

Union and Communion

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[0 : 0 0] Heavenly Father, I ask that you would pour out the Holy Spirit upon me and upon all who listen to this sermon. Father, you know how easy it is, how addicted we are to wanting to sink back into religion or spirituality.

We thank you, Father, that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. And so, Father, we ask that the Holy Spirit would bring this passage of Scripture home very deeply to our hearts, that we might, Father, believe the gospel and that we might grow and be shaped in and by the gospel.

And I ask all of these things, Father, in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Folks, thank you for listening in. If you're listening to this online, it's going to sound a little bit different if you've listened to some of my other sermons.

And it's going to be a bit of a different sermon as well. And the reason is that I preached this sermon on Sunday. I can't remember the date right now. And it got lost.

It was recorded. But when we went to listen to the recording, it was all just hisses and odd little electronic noises. So I am standing in an empty room speaking over my iPhone.

[1 : 2 8] And it's Saturday, like a week after I preached this sermon. And I'm redoing the sermon, so to speak. But I'm doing it on an iPhone, which is why it sounds a little bit different, to an empty room.

And so it's going to feel a little bit different for me and for you. But for a variety of reasons, we felt it was good to still record as much of the sermon as I could sort of recreate.

It will obviously be very different standing in an empty room by myself than it would be being in a room where we've sung together and prayed together and done all those other things.

So anyway, and listen, one of the very first things I should just let you know, this sermon will, you'll understand the first bit of this sermon a lot better if you go online and you get my first point.

And you just have that on the screen while I talk to you. Anyway, here we go. Here we go. So listen, one of the, you know, I've been a minister for a long time. I was ordained in 1985, and one of the things which has been a very, very, very common phenomenon throughout my years of ordained ministry is that there'll be a couple or an individual who's been very, very active in the church, have all sorts of reasons to believe they're a Christian, they've received the gospel, they believe the gospel.

[2 : 5 4] And then all of a sudden you start seeing them a little bit less, and then you realize one day that you haven't actually seen them for a while. And you call them up and have a bit of a conversation with them.

And it turns out often, not always, but often that they've had a great setback, maybe in their finances, a great setback in their marriage, a great setback in their, with their children, maybe a great moral failing, or just some other great setback that's happened.

And because of this setback, whether it be finances or in terms of, you know, maybe their marriage is in deep, deep trouble, or they're having deep problems with their kids or some other moral failing, it's as if they feel they can't go to church.

And it's been a very, very, very common phenomenon with it. And, you know, in some ways, what this illustrates is something that non-Christians say to me when I'm actually able to get to a point of being able to describe the gospel to them.

And here's what happens. When I, you know, time and time again, when I actually get to a point where we've had several talks about the gospel, and one of the things I'll start to tell them about the gospel is I'll try to make a contrast between the gospel and religion or the gospel and spirituality.

[4 : 14] And I'll say, you know, in Christianity, it's, the gospel means good news, not good advice, not good rules, not good rituals, not good institutions, but good news.

Good news that comes from God. That Jesus, God has done something that human beings cannot do for themselves. No human being can. And that God, in the person of God, the Son of God, the Father, in the person of God, the Son of God, that Jesus came and he lived the life that we could not live because he lived a perfect life of unbroken communion with the Father.

And he died the death that we deserved. He died a death on the cross. And when you see or hear or think about Jesus dying on the cross, you are to understand that every wrong thing that we have ever done and ever will do, and any source of shame or accusation, everything that would count us, that there could be some type of valid accusation against us, some moral wrongdoing upon which restitution or justice is demanded, every wrong thing that we have done when Jesus dies on the cross, the penalty or the justice that we could not endure, he endures for us.

And it's not just that in Jesus, every single wrong thing we ever have done and ever will do has all been dealt with on the cross. It's not just that. It's not just a taking away.

But then as well as that, there's this other aspect that when we, in a sense, put our hands out or we reach by our mind out to Jesus and ask him to become our Savior and Lord, it's Jesus who crosses that infinite distance and comes to us and takes us.

[6 : 03] And it's when we touch Jesus, so to speak, because we've desired him to be our Savior and Lord. And in that touching of him or his touching of us, it's as if all of our, as I said, all of our wrongdoings and the justice which is demanded and the, is all laid on him and he pays that price we cannot pay.

But as well as that, all of the good works, the perfect life that we were never able to live and can never possibly live, that stands for us. It's called the imputation of Christ's righteousness, if you want to know a bit of a more, like a theological term.

And it's a, there's a double action of, of the pain of all the debt or the satisfying of justice and this bestowing in a sense of Jesus's perfect life and standing for us.

And every time I've gotten to a point without fail that I've been able to say this to a non-Christian, every single time without fail, they say, if that is true, George, then what, what on earth is the motivation for you to ever do a good thing again for the rest of your life?

Like, what is the motivation for you to do a good thing ever again for the rest of your life? It removes all motivation, is what they would say. Now, I, you know, it's interesting.

[7 : 19] What does this have to do with the story of the Christian? Well, the story of the Christian is very, very simple. That it's actually, there's a very clear tie-in to it, you see. Because actually what happens to the Christian who stops going to church because there's some moral failing which has been discovered, or because their finances have suffered and they're not successful financially, or that there's deep trouble with their children so they're not successful as parents, or there's some deep trouble in their marriage so they're not successful in their marriage, is, and they no longer feel they can go to church, is what that reveals is they actually think that, well, actually what they think is that the thing that allowed them to be a Christian was their ability to keep those rules.

You see, what they haven't sort of grasped is that their standing with God, their righteousness with God had nothing to do with whether or not they had a failure in their marriage.

That when Jesus died on the cross for them, he knew about their future sins, and those also were covered. But they start to come to believe that it's their righteous accomplishments that actually allow them to stand in God's presence rather than the finished work of Christ.

It's a sort of a linked idea. And what John 15 is a sense, that's what we're going to be looking at. Get your Bibles out. We're going to be looking at it in a moment. Although what's going to be a bit unusual about this sermon is we need to do a lot of work up front to try to understand John 15.

In other words, the overall message of John 15, I have to try to bring that home to you before you start to look at the bits and pieces. Otherwise, what's going to happen is we're going to be reading this text and we keep getting confused by it and we get confused by it because what happens is we sink into a religious or spiritual way of understanding the text, not a gospel way of understanding the text.

[9 : 18] So if you look at the first slide, the first slide, it has on the top of the slide, it says the way of religion and spirituality.

And underneath that, the way of religion and spirituality underlined, there is the word fruit and then an arrow that points to the word communion and then an arrow that points to the word union.

And there's other words that I can use for this, but I'm using the basic words or concepts which are found in John 15 because John 15 is going to really help us to understand how it is that the gospel still is the basis and shapes us living a life that is in fact becoming moral or seeks to be moral or virtuous and courageous and all of that.

And underneath that is another sentence that says, the way according to the good news, underlined, the way according to the good news, that's underlined. And underneath that has the word union with an arrow pointing towards the word communion and then an arrow that points to the words fruit.

So I don't know if you can picture it. On the top line is the way of religion and spirituality and it's the word fruit pointing to communion, pointing to union. And underneath that, directly underneath that, you'll see this thing, the way according to the good news, and you'll notice that it's completely and utterly reversed.

[10 : 40] The first word is union that leads to communion, which then leads to fruit. Now, a way to understand the way of religion and spirituality, and by the way, I think this covers all religions and all spiritualities.

In Canada, often people will talk as if spirituality is different than religion. Like, you know, they're putting together their own spiritual path or spiritual way.

But fundamentally, the idea, this captures what is at work, whether you're a Buddhist or whether you're a Muslim or whether you're a Hindu or whether you are crafting your own combination of different elements to have your own spiritual life or spiritual path, is that the word fruit really stands for accomplishments.

It usually means moral or religious or spiritual accomplishments that are worthy within that type of system. And you can think of the word communion as meaning access to God and or conversation to God, and union is the goal.

So what happens in the way of religion and the way of spirituality is that you embark on this and you start to try to achieve or accomplish good things. Not necessarily by yourself.

[12 : 01] It might be that you're part of a coven or that you're part of a mosque or that you're part of a synagogue or that you're part of a temple or part of a club, but you seek to accomplish good things.

You learn how to maybe do some yoga or some meditation or you begin to be a bit more charitable in terms of giving with some generosity.

Or you, you know, like if you're a Muslim, you fast during Ramadan and you make the trip to Mecca and you, you give to the poor.

And if you're a Buddhist, you know, there's the, the, the, the path or the way that you have to do and there's meditation you have to learn. But what happens is you begin by these types of accomplishments or achievements, which you do either by, but you still do it, whether you're doing it all by yourself or in company with other people.

But there's these accomplishments, this fruit that happens to be in your life. And the hope is that as you are able to, to be having more kind acts or more generous acts or more forgiving acts or whatever it is, that if you are good at that and you reach a certain level, then what happens is you have access to God.

[13 : 12] However you define God, whether it's the Buddhist way or the Hindu way or the Muslim way or your own spiritual way, you now, because you have the right habits, the right, you're, you're starting to do, you're becoming a bit of a better person.

Now you have access to God, communication with God. And so now you not only keep on doing the good fruit, the good works, because you don't leave that behind. It's, it's like the step on a ladder.

And, you know, just because if you, if you, if the, if the bottom rungs of the ladder aren't there holding the ladder together, it doesn't matter if you're up higher, the whole thing will fall. So you continue to do the good things, but now you qualify, so to speak, for having better access or better and better access to God or to the spiritual or to whatever that is.

And, and the hope is that maybe if you're able to not only do the good works well or the fruit, have the fruit well and have the right type of access and the right type of conversations or the right type of mystical experiences or whatever it is, then the end game is you might, and in Buddhism and Hinduism, it might take you many, many lifetimes and many reincarnations, but that you might eventually have actual union with God.

And then it all comes to an end. You've, you've reached the end. And that's the way of religion and spirituality. And, and in a sense, if you think about it, the Christian couple, couples that I'm talking about are individuals.

[14 : 35] They, in fact, are, are falling into this type of thing is that they believe that what they need to be able to have access to the God, to God, and to, to maybe one day to have union with God is their good, their, the fruit of their, their lives, like a good marriage or good finances or good kids or being married period, or just not having moral failings.

And if that fruit is not there, then they can't go to church because they don't deserve or cannot have access to God. It's, it's the way of religion and spirituality. But what we're going to see in John 15, and this is at the very heart of the gospel, it's a very, very heart of the gospel, is that Jesus is going to tell us something completely and utterly shocking.

It's as I've described earlier, that God looks at us. Well, actually, I should back up. It's very, very interesting that in Canada, it used to be maybe 10 or 15 years ago that I would talk to many people who would tell me that they were religious, but not spiritual.

I mean, sorry, back that up. Spiritual, but not religious. I find very few people who are younger who say that to me now, that they're spiritual or not religious. What they'll say is that they're, they have no religion.

They're, they're a nun, N-O-N-E. Doesn't, and then they might qualify. So it doesn't mean I don't have some depths or, you know, that I don't think about things seriously. I'm not shallow. I mean, that they'll often say something like that.

[15:56] But, you know, fundamentally, you know, what they say increasingly in our culture, I think what happens is that people would say, and that's why those who would say they have no religion and no spirituality is growing and growing and growing as a percentage of the population.

They would say, listen, religion and spirituality doesn't work. You might say there's a difference between being spiritual and being religious, but the fact of the matter is, is it doesn't work. Uh, what happens is, uh, religion or spirituality, it just makes you insecure.

It makes you self-righteous. It makes you self-justifying. It makes you hypocritical. It makes you foolish. It usually ends up wasting your time and it usually ends up making you poor.

And you should just forget about it all. You know, I mean, it, it does make these things in you. You start to go around and act as if somehow or another your poop smells better than other people's poop.

But the fact of the matter is it smells just as bad. Everybody's poop smells bad. And, and, and so the, there's this very increasingly cultural, uh, critique of both religion and spirituality along these lines, that it makes you insecure, uh, self-righteous, self-justifying, hypocritical, foolish, waste your time, and often makes you poorer and, and maybe even dumber.

[17:10] And the interesting thing is, is that in a sense, Jesus would clap his hands and say, way to go. So everything you say is something that I agree with you on.

And the shocking thing is people say, well, how on earth could you believe this, say that Jesus? And then Jesus says, because I have come to tell you a completely and utterly different way. I mean, the fact of the matter is, is that the gospel is good news.

It's a completely and utterly different way. It is God looking down at human beings whom he loves and knowing that human beings have chosen to walk away from God and have become addicted to walking away from God.

And even when they want to walk towards God, it's as if we human beings are addicted to thinking that it has to be that we accomplish certain things. And then we can have, and then we can achieve accomplishment to God, uh, to, to access to God.

And then we can achieve union with God. And it's all about our actions and me doing and me doing. And God looks down and knows that we can't do it. That will always be a failure. That it will always just be a type of illusion.

[18:12] That it will always lead to hypocrisy. And it will always lead to, um, to, uh, self-justification and making yourself look righteous, even though you aren't, or pretending you're righteous.

It will lead to make-believe and foolishness. And, and the good news is that God knows that you cannot reach him by your own efforts. And the spectacular news is that God in the person of his son, God the father in the person of his son, uh, has done everything that has to be done to make a human being right with him.

Every single thing with nothing left over that had to be done for a human being to be made right with, with, uh, God has been done by Jesus. It's his sinless life.

It's God, the son of God, taking on our human nature, becoming fully human, living a fully human life only without sin, suffering the temptations to sin just like we do only without sin.

And he dies on the cross, taking upon himself in a sense, the doom that we deserved and offering and in exchange, because he is our substitute and offering in exchange, the destiny that he deserved.

[19 : 26] And when we put our hands in the hands of Jesus, when our mind and our heart reaches out to trust Jesus as our savior and Lord, God does this wonderful work.

He really does come and he takes us and he makes us right with himself. He makes us one with himself by his grace alone.

And we access by faith alone in Jesus alone. And in the gospel, it begins with union. And what we're going to see in John's gospel is that Jesus explains then how it is that moral and personal, personal transformation works is that it begins by union and out of union on the basis of that union, out of the security that we have been made right with God by what Jesus has done for us on the cross.

Out of that union flows communion or conversation. And out of that conversation, the Bible is going to use the word, Jesus is going to use the word abiding, like dwelling, living, that out of this, but it's not just like an abiding as if you don't have any neighbors.

It's abiding in the presence of Christ in, we're going to look at that in conversation and in listening and in obedience and all of what that means.

[20 : 49] And out of that flows fruit, but it all comes out of union. It's the natural outflow of union that out of this union with God that comes by faith in Jesus Christ, that out of that comes communion or abiding or dwelling.

And out of that comes fruit. The entire problem is that we human beings in our minds and our hearts are addicted to the other model of fruit leading to communion, leading to union.

And so it is so powerful that even when we read the words of Jesus, we keep getting tripped up because we want to fit the words of Jesus into the model of fruit leading to communion, leading to union.

And we need to hear and understand that Jesus is pointing a far better way, a far, far, far better way. So now maybe we're ready to look at the Bible. So we're halfway through the sermon.

Now we're going to go through the Bible text fairly quickly because you've got the big idea. Now you'll hear John 15 in the way it is intended to be heard, not in the way George wants you to hear it, but in the way that it's intended to be heard by Jesus.

[21 : 59] And so if you turn your Bibles to John chapter 15, that's what we're looking at. And just to get the context, John's gospel is a biography of Jesus, a true biography of Jesus written by an eyewitness.

In fact, one of his very closest disciples. And it's telling the true story of Jesus. John provides a very intimate portrait of Jesus. And what John is doing is, you know, he showed some miracles and other things earlier on in his biography.

And then in John chapter 13, 14, John chapter 13 is a very important chapter in terms of Jesus washing his disciples' feet. And at a time of great intimacy, Judas, one of Jesus' disciples, that's the moment he decides that he really is going to go ahead and he really is going to betray Jesus.

And Judas leaves. He goes off into darkness. And now Jesus is all in the room, alone in the room. The Passover supper has been eaten. And Jesus knows as he's speaking that he is this later on this evening, that he is going to be captured by soldiers because Judas is on his way to find the soldiers.

Go to where he knows that he can capture Jesus quietly. And Jesus knows that that evening he is going to be captured. He knows that the next day he is going to die a painful death upon the cross.

[23 : 19] And he's also, of course, been predicting his resurrection. And the disciples don't understand any of this. In John chapter 13, he shocked them by saying that one of them, one of the 12, is going to betray him.

They don't know who that is. He shocked them by saying that he's going to be going somewhere that they can't come. And that shocked them. And he shocked them by saying that even Peter, like one of the leaders, maybe the leader of the disciples, that Peter himself will deny Jesus three times before the rooster crows the next day.

And so they're all in shock. And in John chapter 14, Jesus, Jesus, in John 13, Jesus is explaining this. John 14, Jesus is comforting his disciples. And now in John 15, he goes to this next part of this conversation with his disciples.

And it begins like this. And this verse is key. These first few verses are key, but especially this first verse is very key. It's picking up in a different image something that Jesus has said in John chapter 14.

And it's very, very key to understand throughout the rest of the chapter. And it goes like this. I am the true vine. Jesus says, I am the true vine. And my father is the vine dresser.

[24 : 31] I'll say it again. I am the true vine. And my father is the vine dresser. Now, just sort of pause on this. It's a key analogy, which is now going to unfold.

Just notice as well is that it's another one of the, I think it's the final of the I am statements in the gospel. And it's also an implicit claim to divinity.

The I am. In Exodus 3, when God reveals himself to Moses, he says, I am. It's how he reveals himself. And Jesus has solemnly used this I am statement with his disciples seven times.

And this is another one. I am. He's making the claim, this human being, that he is also God, the son of God. I am the true vine. And my father is the vine dresser. And then it continues, every branch in me that does not, verse two, every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he, that's the father, takes away.

And every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes, that's the father prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

[25 : 42] Now, just sort of pause here for a second. And this is actually very important because it begins to be right here that we start to slip in, that the way our minds are addicted to this model of fruit leading to communion leading to union.

And it's so addicted to that, it's hard for us to grasp. But Jesus is teaching that the way goes the other way. But notice what Jesus is saying. He says he's picturing that there's he is a vine and he's describing you and me as branches in the vine.

In other words, it begins with union. It begins with union, the branch in union with the vine. He's going to unpack that a little bit more by these other ideas of abiding and what that fully means and fruit.

But right now there's a vine with branches and the branches are, in a sense, in union with the vine. And that is where we begin. And then our minds want to try to turn it into religion because we get troubled with this idea of the father pruning some of the branches.

And as if, okay, we only stay in, in union with God as if we're able to produce fruit. But that's what we have to understand. There's a bit of a clue here about how to interpret that correctly and what Jesus is referring to.

[26 : 57] And it's obvious in the original language, not as obvious in the English. And that is in the original language, the word prune can also be translated as clean.

It has two different, depending on the context, it has two meanings. And in John chapter 13, the main image in John chapter 13 is around the image of clean because Jesus has washed his disciples' feet and they are clean.

And he talks about being clean quite a few times. And in John chapter, so when Jesus now here is using this word clean, he's reminding the disciples of what he's just said a few minutes earlier in a different context.

And in that context, remember, he's talking about the betrayer. And he's, in a sense, talking about Judas who has left. So what the pruning here is, is a warning against false profession.

In a sense, it's a warning about false profession. You know, throughout the history of the church, one of the people who attends my church is a PhD in church history.

[28 : 00] But, you know, I said something about this and he didn't correct me. The fact of the matter is, is that all of the great heretics in the church usually are priests or bishops. All of the great heretics, all of the great heresies that have troubled the church are usually taught by bishops or priests, presbyters, pastors or leaders.

And if you go through the book of Acts, you'll see that there's this constant problem of people who appear to be Christians, claim to be Christians, but they have false profession. And Judas appeared to be a disciple.

He was a disciple. He claimed, in a sense, often to believe in Jesus, but it actually was a false profession. He never gave his life to Jesus. And he's now off to betray him. And so the Jesus here is going to be warning us here in another, the next little bit about this, this danger of false profession.

That you can be in the church. You can appear to, you know how to sing the praise songs. You know how to say the creed. You know how to say the prayers. But the fact of the matter is, is you can be there doing all those religious acts, appearing righteous, but fundamentally you've never actually given your life to Christ.

And it's a problem of false profession. That's what's being talked about here. Now it continues. Now remember verse, remember how I described everything, how the way of the gospel, it goes from union to communion, or the word abiding, or being present to fruit.

[29 : 24] Listen now to verses four and five. Abide in me, abide in me, and I in you. As the branch, listen again to Jesus, abide in me, verse four, and I in you.

As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches.

Whoever abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. For apart from me, you can do nothing. Now notice here, we're going to describe in a moment, Jesus is going to help us unpack in a moment what it means to abide, or to dwell, or to reside, or to commune.

He's going to unpack that himself in a couple of minutes. But you see, it begins with union, the branch in union with the vine. And now he's saying, on top of this union with the vine, he's going to ask that you abide.

And as we are in union with the vine, or in union with Jesus, and we abide with him, that we will bear fruit. That's the order. That's what I mean by, when I was going, spending a lot of time at the beginning, it was really just trying to help us to get this idea that Jesus teaches.

[30 : 40] And if you go back later, or if you remember last week's sermon, in John chapter 14, Jesus talked about this very same idea, but he used a set of different analogies. And in particular, he used the analogy in John chapter 14, several times, about how if you give your life to Jesus, when you give your life to him, that Jesus comes and dwells in you, makes his home in you.

He comes in and makes with the Father his home in you. The Holy Spirit comes and dwells in you. And so in chapter 14, he uses this image of the Father and the Son making their home in you.

And now he's taking, he wants to communicate this same idea of union, and he's using the image of the vine and the branches. But it's the same fundamental idea. And now we get into another one of these spots where it's going to look as if Jesus is now contradicting himself.

But once you just remember, keep straight how the gospel works, and then you realize this little aside, which isn't an aside, it's a very important warning. Jesus warns to connect.

He confronts to connect. He speaks hard words to wake us up so that we say, Lord, is it me? You know, purify my heart. Grant me a clean heart. Help me to turn to you.

[31 : 59] May it not be me. He says these hard things to get our attention. And so that, because remember, God takes no delight in the death of a sinner, but that he would turn from his wickedness and live.

But listen to verse 6. If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers. And the branches are gathered and thrown into the fire and burned. It's a very, very powerful image.

It's an image of hell and to judgment. Now, once again, the image, remember, it's the image. Keep in mind, everything is in the context of Judas having been a disciple, and he's off getting the soldiers to kill Jesus.

And it's, once again, an image of false profession. It's not Jesus talking about all those terrible people who just hang out at bars and never have a thought about doing anything good.

And, you know, he's not talking, he's talking about people who go to cathedrals. That's who he's talking about. He's talking about people who go to cathedrals. He's talking about people who go to church. He's talking about false profession.

[33 : 07] He's saying this to confront us. He's saying this to me. So I say, Lord, is it me? Is it me, Lord? I don't want that to be me. Lord, I do not want that to be me. I want not to have false profession, but true profession.

You know, Jesus be my savior. Jesus be my Lord. Lord, teach me and help me to abide in you. And now Jesus starts to unpack what it means to abide in him, that we have union.

But if we already have union, what does abiding mean? Well, Jesus talks about this in verse 7 to 11. Listen to what he says. If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.

By this my father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.

If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full.

[34 : 16] Now, what's going on here? Well, here's a way to understand what is going on. Is it true intimacy? This is my second point.

My second point is that true intimacy always involves obedience. True intimacy always involves obedience. I think if you were to ask the average Canadian about God, I think they might not think of it in these ways.

But if you were to suggest to them, don't you think that if God exists, he would never command you to obey? Like he wouldn't be the type of God who gives you things that you have to obey? And I think most Canadians would say, yes, that's exactly right.

Like for the average Canadian, the type of God that exists or should exist or, you know, that if they only worship a God who's like this or want to spend time with a God like this or only allow a God like this to continue to exist or live or have any type of social standing and polite society is a God that never has to say anything to you.

That means that you have to obey it. But here's the thing. If you go back and you read verses 7 to 11 later on, what Jesus is describing is intimacy. What he's describing is intimacy.

[35 : 32] And at the heart of intimacy is listening and speaking and obeying. A couple of birthdays ago, for a variety of reasons, we have just two children who are still at home with us.

And for a variety of reasons, we decided we would go out for my wife's birthday, Louise's birthday. And so I said, Louise, why don't we're going to go out for your birthday? She said, yeah, let's go out for my birthday.

And I said, where do you like to go? And she said, I don't know. Do you have any suggestions? And I gave like three or four suggestions. And she listened to the three or four suggestions. And Louise being Louise, because this is my wife in a nutshell, you know, she doesn't want to spend money on herself.

She says she picks the restaurant. And the restaurant she picks is the cheapest, the most inexpensive of the three or four that I had suggested. And George, me being like a goofball, I hear what she says, but I say to myself, oh, come on, we can't go to the most inexpensive.

I mean, it's your birthday. Like you're special. You're worth it. And so I, in my thick-headedness, go. And we don't go to the one that she suggested. We go to a different one, one that's a bit more expensive.

[36 : 45] Not the most expensive, but a bit more expensive. And my wife's unhappy. And I am a slow learner, but eventually I learned. And I realized in the middle of the meal that I had made a huge mistake.

See, here's the thing. When I said this at my church, I got all these women nodding at me. I said, listen, you know what Louise would rather I do? Louise, you know what Louise, because she does, what a wife desires when she wants intimacy with her husband.

She doesn't necessarily desire that he speak more and more and more and more and more. What she really would like is that he listens more. And if I listen to Louise more, if I listen not only more but better, and listening is always going to involve obedience, right?

If I listened to my wife and went to the restaurant that she chose, that's obeying her, right? And at the heart of obedience, a heart of intimacy is listening.

If you want to be more intimate with your husband or your wife, listen more and listen better. And so what Jesus is describing here, when he's describing abiding, is describing intimacy.

[37 : 59] I mean, in a sense, this is what's so terrible. If you also, so what in a sense the average Canadian is describing is something that they actually, like in terms of the ideal God, is actually something they don't like.

Because if you asked the same Canadian, what would you rather do? Would you rather go to an event where it's nobody, it's very, very impersonal.

You're treated in a very, very impersonal way. And nobody talks to you. Or would you rather go to an event where you're treated in a very, very personal way and people talk to you?

Well, everybody would pick the one that you treated in a personal way and people would talk to you. Yet when they describe God, they describe an impersonal God. They describe something which is the opposite of intimacy.

Because the impersonal will never lead to intimacy. We would at least hope that if we go somewhere where we're treated personally and there's conversation, it's some type of intimacy, even if it's just very, very low-level intimacy, or friendship or companionship would develop out of that.

[39 : 01] And so what actually is happening here, that at first it sort of troubles us, this thing about obeying and all that and listening, you know. But you just think about it. Jesus has just described intimacy.

And you see, that's what abiding is all about. You see, we have this union with Christ that comes by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. All my sin is dealt with.

All the righteousness that is needed is offered to me as a gift as well in the person of Jesus. And that union is where it begins. And out of this reality of union, and by the way, this reality of union, this is why it actually works.

This is why the gospel works. Because what Jesus is talking here, on one level he's giving a metaphor, but he's giving a metaphor to describe what really happens. The fact of the matter is, is that when we put our faith and trust in Jesus, as our Savior and Lord, he really does come and live within us.

The Father really does come and live within us. The Holy Spirit really does come and live within us. He really does make his home within us. The Father makes his home within us.

[40 : 07] That, in a sense, as I stand before you now, I mean, so to speak, I am standing while I speak. The Father indwells me. Jesus indwells me.

The Holy Spirit indwells me. My sins really are forgiven. The righteousness of Christ really does clothe me and clothe me.

And that is, in fact, real. It's not just a metaphor to make me feel better. It's describing what is real. And so it is that we have this union.

And now Jesus says, okay, it's union. And that's, it's all by grace alone. But you know what follows out of union, George? It's this intimacy. And I'm going to use the word abide. And out of that abiding means that you're to spend time with me.

You're to listen to me. And then you not only listen to me, but you pour out your heart to me, George. And then you listen to me and you pour out your heart to me. And as I, and as I speak to you, you know, you, you, you, you, you go and do what I say.

[41 : 10] You know, you pour out your heart to me. Do what I say. And, and, and as I do what I say, it means I end up doing acts of courage that I would not normally have done. It means I do acts of generosity, which I would not have done.

I do acts of forgiveness that I would not have done otherwise. You know, I, I have, I have acts of selflessness that I would not have done. I have acts of, you know, of faithfulness and, and, and all that I would not have done.

And it comes out of this profound intimacy with Jesus. See that, that's what Jesus is saying. Now we need to wrap this up a little bit.

It's already been a long sermon and, uh, I'm being a little bit more long winded with you than I was in the church. Although I think it was a 43 or 44 minute sermon, but let's finish the rest of the text. Uh, continue on with, uh, with, uh, with verse 12.

Let's just read through the rest of the text. Two more short points. Verse 12. And this continues to describe, uh, abiding. This is my commandment. Verse 12. That you love one another as I have loved you.

[42 : 10] Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. Uh, no longer do I call you servants or slaves.

Some translations say for the servant or slave does not 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. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.

So that whatever you ask the father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you so that you will love one another. You see this whole, once again, this whole language of union, it shapes us.

Um, we, we, we're friends. There's no room for pride in this discussion. Um, you know, the, the, the whole thing about this model of, you know, fruit then to communion, then to union.

It's as if I achieve and I choose God. And, and it's this whole other reversal of union and everything, everything is grace. Everything is grace. And the union, when we're in union with him, it, it automatically flows in a way that is completely and utterly surprising that as it flows out of union with Christ and we're shaped by the gospel, we're drawn by the gospel.

[43 : 25] We're grounded by the gospel. We breathe the gospel. We're covered by the gospel. There begins to be life change in keeping with the gospel and very, very nature of God. And this is in the real world.

Now he gives a great warning about all of this. And just to, to wrapping all things up, verse 18, if the world hates you, okay, this is a bit of a wake up call. Um, if the world hates you, um, know that it has hated me before it hated you.

Verse 19. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own, but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world. Therefore, the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, a servant is not greater than his master.

If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin. But now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin.

[44 : 35] But now they have seen and hated both me and my father. But the word that is written in their law must be fulfilled. And he quotes, they hated me without a cause. Now, just very, very briefly here.

Here's my third point. The world will not hate you for the sin in your life. It will hate you for abiding in Christ. The world will not hate you for the sin in your life.

It will hate you for abiding in Christ. You know, this is a really, really important thing for many of us to go back and meditate upon. I hear this very, very, very many times in all sorts of different types of podcasts.

You know, the thing to do to be more well-received by your city, by your region, by your, you know, wherever, is, you know, to be known for what you're for, not for what you're against.

It is that we're to be, you know, to be known for what you're against, you know, and that if we do these good acts in the city and we do this and we make ourselves socially useful, then, you know, doors will open for us and there won't be these negative stereotypes about Christians.

[45 : 47] And, you know, you know, listen, the fact of the matter is, is that, you know, we should love the city, we should care for the city, and we should be seeking the blessing of this city, and we should be doing generous acts and all of those things.

I'm not arguing against it, but what this text is saying is it's, in a sense, a refutation of the way Christians sometimes fall into talking. Because what Jesus is saying here, it's precisely because of the grace in your life that you're not liked.

It's because of Jesus in your life that you're not liked. It's not because, you know, you're too anal retentive and too much about what you're against. No, no, no.

It's the actual presence of Christ that is what is not. It's about the presence of grace that you're not liked. Just in closing, verse 26, but when the helper comes, that's the Holy Spirit, sometimes translated as the advocate or the comforter or the counselor.

When the helper comes, whom I will send to 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 because you have been with me from the beginning.

[46 : 53] And here, just in closing, and this is really important in terms of, you know, the subtle ways that we slip into thinking about my accomplishments and then my access, and then maybe I achieve union.

And undermining this whole God-flowing thing of God grants me this union through grace, and then I abide out of that, and then out of that comes the fruit.

Here's the final point, point number four. The Holy Spirit does not help you bear witness to Christ. The Holy Spirit bears witness to Christ, and he includes you in his work.

Say it again, the Holy Spirit does not help you bear witness to Christ. The Holy Spirit bears witness to Christ, and he includes you in his work. It's so easy for me to slip in, and Christians to sleep in as if, you know, I'm going to do this.

I'm going to go in there, and I'm going to call down the Holy Spirit, and I'm doing this. and the Holy Spirit is going to come and move in and through me. And that's just a way for me to make it look like it's all about me.

[47 : 56] And somehow or another, the Holy Spirit is like my superpower that I can call on to help me do what I'm going to do. But that Jesus, go back and read the verse 26, 27 and 28.

What Jesus says is, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. The Holy Spirit bears witness to me. And oh, by the way, he includes you. By the way, friends, that takes so much pressure. So much pressure off of everything.

He does the work. He includes me. If you were here, I'd ask you to stand, which is how I always finish my sermons. And just say, you know, many of us here, it's a good time to do some work with the Lord and just say, Lord, I've been falling into this mistaken way and habit of thinking that it's my fruit that leads to access, that leads to union with you.

I'm forgetting the gospel. I thank you that, you know, I don't have to remember the gospel perfectly to be accepted by you. That's the whole point of it being gospel. But it's a good time to call out to the Lord and say, Lord, help me to abide in Jesus today and tomorrow and the day after.

Help me to abide in him. And help me to know the gospel is true at deeper and deeper levels of my heart. And to trust that you will include me in the work of the Holy Spirit and that your life, your eternal life will flow in and through me.

[49 : 15] And as I dwell and abide in you and the union that comes from grace, that fruit will emerge in my life. Let's just close in prayer. Father, I thank you for every person who is listening to this or has listened to this.

I ask that the Holy Spirit would move and work in them in a mighty and powerful way. Help them and me, Father, to know the gospel, to trust the gospel, and to be shaped and stand on the gospel.

And Father, help each one of us to abide in Jesus daily, to listen to him well, to speak to him with the depths of our hearts about everything. And out of that, listening and speaking and loving and being loved to obey and to bear much fruit for your great glory in the city that we live and to the very ends of the earth.

And I ask all these things in the name of Jesus. Amen.