

The Vine and the Branches, or Union and Communion with the Lord Jesus

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"Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me, ye can do nothing." John 15:4, 5

Union and communion with the Lord Jesus Christ are the source and fountain of all our salvation and of all our sanctification; the very spring-head of all our holiness and all our happiness for time and eternity. You will observe that I have put together salvation and sanctification, holiness and happiness; for as these are inseparable in their nature and in their end, so do they flow out of the same fountain and run in the same channel. As, then, union and communion with the Lord of life embrace and imply blessings so great and ends so glorious, the Holy Ghost has set forth this grand truth very largely and blessedly in the Scriptures of the New Testament. Figures, I need not inform you, are much used in the word of truth, as indeed they were by the Lord himself in the days of his flesh, to set forth and illustrate heavenly doctrines; and they have this great advantage attending them, that they lie level with the capacity of most minds. Many can understand and remember a figure who can neither comprehend nor retain an argument; and as divine truths are rather to be believed than reasoned about, a comparison may help faith when an argument might but hinder it. The Holy Spirit, therefore, has in this instance, as in so many others, made use of several very striking figures, which no doubt you are familiar with, but which, as

conveying the nature of this union and communion more vividly than any other way that could have been employed, I will briefly touch upon before I proceed to my text.

1. One figure then which the Holy Ghost has made choice of to show us the nature of the union which exists between Christ and his people is that of a *building*. The main force of this figure lies in the connection between the foundation or the corner stone and the superstructure; the Lord Jesus being the foundation or corner stone and his people the stones built up upon him. "And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord." By the foundation of the apostles and prophets is meant not that they are the foundation, but that it was instrumentally laid by them, as Paul speaks: "As a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation." (1 Cor. 3:10.) But it is God himself who really and truly lays it, as we read: "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." (Isa. 28:16.) As Christ is here spoken of as both "the foundation" and "the corner stone," the question perhaps may rise in your mind, What is the difference between the two? There is no real difference between them, they being one and the same; but the expression, "corner stone," implies that the foundation stone laid is so broad and wide that every corner of the whole building rests upon it, and thus each side wall has the same strength and the same security, Jew and Gentile equally resting upon Christ as the only true foundation. Is not this a beautiful representation of the union which subsists between Christ and his people? Take away the foundation, the whole building falls into ruin. Let the foundation stand, every stone built upon the foundation remains firm in its place. Every

child of God is taught and brought by grace to rest upon the Lord Jesus Christ, his Person and work, his blood and righteousness, as the only foundation of his hope; for well he knows the truth of those words: "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Whilst then he stands upon that foundation, he stands secure; for upon that rock the church is built, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

2. But the Holy Ghost has chosen another figure also to set forth the union and communion which subsist between Christ and his saints—the figure of the *human body*, as consisting of head and members. You will recollect that passage in the Colossians where the apostle says, "Not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God." And so in the Ephesians: "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ. From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." (Eph. 4:15, 16.) In these almost similar passages, the blessed Lord is represented as the Head of his body, the church, and all his saints in personal and immediate union and communion with him as his members. As, then, the members of our natural body are in union with our natural head, and receive from it those supplies of strength and direction which are needful for the being and well being of the whole frame, so the members of Christ's mystical body live, act, and move by virtue of their union with him.

3. Another figure is that of *man and wife*—that most intimate, close, and affectionate of all possible unions. Strong

is the union of father and daughter; strong the union of mother and son; strong the union of brother and sister; strong the union of friend and friend. But what are these bonds of union compared with the union which binds together as one flesh man and wife? So in the mystical body, Christ is represented as the husband, and the Church as his bride. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it." "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church: and he is the Saviour of the body."

But there is no part of Scripture in which this union in its nature and effects is more blessedly set forth than by our gracious Lord himself in those solemn discourses which he held with his disciples previous to his sufferings, bloodshedding, and death. It was then that he who taught so much by figure, chose that now before us to represent, first to his disciples and then to us through them, in the clearest and most beautiful way, the union and communion which subsists between him and his people—I mean that of *the vine and the branches*.

But the meaning, force, and beauty of this figure will, I trust, be more evident, if the Lord enable me to open up the language of our text with any degree of clearness. We may observe, I think, in it these three distinguishing features:—

I.—*First*, the Lord's positive *testimony to man's inability* and helplessness: "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me." "Without me ye can do nothing."

II.—*Secondly*, the Lord's gracious *charge*, "Abide in me, and I in you."

III.—*Thirdly*, the Lords unerring *test* of abiding union, "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit."

These three points I shall, as the Lord may enable, endeavour to bring before you this morning. The Lord the Spirit open my heart and mouth to speak and your ears to hear, and crown both with the blessing which maketh rich.

I.—The Lord's people in some points widely differ, in other points closely agree. In external circumstances, such as rank, station, property, ability, circumstances in life they widely differ. How varied, for instance, are the cases, states, and circumstances of those now before me, as regards outward conditions of life. Nor do they differ only in these merely external points: even in their inward experience of the power of the word they widely differ. They are not all cast in the same exact mould of divine teaching, are not all led in the same precise path of exercise and temptation, do not sink equally deep in soul trouble, nor rise equally high in sweet enjoyment. And yet with all this evident disagreement, there is a solid body of real agreement, so close and strong, as if not actually to nullify, yet to render insignificant all minor differences. It is in grace as in nature. The features of our face may widely differ to the spectator's eye, and yet there is a unity stamped upon them all, which makes their resemblance far closer than their difference. As a proof of this, if we ever meet with a person, any one of whose features is distorted or exaggerated, different in form or size, or out of proportion to the rest of the countenance, how sensible we are in a moment of it, as if it were a caricature of the human face. So in grace. In many features of their experience the Lord's people widely differ; but if any one be wanting, or distorted from the right shape, or exaggerated so as to be out of proportion, we are at once struck with it, as if

it were a caricature of a true and living experience; and almost the first glance seems to arouse some suspicion of its truth and reality. Admitting, then, that in minor points the people of God may differ as regards their Christian experience, yet there is one in which all of them will agree, from the least to the greatest, from the babe in grace, just beginning to lisp his first broken accents in the language of Canaan to the most advanced saint, who, after many years of painful struggles in the wilderness, is listening to hear the call, "Come up higher." This, then, is the feature so universally stamped upon them all: *a sense of creature helplessness*. And does not this voice of conscience in them all within re-echo the Lord's words in our text? "Without me ye can do nothing." No Pharisee or legalist, no formalist or Ritualist, no advocate for faith as a natural duty and for repentance as a moral obligation, no wholehearted, unhumbled, unwounded, unexercised professor of religion will ever truly and sincerely use that language as the expression of his inmost experience, though it may issue from his lips as a formal confession. And why? Because a thorough sense and deep feeling of his miserable helplessness and inability to all that is good has never been wrought in his conscience by a divine power. Now, until this is the case, there is always a latent persuasion in his mind that he can do something toward his own salvation; and whatever failures, aye, repeated failures, he may be conscious of; whatever amount of sin his conscience may testify against; whatever dislike he may feel to the strictness of religion and the separation it calls for from everything which his heart most fondly loves, he still cleaves with all the strength of a drowning man to this point as his last hope, that he both must and can do something whereby to please God, and avert destruction from his guilty head. It is true that he never has begun, seriously begun, even to satisfy himself that he is in a right way, or if he has made an

attempt to do so, he has never persevered even according to his own knowledge of right and wrong. And yet with desperate strength he will ever continue to hold a lie in his right hand, even to, and often on his dying bed; for he thinks if he part with that one only hope he is lost without remedy. But now take as a contrast to all such as he, alike deceiving and deceived, the quickened family of God—aye, begin at the lowest state or stage in the work of the Holy Ghost upon the soul—and you will not find any one amongst the partakers of grace but who will fully agree with our Lord's testimony that he can do nothing. Now why is this? Because a ray of divine light has shone into his soul, by which he sees not only that which is to be done but that he has no power of doing it.

What then is intended by the expression of our gracious Lord? "Without me ye can do nothing." Does the Lord mean to exclude thereby such things as natural conscience may recognise as right and wrong, or that a man may be induced to do by the effect of moral persuasion? Does he exclude thereby all the duties which we owe to society, to our friends and relatives, or those acts of kindness and affection which we owe to all, as far as lies in our power? No, surely; though I ought to add that even these things cannot be done as God would have them done except by the power of his grace. But what the Lord means is, nothing to satisfy God, nothing to put away sin, nothing to draw down the approbation of heaven, and I may well add, nothing to satisfy a man's own enlightened and living conscience. For you will observe that I am speaking now not of one dead in a profession, and therefore satisfied with mere formal lip service, but of one who is enlightened by the light of the living. Such a one sees light in God's light; is taught of God to know the length and breadth of his holy law, and is thus made to see and feel what alone will satisfy God; and as his conscience moves in strict accordance with the word of God, the light he has from

it and the life he feels in it, he is fully and clearly brought to this point, that nothing can or will satisfy his enlightened and quickened conscience but that which satisfies God. I want you well and thoroughly to understand this point; and you will do so if God be your teacher, for it is a grand turning point between a dead profession and a living faith, between knowledge in the head and the life of God in the soul, betwixt the teaching of men and the teaching which cometh from God only, betwixt a religion which leaves a man under the power of sin and Satan and a religion which saves the soul from sin in its guilt, its dominion, and its consequences. In the case, then, of which I am speaking, there is light in the understanding, life in the conscience, faith in the heart, and feeling in the soul; and as all these things spring from the inward teaching of God and the express work of the Spirit, they accurately and intimately correspond with God's written testimony in the word. When therefore our Lord says, "Without me ye can do nothing," he means "nothing to put away sin; nothing to reconcile yourself to God; nothing to fulfil the demands of his righteous law; nothing to atone for your aggravated crimes; nothing to deliver you from curse and condemnation; nothing to shut the gate of hell or open the door of heaven; nothing to allay your doubts and fears, or remove the guilt of sin from off your conscience; nothing to take away the sting of death, or fit and qualify your soul for the inheritance of the saints in light."

Now, there is nothing more easy to learn as a doctrine than that of man's helplessness, and yet nothing more dreadful to feel as a matter of soul experience. It is one thing to look on a deathbed and there to lie oneself. It is one thing to stand in a court of justice and hear a man condemned to death, and another to stand oneself a guilty criminal in the dock. It is one thing to read of a shipwreck, and another to be a storm-tossed mariner on a rocky shore; it is one thing to hear about

a holy, just, and righteous God, and another to stand trembling and guilty at his bar. In fact, there are few feelings more terrible than of helplessness, when we know that unless help come we must perish. Picture one man standing under a tall precipitous cliff, or upon a rock on which the tide of the sea is gradually gaining, and who knows he must be drowned unless a boat come to save him. Fancy a titan about to fall into the hands of a banditti all watching for him, unless timely aid rescue him. Picture one left on a desert island, or wandering in an Australian wilderness, with neither food nor water, and ready to perish of hunger and thirst. This is to be able to do nothing, when life itself depends on doing something ourselves, or another doing it for us. Now, until a man is in some degree brought here as one ready to perish, he does not know the meaning of the words, able to do nothing. A real knowledge and a living feeling of it is, I repeat, a most terrible experience—one of the sorest, sharpest, most cutting, and slaughtering which the soul passes through under the strong hand of God. And yet, how you will hear ministers telling people one minute in word how helpless they are, and then the next exhorting or bidding them in deed come to Jesus and take hold of his promises. How contradictory is all this; for if they can do nothing, how can they come to Jesus, or how can they lay hold of a promise given by him?

But you have probably observed that our Lord here is speaking not so much of men generally—that is, of men dead in sin, and therefore emphatically, as the apostle speaks, "without strength" (Rom. 5:6), as of his own disciples, who were possessed of divine life and in union with himself. What do we gather from this fact? This grand truth, that God's people are in themselves as helpless in divine things after they are called by grace as they were before. It is a very common idea among both preachers and professors that

those who are possessed of faith can always make use of it. But our Lord's words effectually dispose of a doctrine so contrary to Scripture and experience: "Without me ye"—ye my disciples, ye who are members of my mystical body, ye who are branches in me the true vine, even ye without me can do nothing; that is, as I have explained it, nothing spiritual, nothing to satisfy either God or conscience, nothing worthy of the name of gospel fruit. If you will refer to the margin, you will find it rendered "severed from me," the idea being that of a branch cut off from the main stock, and thus practically incapable of bringing forth fruit. A branch severed from the stem necessarily withers and dies, because the supply of sap is cut off which, flowing through stem and branch, has clothed it with leaves, flowers, and fruit. The word means, literally, "apart from me," in a state of separation from me, and, as it were, outside me. Our Lord does not mean thereby to say that a branch once in living union with him can be severed and cut off, but that assuming it could be, such would be the case. He purposely uses this strong language to show them, not only the source of all their fruitfulness, but that separation from him would bring with it an immediate drying up of every grace. In fact, it is a fuller opening up as well as a more condensed declaration of what he had said in the preceding verse: "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me." There is a natural impossibility for the branch to bear fruit of itself under such circumstances. Did you ever see a vine branch bearing fruit which did not issue out of the stem? If it do bear fruit—and all its beauty as well as all its usefulness consists in it, it only bears fruit by virtue of its union with the stem. We may not be able to explain how this fruitfulness is effected; nor need we be botanists and naturalists to penetrate into the hidden mysteries of vegetable life; but we see with our unlearned eyes certain natural facts, and from them we can gather

certain undeniable truths. A branch must be in union with the stem, to produce, under the influence of light and heat, anything worthy of the name of fruit. So it is in grace. Without Christ, without union and communion with Christ, without the flowing in of his influence into the soul, without the communication of his Spirit and grace to the heart, without the light, without the warmth of the Sun of righteousness, there is no bearing fruit to the honour and praise of God. There is no real faith, no true hope, no heavenly love, no genuine repentance, no godly sorrow for sin, no effectual prayer, no spiritual praise. Without Christ and a union with him, all our religion is but a name to live, and all our service of God is but a round of legal duties and vain ceremonies, beginning and ending in death.

II.—But we will now pass on to the Lord's *gracious charge*: "Abide in me, and I in you." He speaks to his disciples as possessing, already possessing, union with him; for this union was to be maintained. He does not say, "Get into union with me; procure by your repeated exertions of faith and repentance union with myself, and then secure that union which you have thus procured by a steady course of unwavering obedience." But he assumes it as a possession which they already enjoyed. "I *am* the vine, ye *are* the branches." This language is clear and positive, not hesitating or doubtful. No contingency is expressed or implied; but the whole stands forth in the clear light of positive assertion as a blessing present, not future, then and there enjoyed, not to be attained unto by and by. It is as if the Lord had said, "Ye are as much now the branches as I am now the stem." Actually, at the moment when he spake to them, with all their weakness—and we know how weak they were—they were as much in him as ever they would be. They might expand and grow into larger measures of strength and fruitfulness, but they never could be more in the vine than

they were then; for it is in grace as in nature. The young bud does not insert itself into the vine, having previously had an independent self-existence apart from it; but is developed out of the stem by the innate power and energy of the tree. It does not raise itself from the ground by an act of voluntary exertion, and fixing itself upon or in the vine by a self-emanating, self-sustaining life and power, become a branch by its own activity and energy; but issues by a natural, living process out of the body of the vine. So it is spiritually. If we are branches of the living Vine, we are so by virtue of an eternal and internal union with Christ. We did not make ourselves either buds or branches, but were developed out of the stem by the power and energy of the Vine itself. As then a bud is developed out of the stem of the natural vine from a previous in-being in it, so it is in a higher and spiritual sense. There is an in-being in Christ by original union before there is a coming out of Christ by visible manifestation. And as there is an analogy between the natural and the spiritual vine as regards the original in-being of the bud, so there is a similarity in the formation of the bud into a branch. As then in spring, under the united influence of light and heat, the hitherto dormant bud becomes as if awakened into a new and active life by the flowing in of sap out of the stem, so the dormant buds in the mystical Vine, those who till this time were without any visible manifestation or evidence of union with Christ, are roused into divine life by the inflow of his grace at the appointed season. Feeling then the movements of the living sap flowing into them out of the fulness of a covenant Head, they burst through the old coat of darkness and ignorance which has bound them up in its folding leaves, and push forth into a new and surprising activity. They can no longer tarry as before, shut up as in a prison-house of unbelief, but called forth by the light and warmth of the Sun break out into open manifestation as living branches of the only true Vine. I want you to look at this in the light of your

own experience, that you may have some confirming testimony to the truth of my words. Look back then for a few moments to the time, the memorable time, when your soul was quickened from its death in sin. Was there not a free flowing in of the grace of God, communicating to it a new and hidden life? You may not be able exactly to trace the how and the why, the when and the where. The work, though genuine, might have been feeble in its first movements; the process, though real, might have been but gradual. It is so in nature. The bud usually does not make at first any sudden or extraordinary start. It begins to swell, as if there were some secret movement of life going on within. In this state it may continue for some little time; and if the weather be cold and the skies dark and gloomy, it may continue for a season swelling without bursting. But on some warm and bright day the sun shines directly upon it, and all at once, under the influence of this light and heat, it bursts forth. It was a bud; now it is a shoot; it will soon be a branch. But whether bud, shoot, or branch, it is still in union with the vine, and only moves and grows as sap flows into it; nay, the very sap itself moves only under the influence of the light and warmth of the sun. Now was there not, I will not say an exact, but still some kind of similarity to all this in the first movements of divine life in your soul? Was there not, for instance, a sensible movement of divine life in your heart analogous to the movement of sap in the spring in the natural vine; and as a fruit of those internal sensations and movements, was there not as if a swelling of soul, a sense of oppression under the closely folded leaves of darkness and bondage, out of which you longed to find, but could not realise any sensible deliverance? But one blessed day, when the light of the Sun of righteousness shone into your soul, it enabled you to burst forth out of the prison-house of unbelief, symbolised, according to my figure, by the leaves closed over the bud. Then you who were once a bud became

a shoot; and though for a long time you might remain very weak and tender, yet were thus manifested to yourself and others as a living branch.

It is in this way that we come into some experimental knowledge of our union with Christ; for wherever there is this union there will be more or less a measure of communion. Now it is to such living branches in union and communion with himself that our Lord speaks. If then we have any inward testimony of our union with Christ, and have been brought to that vital point of all true godliness that we know something experimentally of communion with him, we shall see and feel the need and importance as well as the blessedness of his gracious charge: "Abide in me." This point, then, I shall now endeavour to examine in the light of the word of truth and the experience of God's people.

You will observe that our Lord's charge runs in a preceptive form. We must not infer from this that we possess any natural power to fulfil this or any other similar injunction; but we should view it as a gracious charge laid before us by the Lord himself, presented to us by his own lips, and enforced upon our willing mind by every constraining motive of his bleeding, dying love. And we should also carefully bear in mind that if, under the teachings and operations of the blessed Spirit, we attend to and act upon our Lord's gracious injunction, we shall most certainly find the benefit and blessedness of so doing. When then he says, "Abide in me," we are bound by every godly motive to listen to his voice, to seek to know his mind and will therein, to attend to and obey it to the utmost of our power, and feeling our own inability, to beg of him to give us grace to do so.

i. But to make this point clear, let me endeavour to show you *how* we abide in him; for if I am enabled to show this

gracious mystery aright, it may be not only to you a word of instruction but of direction and encouragement; and you may be able to see from it not merely what and where you are in the divine life, but may be warned from attempting a wrong course and strengthened to walk in a right one. Let me then show you *how* we abide in Christ, and thus fulfil his charge.

1. We abide in him first by *faith*. It is only as we believe in the Son of God that we can sensibly trace out the union which our soul possesses with him. If I am in a state of unbelief, or even, though a believer, under its power and influence, there is no receiving out of Christ's fulness; there is no spiritual dealing or heavenly trading on my part with him. There is no movement of my soul in such a way towards him as my Head of influence, as my life and my all, that he honours it and manifests himself to me in answer to it. But if the Lord, by the power of his grace, be pleased to raise up and draw forth a measure of faith in my soul upon himself; if he enable me, by the teaching and influence of the blessed Spirit, to come unto him as he invites, to look to him as he bids, to hang upon him and trust in him as he draws, then there is a sensible, or if not a sensible, there is a real communication of light, life, power, and influence out of his blessed fulness, which revives, strengthens, cheers, and encourages my heart. This is abiding in him. Directly we cease to believe—and when I say cease to believe, I mean in the actings of faith—we seem to get, if I may use the expression, out of him, not virtually, not actually, but feelingly. Ministers often speak as if we were first united to Christ by faith, and maintain that union in the same way. I do not hold this doctrine. I believe that the union of the church, and consequently of every member of the church, with Christ is an eternal union, as the apostle speaks: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." (Eph. 1:4.) As then chosen in Christ before the

foundation of the world, the elect of God have an eternal union in and with him as their covenant Head. It is true that this union is not made manifest until they believe in him, or rather until they are quickened into divine life, and like the bud of which I have spoken, come forth in visible manifestation. But when they believe in him by a living faith, then they know and realise their union with him; and as this sensible union is only maintained by faith, it is by faith we also sensibly abide in him.

2. Again, we abide in him by *hope*. Do we not read that "we are saved by hope?" (Rom. 8:24.) What is the meaning of being saved by hope? It does not mean saved actually, but instrumentally; not saved as regards our eternal security, but as regards our experience of salvation. By hope we are instrumentally saved from despair, saved from turning our backs upon Christ and the gospel, saved from looking to any other Saviour, or any other salvation; and especially saved from making this world and this life our happiness and home, as "waiting patiently for what we see not," even "the redemption of our body." Now it is by hope that we hang upon and cleave to the Lord Jesus, and thus by this grace we abide in him. It is therefore spoken of as an "anchor of the soul both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that which is within the veil." What holds the ship firm in the storm and prevents it falling upon the rocks? The anchor. The ship abides firm as long as the anchor holds. So by hope the soul abides in Christ. He is within the veil; we are without, and it may be tossed up and down on a sea of doubt and fear, distress and anxiety; and yet there is a bond of union between him and us firmer than the Atlantic cable.

3. We also abide in him by *love*. We know naturally what an abiding bond love is. When we cleave to our wives or our children, or our friends, how close and firm is that union,

because cemented by love; and so when we cleave to the saints of God in love and affection, it forms one of the strongest bonds that can knit soul to soul. But how much more does the bond of love strengthen and cement union and communion with Christ. His love revealed to the soul and shed abroad in the heart, drawing out love to him in return, forms the strongest of all ties and the closest of all bonds.

4. We abide in him also by the *fear of God*, for the fear of God is a blessed covenant grace, of which the Lord himself has said, "I will plant my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." Thus, as the fear of God springs up in a believing soul, and is maintained and kept alive by the influences which come out of Christ as a covenant Head, it produces, as its effects, an abiding in him. We cannot depart from him through the fear of God. It is therefore called "a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death." If a fountain of life, it must be fed out of him who is the life; and as it departs from the snares of death, it cleaves more fully and closely to him as these snares are broken to pieces and left behind. If we examine the movements of godly fear in our hearts, we shall see that all tendencies are toward life and the Source of life; toward hatred of sin and love of holiness; toward a desire after the enjoyment of heavenly realities, and a deadness to the things of time and sense; toward a knowledge of Christ in the manifestation of himself, and a longing to live more to his praise, to walk more in his footsteps, and to be more conformed to his suffering image. Now, as none of these things can be produced but by union with Christ and abiding in him, we see how the fear of God helps forward and is needful to this abiding. For directly that the fear of God burns low in the soul, there is a gradual withdrawing from, and a sensible declining of this abiding in Christ.

5. But we abide in him also by *patience*, or, as the word more strictly means, "endurance." How we see this grace of patience or endurance manifested in the saints of God, whose experience is recorded in the word of truth. How firmly, through patience, Abraham abode by the promise that he should have a son by Sarah: "And so after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise." (Heb. 6:15.) James tells us, "Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord." (James 5:11.) He patiently endured all his trials and afflictions, and found in the end how blessed it was to abide by his hope in the Lord. So, we, in our measure, abide in union with the Lord by the grace of patience, for by this heavenly grace, and the strength communicated by it, we are preserved from giving way to unbelief, or sinking under the weight and pressure of our trials and afflictions. "Tribulation," we read, "worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope;" and thus, as patiently bearing what the Lord may lay upon us, we are not beaten out of our faith or beaten down by despair, but are enabled to stand firm to our post, and keep our ground, not fearing the wrath of our adversaries, nor giving way to all the opposition which may be arrayed against us from without and from within, in order that we may still, in spite of all, maintain union and communion with our gracious Lord.

ii. But there are certain *means* which the Lord has kindly afforded, whereby our faith, and hope, and love, our godly fear and patience, these divine graces the power and effects of which I have just shown, may be all strengthened, watered, and kept alive. Let me name some of these means of grace.

1. First, there is the diligent and prayerful *reading of the word*. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all

wisdom." (Col. 3:16.) Now this surely means something more than merely reading the word in a careless, formal manner. It is "to dwell in us," that is, take up its firm and lasting abode in our heart, and that "richly;" not poorly and niggardly, but copiously and abundantly, unfolding to us and putting us into possession of the wealth of its treasures; and that in "all wisdom," making us wise to salvation, opening up to us the manifold wisdom of God, and how it displays itself in the great mystery of godliness. Now, we shall not attain to this rich and heavenly wisdom unless we search and study the Scriptures with prayer and supplication to understand what the Holy Ghost has revealed therein, and what he is pleased to unfold therefrom of the will and way of God for our own personal instruction and consolation. We very easily fall off from abiding in Christ; nor can we expect to keep up sensible union and communion with the Lord Jesus, if we neglect those means of grace which the Holy Ghost has provided for the sustentation of the life of God in the soul. When we get cold, sluggish, and dead, to read the word of God is a task and a burden; but not so, when the life of God is warm and gushing in the soul. Then, to read his holy word with prayer and supplication, entering by faith into its hidden treasures, and drinking into the mind of Christ as revealed therein, is a blessed means of maintaining the life of God in the heart, and keeping up that union and communion with Christ which we hope we have from time to time enjoyed. Never, perhaps, was the Bible more read, and never, perhaps, less understood, less felt, less tasted, less handled, less enjoyed, and above all, less acted on than in our day.

But if reading the word under divine influence is so blessed, how much more is it when the Holy Spirit applies it to the heart; when there is some sweet breaking up of the word of truth in some gracious promise, or the application of some part that speaks of Jesus, or that holds forth some

encouragement to our languid faith.

2. *Prayer and supplication*, I need not mention, is also another special means of grace to enable us to abide in Christ. Indeed, I may say, that without it it is impossible sensibly to abide in him. When the breath of prayer is faint and languid in the soul, when there are few desires after the Lord, there is no sensible abiding in him as a branch in the Vine, so as to receive out of his fulness.

3. Another means of grace is *assembling* ourselves with the people of God at the seasons of public worship. The ordinance of preaching and united prayer should never be neglected by any who fear God. It is indeed a precious privilege to join with the ransomed family in hearing the word, singing his praises, and meeting together as a family in his house. Nor can we hope to abide in union and communion with the Lord and his people, if we neglect the house of prayer and make lazy excuses why we should not come up to worship in his courts. In fact, to very many of the family of God, who are toiling and labouring all through the week to earn the bread which perisheth, there is no sweeter or more suitable means of grace than the preached word on the Lord's day; and to some it seems almost the only one fully available.

4. The *ordinances* of God's house were also instituted by our most gracious Lord as a means of maintaining the life of God in the soul, and thus keeping up union and communion with himself. Baptism is an ordinance which God has much blessed, not only to those who, in obedience to his revealed will, have gone through it, but to those who have witnessed its celebration. How beautifully and blessedly it sets forth the union of the church with her covenant Head in his death, burial, and resurrection, in his sufferings and sorrows, when

he could of a truth say, "All thy billows and thy waves have gone over me." The Lord's Supper, in which figuratively we eat his flesh and drink his blood, is a blessed means also of keeping up and maintaining the life of God in the soul, and cementing our union with the Lord and his people.

5. *Associating* ourselves in spiritual intercourse with the dear family of God, making them our choice friends and bosom companions, and taking sweet converse together in speaking of the Lord's word and the Lord's work, is a blessed means of keeping up and maintaining in vigorous exercise the life of God in the soul. How often are we strengthened and encouraged, cheered and comforted by our intercourse with the spiritually minded, of whom, alas! there are few, of the family of God. From them we get sometimes a word to help us in the path of temptation, as finding them no strangers to it; and at others, the example of their liberality, consistency, self-denial, and practical godliness, whilst it may cast us down at our own dissimilarity, may yet stir us up to walk more closely with God as we see them to walk.

6. Private *meditation*, close and frequent self-examination, leading a life of separation from the world, being much alone with the Lord and ourselves, in searching his word for direction, and often looking up to the God of all our mercies for the support that he is able to communicate; this path, though sadly neglected, for in our day as in the days of Jael, "this high way of holiness is much unoccupied, and travellers now walk through by-ways" (Judges 5:6), yet, is, when persevered in, a most blessed means of abiding in Christ.

These are the Lord's appointed means of maintaining his own life in our breast; and if you will search the Scriptures you will see how continually they are spoken of either in the form of precept or that of example. Compare, for instance, with

what I have laid down, the Psalms, and especially Psalm 119, and the precepts and directions of our Lord in the gospels, and of his inspired apostles in the epistles, and I think you will find I have traced out a scriptural path. And O the blessedness of abiding in Christ, in sensible union and communion with him so as to talk with Jesus, hold intercourse with him, receive his gracious promises as he has revealed them, sit under his shadow with some measure of delight, and find his fruit sweet to our taste. But we cannot attain to all this by sloth, carelessness, and indifference; by that easy, loose, slipshod profession so rife in the present day, just as if all religion consists in believing a few doctrines, and adopting a few set phrases without any vital operation of the Holy Spirit upon the heart. One thing, at least, is very evident, that the Lord would not have said to his people, "Abide in me," unless there were an abiding in him on our part as well as an abiding of him in us on his. You will perceive how he unites them together. "Abide in me, and I in you," as if he should say, "My charge is, Abide in me; but do not think it remains with you to do it, or that you possess any such power, except as I work it in you by Spirit and grace." The Lord guards us well against any self-righteous idea, that without him we can do it; for he tells us implicitly, "Without me, ye can do nothing." "The branch can not bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine." When, therefore, he says, "Abide in me," he immediately adds, "And I in you." Why do ye abide in me? Because I abide in you. How are ye able to abide in me? By my abiding in you. He therefore puts them together: "Abide in me, and I in you."

iii. But *how* does the Lord abide in us? I have shown you or endeavoured to show you how we abide in him; I must now take up the other side of the question, and show how he abides in us. As we must be in him before we can abide in him, so he must be in us before he can abide in us. He

therefore must first come to us before he can take up his abode in our hearts. Till the Lord has given us some visitation of his presence, some manifestation of his Person and work, and some discovery of himself in the word that we may see him by the eye of faith, receive him into our heart as the Son and Christ of God, and find and feel him precious as revealed to us by the power of the Holy Ghost, there is no coming of the Lord into our souls; and, therefore, he cannot abide where he is not come. Many of the dear children of God are tossed up and down on a sea of great uncertainty, doubt, and fear, because they have not had these sensible manifestations of Christ to their soul. He has not come into them in the power of his love; still they often say, "When wilt thou come unto me? O visit me with thy salvation; speak a word to my soul; it is thyself, and thyself alone, I want to hear, to see, and to know." Now these are drawings of the gracious Lord, the secret beginnings of his coming, the heralds of his approach, the dawning of the day before the morning star arises and the sun follows upon his track. But when the Lord does come in any sweet manifestation of his presence or of his power, then he will abide where he has come, for he never leaves or forsakes a soul which he has once visited. He may seem to do so; he may withdraw himself; and then who can behold him? But he never really leaves the temple which he has once adorned and sanctified with his presence. Christ is formed in the hearts of his people the hope of glory; their body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, and Christ dwells in them by faith. Though we often mourn over his absence and do not feel his gracious presence as we would, still he is there, if he has once come. But he is to abide; and how he does this I shall now endeavour to show you.

1. First, then, he abides in his people by that wherein he came: viz., *by his presence*. Whenever the Lord is pleased to

manifest his presence to any of his dear family, there he abides as long as his presence lasts; and as he never will withdraw himself from any of them fully or finally, he now and then shows his presence. It is almost like the court of an earthly sovereign. The sovereign has apartments of his own, where he keeps himself sequestered and retired from his court. They may inhabit the same palace, but only—especially in eastern countries—only at rare times does he come and visit them. So it is in divine things. The Lord is never out of the palace, but he sequesters himself and lives in his own, so to speak, private apartments, in those glorious heavens which he fills with the blaze of his divine Majesty. But now and then he will glance through the lattice, and give a passing visit to those who resort to his earthly courts, and thus cheer and gladden their hearts.

2. He abides in us also by *his word*: "Let the word of Christ dwell richly in you." He therefore says, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will." Thus, by the power of his word upon the conscience, by the application of his truth to the heart, by the promises, the invitations, the glorious truths, and the sweet declarations with which he has filled the Scriptures, the Lord first comes to, and then abides with his people. When we can believe the promise, there is a fulfilment of it by taking hold of Jesus as the great promiser. When there is an invitation which falls sweetly upon the soul, and we can avail ourselves of it and make use of it, that is a renewed pledge that he is abiding in us. When there is a gracious belief of any word, any declaration, any scriptural truth, which seems to fall with a measure of sweetness and savour upon the heart, Christ abides in the soul by virtue of that sweetness and savour which he communicates through the word.

3. But Christ abides in his people chiefly by his *Spirit*,

according to John's testimony: "And hereby we know that he abideth in us by the Spirit which he hath given us." He, therefore, dwells in us mainly by his Spirit; for the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ as coming from him and testifying of him. Paul, therefore, puts them together, "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. And if Christ be in you" (Rom. 8:9, 10), clearly showing that where the Spirit of God dwells, there Christ is.

III.—But what is the sure and unerring *test* of our abiding in Christ and his abiding in us? The production of *fruit*. "He that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit." Fruit is that which God expects to see in every one who names the name of Christ, for fruit is that whereby we are manifested as living branches. Solemn is the warning which the Lord gives in this chapter to fruitless, graceless professors: "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away." Every branch, therefore, that bears not fruit, is under the solemn sentence of excision. Of course, the Lord does not mean that those branches which are unfruitful were really in him by living union; but they were in him by their own profession of it. He therefore takes them on their own ground; he speaks to them as occupying in their own eyes and others a certain visible position. If you take the name of Christ into your lips, if you call yourself a Christian, if you say "Lord, Lord," if you are a member of a Christian church, the Lord takes you on that assumption, and speaks of you as a branch in himself—the result proving whether in him vitally or in him nominally. So that as to bear no fruit is a certain work of excision, so to bear fruit is a certain mark of union and communion. Now there is no bearing fruit to his honour, praise, and glory, except by our abiding in him and by his abiding in us.

But what is it to bear fruit? Here we are often mistaken. There is inward fruit and there is outward fruit. We must look at the inward before the outward; for the apostle in recounting the fruits of the Spirit in the Epistle to the Galatians gives us a long catalogue of them; and you will find they are nearly all internal. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Only two out of the fruits named are outward, and even they are partly inward—"meekness and temperance."

The first in this catalogue is "*love*." This love we may consider as embracing the whole of our love to the Lord, to his ways, to his people, and to his truth; mainly and chiefly however to the Lord, because he is so worthy of all our love; and, secondarily, to his dear people, because they carry about a resemblance to him. The next fruit is "*joy*," as rejoicing in the Lord for what he is in himself and what he has done for our soul, which we only can do by abiding in him, and maintaining union and communion in the way that I have spoken of. The third is "*peace*," as flowing into the soul through the blood of the Lamb, which peace can only be kept up by virtue of abiding in him in faith, and hope, and love. The next is "*long-suffering*," bearing patiently injuries, oppression, and all that the malice of men and Satan may devise against us or lay upon us, as knowing it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong, and better to suffer affliction with Christ than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. The fifth is "*gentleness*," as being melted, softened, and humbled by a sense of his undeserved grace and the riches of his mercy, and putting away from us all wrath and clamour, violence of temper, peevish and passionate words, and everything inconsistent with the meekness and gentleness of Christ. "*Goodness*," also, is another fruit by which is meant

kindness, tenderness, and a loving spirit to the family of God and doing them what good we can. "*Faith*" stands next on the list into which I need not enter, as having spoken so much upon it already; and then come the closing fruits of "*meekness and temperance.*"

Now with all these internal fruits, and in proportion to them, there will be the *external* fruits of a consistent, godly, and upright life, living separate from the world, and adorning the doctrine by bringing forth those fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ unto the praise and honour of God.

Now look at these things in the way that I have endeavoured to bring them this morning before you. You know, all of you that have received any measure of divine teaching, that without Christ you can do nothing. You are deeply and painfully convinced you can no more bear fruit of yourself than a branch can bear fruit except it abide in the vine. But this has been, and ever will be, a difficulty in your way—the secret of abiding in Christ; for you find, as we all find, so many things to draw you away from this abiding in him. The whole spirit, the whole tendency of the flesh is to draw us from Christ into the world and into self. We have therefore to maintain such a continual battle without and within against the world, against Satan, against sin and self, in any way to abide in Christ, in any way to keep up and maintain the life of God in the soul, and to be receiving out of his gracious fulness those supplies without which we can bear no fruit to his honour and glory. And yet we feel the misery of not abiding in him; the strength which it gives to sin and temptation; the power which it seems to put against us into the hands of Satan; the guilt which it lays upon the conscience; the occasion it furnishes to the adversary; the leanness which it brings into our own soul; the state of poverty and death which we are reduced to by it. All these

things testify to the misery of not abiding in Christ, and to urge and stimulate us to seek more earnestly to abide continually in him.

But in the depths of his infinite mercy, in the tenderness of his love, the Lord is graciously pleased from time to time to revive his work upon our heart in answer to our lamentations and complaints of our poverty. He has a tender, sympathising, affectionate heart, and he comes to the rescue when all is gone but himself. He drops in a kind word, or gives a gracious touch; he affords some renewal or revival of faith, hope, and love, and thus he teaches us again the blessedness of abiding in him by his abiding in us. Still, however, he graciously charges us, "Abide in me. Do not leave me, as I will not leave you. Do not forsake me, as I will never forsake you. Keep close to my wounded side, hang upon me, look unto me, cleave unto me with purpose of heart, and lay aside all those hindrances which keep thee from abiding in me, whatever they be. Be it a right hand, be it a right eye, cut it off, pluck it out, part with anything and everything which hinders abiding in me.

Thus we learn, after a long struggle it may be with sin, self, and the world, the blessedness of abiding in Christ, the firmness of every word which he has spoken, and his faithfulness to his own promises, the end of which is to see ourselves the vilest of the vile, and him the chiefest among ten thousand and altogether lovely—to see ourselves less and worse than nothing, and him, God over all, blessed for ever.