition to the theme of abiding in Christ's love? It is actually, I think, a very serious question, and at risk of embarrassing Walt Chantry yet again, although I delight to do that in honor of him, I suspect that we would not all have divided the theme this way, that many of us would have divided the theme, yes, holiness designed by the father, perhaps we would have included purchased by the son, but then I many of us would have been instinctively likely to have given the great central section in our exposition to the conflict and the battle of the Christian life.

Is that not one of the great characteristics of biblical teaching and especially caught up in our Reformed theology? We hold this view of sanctification, that sanctification is a fight to the death, and I suspect many of us might have therefore been inclined to slide past this notion of abiding in the love of Jesus Christ in order to move on to the manly aspects of sanctification and the struggle to the death and then lead into the blessed ministry of the Holy Spirit as we walk no longer in the flesh but in the Spirit. And architecturally, or to use the expression Derek Thomas used earlier on, from an architectonic principle, as people who think systematically about holiness, it would be altogether appropriate that we give much attention to the battle and the fight and the conflict of holiness. But sanctification at the end of the day, as we tried to see last night, is not a matter of architecture.

Sanctification at the end of the day is a matter of personal character. Holiness does not float above our heads. Holiness is who we become in Jesus Christ.

And there is, I think, something extraordinarily insightful about wanting to give an entire address to this principle of abiding in the love of Jesus Christ. Because it's as we abide in the love of Jesus Christ, or abide in Christ with respect to His love, that the architecture of the Christian life takes on a very distinctive flavor. I recognize that we can become thoroughly sickened of that false emphasis that extrapolates from Scripture that the heart of the Christian message is love.

But the fact of the matter is the heart of the Christian message is love. The love of God, the Heavenly Father, the love of Christ, the glorious Savior, the love of the Holy Spirit with whom we are to dwell in the sweetest of communion. It is the fact of the matter that the first fruit of the Spirit is love.

It is the fact of the matter that the heart of Jesus' exhortation to us, the summation of the law, is about loving the Lord our God and loving our neighbor as ourselves. And the key to all of that is that the Christian believer abides, remains, dwells, stays in the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. Alexander White, who had some failures and many outstanding qualities, used to say, there is such a thing as sanctification by vinegar.

When we were children, one of the games at a certain time of the year whenever the horse chestnuts were out and could be purchased in the shop would be to play what we called conkers. We would put a chestnut, put a hole through a chestnut and then a string through a hole and we would bang one another's chestnuts. And you would get a conker, as we called it, that was a once-er or a twice-er or a thrice-er that had destroyed many other people's chestnuts and eventually there would come a point where you would accuse this great conqueror of cheating.

And we would say, you used vinegar. And that's what happened. You would soak your chestnut in vinegar and it would harden.

It was a kind of, there was no dope testing on horse chestnuts in those days. But if there had been dope testing, vinegar would have been a banned substance. And Alexander White was surely right to say that

there is a false kind of holiness that is a sanctification by vinegar that exudes something usually hidden from the person who thus earnestly projects himself or herself as a model of sanctification.

But there is something about that sanctification that repels not only unbelievers, but actually, and this is the sinister thing, repels weak believers. And it strikes me often in the Gospels that one of the things about the holiness of our Jesus Christ was the way in which his holiness actually attracted weak believers to him. And that he brings this out as a kind of test case of our sanctification, our holiness, inasmuch as you have done it to one of the least of these, my brothers, you have done it to me.

That the evidence of my holiness in my congregation's life, therefore, is not the way I rub shoulders with those who have it all together, but the way I devote myself to those who have almost nothing together. And I show them the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's where Christ-like holiness is most likely to emerge.

And when I go to a conference in those whom I will seek out, I'm always amazed at conferences, how there are people who seem to have been extraordinarily gifted in getting to you. And the reason they get to you is because you've appeared up front and in public and they zone in upon you. They want to discuss with you or debate with you or whatever.

But wherever they go, they're always able to get to you. And I sometimes think it's a real test of my holiness, whether I love them in all the irritation that they cause me. And in a conference like this, is my instinct to mix with what kind of people, what kind of ministers.

This is why abiding in the love of the Lord Jesus Christ is, as it were, what creates an atmosphere in the Christian's life. If I can use an illustration, you go to a beautiful home where everything is correct, where the flowers are in the right place, where the drapes match the carpet and where the settee has the right level of comfort. And everything is perfect, except when you go into the home, you almost immediately realize that there is a spirit of alienation in the home.

And the way you are treated is completely formally. There is no affection. There is no love.

The children do exactly the right thing. But you catch that sense in the children that they don't really know what it is to experience the love and the affection of their parents. And this is a very real thing.

And I think it's a very real challenge, particularly for those of us who are concerned about the architecture of the gospel, that we don't build our theological house and miss out from the ingredients. The one thing that belongs to the very essence of the style of being a Christian that is so characteristic of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so in a way that seems increasingly to me to summarize and bring together in one extended allegory, many lines of the teaching that he's giving to his disciples in the whole of the farewell discourse.

He urges upon his disciples in the context of his exposition of the idea of the vine and the branches. These wonderful words in chapter 15 and verse 9. Abide in my love. Abide in my love.

And I want to say that this is of the very quintessence of real holiness. That the love that flows from me in my ministry to others is an authentic and genuine love only so long as I myself am abiding in the love of the Lord Jesus Christ for which nothing else in the world can possibly substitute. And I want us to think about this really under three headings, which is a disguised fashion probably for about 15 headings as we try and make our way through the material that I want to bring to you this morning.

First of all, to think about the love in which we abide. Secondly, about the union with Christ by which we abide in his love. And thirdly, about the characteristic hallmarks of those who thus abide in Christ's love.

First of all, the love in which we abide. A very interesting thing to me over the history of the church since the days of the Reformation, that sometimes because of a lack of this emphasis, Christians who have struggled to understand union with Christ have developed a very mystical view of what it means to abide in the love of Christ. It is something ethereal.

It is something sometimes said so marvelous that there's no way you could put it into words. The thing about the Lord Jesus teaching here is that that's precisely what he does. He urges us to abide in his love and he gives us a very carefully expounded piece of teaching about what this love is in which we are to abide.

Beginning of verse 9, As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. That is to say, the original pattern for this love in which we are to abide in Christ is the love that the Father has had for the Son.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Therefore you abide in my love. Now, here's a striking statistic in John's Gospel.

I think I'm right in saying that there is only one place in John's Gospel that speaks about the love of the Son for the Father. But there are several places where John's Gospel, as it were, undergirds this statement by speaking about the Father's love for the Son. Now, it's self-evident that the Son loves the Father.

But John's Gospel provides for us, right up to this point, a way of exegeting what Jesus means when he says, As the Father has loved me. Of course, it's adumbrated right at the beginning in the prologue. The Son who is in the bosom of the Father.

The Word who is *pros ton feon*, who is, as it were, face to face with the Father. And there in those descriptions of the closeness of the intimacy, the eternal bond of love between the Father and the Son, the whole Gospel is set up as an exposition of the nature of the Father's love for the Son. But we find this running through the Gospel.

For example, John 3, 35, the Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. John 5, verse 20, in a similar way, says the Lord Jesus, Here the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. Now, whether or not, as some commentators have suggested, the idea here may reflect on Jesus learning his carpenter's trade in Joseph's shop and his Father showing him all he knew about carpentry, or whether this is a purely neutral kind of piece of language.

And in one way or another, it speaks so extraordinarily about the love of the Father for his Son, that he shows him all he is doing, that the Father has no secret from his Son. Now, that's obviously true in eternity. But what Jesus seems to be speaking about here is the way in which, in terms of his life and ministry, there has been no secret hidden from him in the Father's day-by-day purpose.

Remember how the songs of Isaiah put this, morning by morning he awakens me, he awakens my ear to listen, and I've listened to him. The intimacy of love between the Father and the Son. And then in chapter 8, verse 42, certainly by implication, the same thing is surely here.

Jesus said, If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. If God were your Father, you would do what your Father does, namely, you would love me. And then in our text, in chapter 15, verse 9, as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

And in the great prayer in chapter 17, exactly the same thing, amazingly. He prays that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. Verse 24, I want them to see my glory that you gave me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

And then in verse 26, at the end of the prayer, I'll continue to make it known that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them. And perhaps most significantly, the text in John's gospel that I've left out that seems to me to be so eloquent of the nature of the love about which the Lord Jesus is speaking when he says, recorded in chapter 10, verse 17, for this reason, the Father loves me because I lay down my life that I may take it. In other words, and I think this is a not unimportant thing for us to grasp, the love the Father has for his Son itself has more than one dimension.

There is a love, an eternal love that the Father has for his eternal Son, because he is his eternal Son. In the eternal intimacy and bond between the Father and the Son and the mutual admiration and esteem and enjoyment of one another, of which in the image of God, I assume a pale glimpse or reflection is given in the mutual esteem, affection, and bond of love that there is between the man and the woman, Genesis 1, 26 through 28. That what we have in the eternal love, mutual love of the Trinity is given a pale reflection in the mutual love of the image of the miniature of himself that God has made, in which a man and a woman can spend so long doing nothing but just being with one another.

That old question that Calvin takes up in the Institutes that Augustine took up, what was God doing before creation? I won't pause on the answer that Augustine gave. But you know, he wasn't doing what Augustine said he was doing. He was loving his Son.

He was enjoying his Son. He was being intimate with his Son. In the bond of the Spirit, the Father needed nothing else fully to express himself as Father and fully to enjoy being Father.

He needed nothing else than his Son. That's beyond our imagination. But I say we experience a little of it here in the bond of fellowship that many of us have with one another.

That we leave the evening meeting and suddenly it's way past bedtime and what have we been doing? We've not really been doing anything. We've just been with each other. And we discover in one another there is a whole world there.

And in a sense this boggles the imagination. Every single one of us, in a way, don't let me get off the track. I'll get back to the track in a minute.

Every single one of us contains within ourselves an entire history of the universe that's different from the entire history of the universe that's in every other one of us. And so we can endlessly explore one another without doing anything. How we need to learn this in the church.

If you send out an invitation to members of your church and say, we're going to meet 7.30 Friday night, half of the membership will phone into the church office and say, what are we going to do? And if the response is actually, we're not going to do anything. We're just going to be. Oh, but you see, once we grasp the nature of the fellowship within the Godhead, we begin to see, and this is so abundantly clear in the farewell discourse, that the fellowship of God's people is an analogy.

This is what makes the church as church, when the church is church, such a powerful testimony to the world. And this is what Jesus is praying for, that they may be one, even as we are one, that the world may believe. Because when it sees this kind of community that dwells in this kind of love, that is modeled upon the father's love for his son, and is the fruit of indwelling the love of the son, it recognizes that it's not normal.

It's not natural. It's supranatural and it's supernatural. And it's rooted in this principle that Jesus is enunciating that the pattern of the love in which we dwell in Jesus Christ is the love of the heavenly father for his son.

But back to John 10, 17, the father loves his son as his son from all eternity. But there is another dimension to the love for his son. We might say the father's love for his son from all eternity is absolutely unconditional.

It's conditioned by nothing except the personal in being of the son in the Holy Trinity. But we might also say that the love that the father has for the son as incarnate, as mediator, to which the Lord Jesus is referring in 10, 17 is actually carefully conditioned. It's a love that is capable of development and growth, just as your love for your son, if you have one, is capable of development and growth.

That you loved him when he was a baby, that you cradled in your arms. But as you see him grow, as you see him go through much that you would take to yourself and struggle with it, is it not true there is something in your fatherly heart that goes out to him and you say, if ever I loved you, my son, it's now. And Jesus says there is a moment in his life, in his relationship with God as mediator, as the eternal son wearing our flesh, there is a moment of climactic consummation to the love of his father for him.

Yes, how much he loved him because he was willing to become incarnate for us and wear our flesh and enter into the abject weakness of our humanity, become from the point of view of his humanity, totally dependent upon his mother, that he would enter into the darkness of her womb, he who had forever known only the eternal light. Oh, what love, no wonder the angels burst out of heaven to praise him. But surely that paled into insignificance when on the cross in obedience to the father, he cried out, my God, why have you forsaken me? And it was in that moment that the father sang, if ever I loved you, my Jesus, it is now.

The reason the father loves me is because I lay down my life that I may take it again. Now that is the pattern of the love as the father has loved me. So have I loved you.

And of course, this is really where the farewell discourse began in terms of the washing of the disciples feet chapter 13, verse one, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the father, having loved his own who were in the world. He loved them to the end. Well, we're all educated people here.

Let me put it in a very educated way. He loved them teleologically. He loved them to the end in the fullness of his love.

And of course, he's speaking here about his atoning love, just as there is in the nature of the father's love for his son, the kind of two foldness, his love for his son, as he is son and his love for his son, because of what it is that his son does in love for him. So there is a two foldness in the love of Christ in which we are to dwell. There is a love of Jesus Christ that is his atoning love for us.

And that's what then is unfolded in chapter 13. He loves us to the end. And so there is the Johannine acted out version of the Pauline exposition of the incarnation and Philipians 2, 5 to 11.

And you can put this Philipians 2, 5 to 11, John 13, almost phrase by phrase opposite one another. And you see how clearly the Lord Jesus was enacting before them the wonder of his humiliation and then the marvel of his exaltation. How he knew that the father had given everything into his hands and that he had come from God and although he was in the form of God, he didn't count equality with God, a thing to be held onto and made a special privilege.

Why should he wash the disciples feet? But he took on himself the form of a servant and was made man and being made man, he humbled himself. He girded himself with the towel and he humbled himself yet further. He stooped to conquer.

He came and he washed his disciples dirty feet. And because he has done this, God has highly exalted him and given him the name above every other name. And so when he had finished his work of foot washing, he retook his place at the center, at the head of the table.

Having loved them, he loved them to the end. I love the words of John Donne about this very text. When he says this, he says, whom he loves, he loves to the end and not to their end and to their death, but to his end.

And his end is that he might love them more. You understand that's what the atonement is all about. It's the efficacious love of God for your salvation in order that he may love you more.

That's what salvation is really all about. Salvation in this sense, for all its glory, for all its costliness is not the end in itself. The end in itself is the restoration to the love and the communion in love which we were created to enjoy in the presence of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

So this fullness of love in which we are to dwell is not only a love that Christ has for us in terms of what he does for us as atoning, but once atoned for, that's the foundation of everything. But the love that brings atonement is the stepping stone to what the older writers called in a beautiful expression, if odd to us in the 21st century, not the love of atonement, but the love of complacency. The love that having made atonement now delights in those for whom the atonement has been made as the Father has loved me as mediator and for myself.

So the Son loves us as those for whom he has made atoning mediation in order that having made atoning mediation for us, he might love us with the love of complacency in which he loves us as atoned for. Now objects of his pleasure, of his complacency, of his satisfaction in that sense. And we see that here in John 15.

Owen again, who incidentally is not the only Christian author I ever read, but he does from time to time put things most exquisitely. And he speaks about the love of Christ as the love of complacency in a fourfold manner that's magnificently illustrated here in John 15. He must have read John 15.

He speaks about the love of complacency as a love of delight. The outflowing of love in appreciation and joy. The kind of love that's described in Zephaniah 3, I will delight over you and sing over you.

The kind of love of delight that's spoken of in chapter 15, verse 11, to look no further. I've spoken to you these things that my joy might be in you. You see, there is a love of grace in order to bring atonement for

our sins, but once atoned for, there is a love that overflows in the heart of the Lord Jesus in sheer delight over his people.

Now, my dear brothers, that's something we need to bathe ourselves in. Because we can so often, and yes, from a certain point of view rightly, but from an exclusive point of view, never safely, we can beat ourselves into the dust because of our sinfulness and our failure. And we can lose sight of the Lord Jesus Christ love of complacency that once atoned for, we are the objects of his delight and even his joy.

It is secondly sazone, a love of value. He was made flesh and emptied himself, became a servant, obeyed to the death of the cross, sanctified himself for us. As Jesus says in John 17, as we are reminded, Calvin emphasizes so greatly in the Institute's book three, and especially his commentary on Hebrews.

Why? Because his saving love for us expresses his valuation of us. Now notice, not that he dies for us because we are valuable, but because he has died for us, we become valuable. Our value, your valuation, you need to understand this, your valuation in the eyes and heart of the Lord Jesus is nothing less than his oblation on the cross of Calvary.

That's the value he has placed upon you. And he loves that which he values. Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

We are his treasured possession and his heart is toward us. And then thirdly sazone, there is a love of pity and compassion that's expressed in many ways in the New Testament, but actually expressed here in two ways, in the compassion and pity that Jesus has for us. Verse 18, because he knows that the world will hate us.

And so he's at pains to explain to us why it is that the world hates us. He wants to teach us to be able to say when the world hates us and there is something in us that is likely to recriminate the Lord Jesus because we are hated by the world. He says, don't look at it that way.

Think of it like this. This isn't really about me. This is about him.

The world hates me because he loves me and abide in my love. And so at the end of the passage in verse 26, he speaks to them about the way the helper will come, the counselor who will come alongside us to strengthen us. That's the fruit of his love.

And then sazone, there is the love of bounty that's so beautifully expressed in the words of verse 14. You are now my friends. No longer do I call you servants for the servant doesn't know what his master is doing, but I have called you friends for all that I have heard from my father.

I have made known to you. Now, this is the grace upon grace about which John had spoken in the prologue to the gospel. When we get to this point of the gospel, the grace is just pouring out of Jesus towards his disciples as he draws them into that love in which they are to abide.

This is the abundance of grace that is ours in Christ Jesus. And so we need to understand the love in which we are to abide. Let me ask the homework question again.

How well do you understand this in terms of what it does to the style of your holiness? That you are somebody who has grasped the love in which we are to abide. Second, the union by which we are to abide. Clear to us, wasn't it in Derek Thomas's address this morning, how deeply imbued with Johannine

as well as Pauline theology the apostle Paul was.

Notice a number of things about this union. Six of them, five of them I think I want to mention. Number one, and perhaps most important, it is a personal union.

It is a personal union. Abide in me and I in you. Now one of the reasons that is so difficult for us to expound is because there isn't really a perfect analogy.

And Jesus uses, as it were, the least imperfect analogy for our abiding in him and he abiding in us in the horticultural metaphor that he uses of the vine and the branches united together in order that the branches may bear fruit. But dear friends, let's try and grasp this, however difficult it may be for us to articulate, that the union which we have with Jesus Christ is a union with his person. I think oddly enough, oddly enough, it's Bultman who points out that the expression that the New Testament loves to use, pistouane ais, to believe into Jesus, is actually unique in all classical literature.

That is to say there is something about the nature of the gospel that demands a different use of grammar in order to express it. Believing into the Lord Jesus Christ. That is to say this union which we have with him is a union of persons, most nobly illustrated as far as the scriptures are concerned by the union of persons in marriage.

So that we have one name and we become one flesh. Or to put it negatively, this is not an impersonal union. This is not the fruits of Christ's atoning work affecting my life.

This is the very person of the Son of God in my flesh dwelling in me by his Spirit and I dwelling in him through the power of his Holy Spirit. So that if I could put it this way, there is nothing between the person of the Lord Jesus and the person of the believer as that union and communion develops and grows. I think this is a very important thing for us to grasp.

Let me put it the way I sometimes put it. The union with Christ we have is not that we somehow or another share his grace because, follow me carefully, there actually is no such thing as grace. That actually is Roman Catholic teaching, medieval Roman Catholic teaching.

There is a thing called grace that can be separated from the person of Jesus Christ. It's something that Jesus Christ won on the cross and he can bestow it on you. And there are at least seven ways it can be bestowed on you and they all, as it happens, turn out to be in the hands of the church.

And you can have this kind of grace and this kind of grace and this kind of grace and this kind of grace. There is no such thing as grace. There's only the Lord Jesus.

Grace is not some appendage to his being nor is it some substance that flows from us. Let me give you grace. All there is is the Lord Jesus himself.

And so when Jesus speaks about us abiding in him and he abiding in us, this however mysterious it may be, mystical in that sense, is a personal union. Do not let us fail because of the abuse of expressions. Do not let us fail to understand that at the end of the day actually Christianity is Christ because there isn't anything else.

There isn't an atonement that somehow can be detached from who the Lord Jesus is. There isn't grace that can be attached to you, transferred from him. All there is is Christ and your soul.

And so he's emphasizing to them this high and deep mystery of the Christian faith that the union we have with the Lord Jesus is a personal union. And because that union, as Calvin, remember, taught, because that union is actually grounded in his union with our humanity and the beauty he created in that humanity, the holiness that is forged in us by our union with his person follows the simple principle, you become very like the person with whom you most intimately live. Now listen, that's a fundamental element of our ministry, isn't it? I spent, I guess, many years of my life having the privilege of begging, borrowing or stealing somebody else's congregation.

And one of the things I've noticed again and again and again is the way in which congregations over a longer ministry tend to take on the personality of their minister and preacher and the extent to which people model their holiness and sanctification on what they see in their minister. Now we might fly from that, we might say it shouldn't be that way, we need a plurality of elders, but at the end of the day there is such a close identification inevitably in the hearts and minds of our people between the one who preaches Jesus and the Jesus who is preached that your likeness to the Lord Jesus in your mutual indwelling of him is either going to foster a true likeness to the Lord Jesus in your people or it's going to foster a distorted Jesus in your people. And that's absolutely vital that we see that.

It's a crushing thing to think. I find it a haunting thought. I want to fly from the pulpit and say, please don't look at me.

Please don't think that Jesus really is the way I preach him. But my friends, if Jesus isn't really the way I preach him, I shouldn't be preaching. And the key to that is personal union with him.

I think it's one of the great mysteries of God's providence that when we preach, we grow large, don't we? Our minds operate at a level. I mean, I know you can lose the place, but your mind operates with a speed that it doesn't normally operate with. You grow large, you become conscious that you're caught up into the Word of God and into something the Holy Spirit is doing.

And one of the strangest of all divine providences seems to me to be this, that when the Holy Spirit makes us, as it were, as large as we can possibly be, he doesn't always hide the enlargement of our distortion of the character of the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that we will be hidden behind Christ. We pray that the Holy Spirit will do that, but apparently he is not always pleased to do that.

And so we preach a half Christ, a distorted Christ. And it's not so evident in our preaching to the people that we love them as those who are abiding in the love of Jesus Christ. And there is not the atmosphere in our ministry that we are enjoying personal union and personal communion with the Lord Jesus.

So it's a union that's personal. It's a union, secondly, that's spiritual. That is to say, this is point number two and this is subheading number two.

It's a spiritual union in the sense it's a union that's forged by the Holy Spirit. And this, of course, is the key to understanding what it means for it to be a personal union. And Jesus has just been speaking about this in chapter 14, verse 15 to the end, where he speaks about the way in which this union is forged in us by the gift of the Holy Spirit that he's going to give to them.

And this Holy Spirit he's going to give to them, as we heard again earlier on today, is the gift of the very same Holy Spirit who has indwelt him and possessed him and empowered him, because there is no other Holy Spirit. There isn't a Holy Spirit who came and dwelt upon the Lord Jesus and another Holy Spirit who

didn't come and dwell upon the Lord Jesus. So that when God gives the Holy Spirit, he says, will I give them Spirit A or will I give them Spirit B? There's only one Holy Spirit received by believers.

And that's one and the same Holy Spirit who endowed our Lord Jesus Christ for his ministry with all the graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit. He is the Spirit of Christ who comes to indwell us. And look at what Jesus says here when he speaks about this, when he says, I won't leave you as orphans, I'll come to you.

He's speaking not just about his resurrection, he's speaking about coming to them in the power of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. And he speaks, you notice, verse 23 about this. If anyone loves me, you see, as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

Abide in my love. If anyone thus abides in my love and loves me, then my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him. I don't begin to understand what that means, but I think I begin to experience what it means, that he more and more works in my life to unite me to himself by the power of the Holy Spirit, that my life becomes more and more a place from which Jesus is not repulsed, but to which he is drawn.

That he loves being here. That he knows he can go anywhere here. That he can be ungrieved here.

And while that may be beyond our ability to articulate, Jesus also emphasizes that this union that is personal and spiritual is also a union that's regulated by his word. If he says, my word abides in you, then you will abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.

It's the same thing as Colossians 3, 16, isn't it? Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, which is parallel to Ephesians 5, 18. Be filled with the Spirit. Give the word room.

You know, our love for the Lord Jesus is going to be manifested by that which we communicate to our congregation in our preaching, that we are not experts who stand on top of this book, who are able simply to explain it all, but that we are deep sea divers who have gone down into this book and we are forever finding precious pearls to bring up and hold before the congregation and say like excited children, do you see what's here? Do you see what the Heavenly Father has embedded in the seabed of his word? And we hold it up and our congregations begin to sense that we ourselves are growing in our understanding of scripture. That we are not just schoolmasters teaching them something we know perfectly, but we're explorers in a world of grace. We're constantly finding new things and we're conscious then that we're not above this book, but that we're below this book.

We're well below this book and we sit where the congregation sits and we're drinking it in and God is speaking to us and no one is more thoroughly dealt with by the Lord Jesus in our ministries than we who are the conduits of that ministry. Because our very ministry of his word is one of the high points of our weekly experience of abiding in Christ in a union that's regulated by his word dwelling in us and it's a loving union. No longer servants, well we're still servants of course, we don't misunderstand what Jesus is saying.

No longer servants but friends. I really regret, I guess I'm getting old, but I really regret the Americanization of the Western English-speaking world so that everybody wants to call you by your Christian name. And it's not I think I want to stand on my dignity, but I thoroughly dislike going into the hairdressers and an 18-year-old girl saying to me, what's your name? And I say it's Ferguson.

She says, oh what's your first name? And I know what's going to follow. She's going to call me Sinclair. Come over here Sinclair.

Now why do I object to that? That's the name my mother gave me. What I object to is this, that it means that social grace that used to exist when somebody wanted to draw you into their friendship, they could say to you, please call me by my Christian name. I've never forgotten going in an elevator with very famous Christian theologian that you would all recognize his name immediately, to whom I'd always referred as Dr. X, when Dr. X turned to me as the doors were just about to open and he said, please, he said, my name is.

It was a great moment for me as a young man to be drawn into friendship. It was no longer the relation of master to servant. And I would never in a thousand years have transgressed the honor and the esteem, but to be drawn in.

And Jesus says to him, what a moment. I think the thing that really just overwhelms me about this moment is that our dear Savior was going to die in awful excruciating pain upon the cross within 24 hours. And he says to them, from now on you're friends.

It's a union of friendship. And yes, he says, it's a, it's a growing union. Did you catch that in Calvin this morning? It's a growing union.

There's more and more and more and more. Those of you who are married, the day you were married and you were just, I hope just filled overwhelmed with the emotion of the situation, maybe more than your wife was. Can't believe this is happening to me.

She's actually done it. She's mine. You scarcely loved her then.

You, you scarcely knew her then, but you've grown into that union. You have a hundred thousand more intimate reasons to love her today than you did then. And so with the Lord Jesus for all eternity.

I think it's a great mistake that people think that when we die, we become A, infinite and B, eternal. When we die, we remain finite creatures and we don't become eternal in that ontological sense that there is no past, no present, no future. Otherwise the lenses that scripture gives us of those who are in the glory are false and untrustworthy lenses.

And this friendship that's bestowed upon us in Christ, this union of love, we will find a million, million, million more reasons to love the Lord Jesus in eternity than we have now. It's a love of growing union. And yet you notice it's a union that in order to bring blessing causes pain.

Back to the Michelangelo illustration, as he chisels away, because he sees in this block of stone, the angel. But the difference between the illustration and the reality is this, that we are not blocks of stone that have no feelings. We are men who feel every chisel blow, every hammer of the heavenly father.

We cry out to him, what are you doing? We don't see the big picture. We don't understand that he's conforming us more and more to the likeness of his son, that he might be the firstborn of many brethren. And we allow ourselves to be dislocated and enervated by the chisel blows of the heavenly father or by the pruning knife that he uses.

As he cuts away everything that will get in the way of stable fruit and glorious fruition. Well, I'm almost finished. Let me simply give you the six headings of the third point, the love in which we abide, the union by which we abide, the marks of those who thus abide.

And there are at least six of them in this passage. Number one, in chapter 15, verse 12, universal obedience to the Lord Jesus commands, universal obedience to the Lord Jesus commands. Second, a respondent friendship to Jesus himself, a respondent friendship to Jesus himself.

You know, the privilege as you go on in ministry, you come to this conference year after year, or you intersect with brethren here and there, sometimes a year passes, two year passes, and you've no idea what's been going on in their lives. And yet you somehow or another, you pick up where you left off and you think there can't be friendships like this. Do you sometimes think, is there another man in the whole universe who is so blessed by the friendships you have? The bounty that Jesus Christ has given to you in the gospel.

I know that friendship grows over the years and same here. He not only makes us his friends, but he seeks from us a respondent friendship. You think about yourself that way.

There are many ways in which I need to think about myself. I'm a sinner saved by grace. Yes.

I continue to be a sinner, a wretched man. And I need to be delivered from the body of sin and the body of death. But he wants me also to think of myself as his friend, to walk with him as his friend, to go to him as his friend, to share my life with him as his friend.

Mark number three is a love for all those for whom Jesus has died. This is my commandment that you love one another without exception. Now they hadn't done that.

Some of them had been furious about the way in which there were some who were in the inner circle. They were probably all furious with one another as they'd sat around the room and Jesus had washed all their feet. You should have done it.

You should have done it. And he who called them to a universal obedience called them also to a universal love for all those for whom Jesus died. Never my brothers let your first thought of somebody who is a true Christian, never let your first thought about them be anything else but I will love this brother or sister for whom Jesus Christ died.

And never ever transgress that principle by God's grace. Fourthly, a willingness to suffer in communion with Christ. This is what he goes on to expound in chapter 15 verse 18.

If you are united to me again, this is Calvin this morning, isn't it? If you're united to me, you will suffer in me and with me and your life externally as well as internally is going to be conformed to this pattern so that death is the way to life and the cross is the way to victory. And it's all here in chapter 15. Number five, a constraint to witness to Jesus' name.

Remember how Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 5, the love of Christ constrains me. And here Jesus himself puts it fascinatingly at the end of the chapter where he says, speaking about the coming of the Holy Spirit, when the helper comes whom I'll send you from the father, the spirit of truth who proceeds from the father, he will bear witness about me and you also will bear witness about me because you have been with me from the beginning. Now see the perfect analogy that he's drawing here, the parallel lines, the reason the

spirit is such an effective witness is the very same reason they are to be witnesses because he has been with Jesus from the beginning.

And he who has been with Jesus from the beginning of his ministry is able to enable those who have been with him from the beginning of his ministry to bear witness to him. That's how our union with Christ overflows. And point number six, a mark of one who abides in Christ, chapter 15 verse 11, is that Christ's joy will be in him and his joy, your joy, will be full.

I find that one of the most intriguing pieces of language in John's gospel. What does Jesus mean? He says, I've spoken these things to you in order that, does he mean in order that the joy I have may be in you? Or does he mean that you may be the reason, the cause of my joy? I suspect actually he means both. That as we abide in Christ's love, the love that has as its foundation, the love that the father has for him, the love that he has given to us, we discover both things are true.

That our little lives give our Savior great joy and the great joy of the Savior dwells in us. And when this is true, if we can apply all this to ourselves as ministers of the gospel, when this is true, our ministries really will be different and Jesus-like, Jesus-like. And at the end of the day, there's nothing else worth living for except what's going to be Jesus-like because nothing in you will last for eternity unless it's Jesus-like.

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you again and again for the grace that you have shown to us in Jesus Christ and we pray that you would teach us more and more by your Holy Spirit what it means to abide in Christ and grant that it may be said of every single one of us in the last day that abiding in Christ we bore much fruit and so proved to be Christ's disciples. Bless us now as we go to lunch, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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