

The Love of God

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Date: 18 February 2010

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[0 : 0 0] Abide in my love. We know that this part of the Gospel of John is called the farewell discourse of the Lord Jesus.

He is sitting together with his disciples, and he uses this last opportunity to impart to them some great truths, give them some words of encouragement, and instruct them in, I suppose, what can be considered one of the most important things that belongs to the Christian faith, the whole area of relationships.

It's quite important within the Christian experience that a relationship with God should be maintained, a relationship with Christ.

First, we maintain a relationship with him, with his word. We maintain a relationship with his people. We make sure that that is secure, that that is confirmed, that it is something that we jealously guard.

It's surprising how much of Jesus' teaching is given over to that, how much he stresses the nature of relationships.

[1 : 4 8] And here in this chapter, he uses the allegory of the vine and the branches to convey a certain truth, if we can call it an allegory.

If anyone was adept at taking examples from the world round about him, Christ was. He was someone who readily drew from the natural world and from the events as they occurred round about him.

What he observed happening in his journey, what he saw taking place within the places of worship, all of these things were taken in by him.

They were observed by him. They were used in order to teach those that were his own people in particular, and sometimes also those who weren't his people.

He took on board what the Pharisees were doing, what their rules and regulations were, how they observed them or chose not to observe them.

[3 : 0 6] And he pointed out to them the error of their ways and the hypocrisy of their lives and so on. But here he uses the illustration of the vine.

And some try and find out why he chose this illustration. They try and understand why this illustration was used by him.

Was it something that was natural? Was it something he ate in the vine, something that he knew about the whole art of the vinedresser, the whole role that the vinedresser played and the bearing of fruit and so on?

Or was it just simply that his eye glanced and caught something that he understood to be a good illustration for the reality of being in a proper relationship, being properly connected to the source of life?

That's true about the Christian life. If you're improperly connected to Christ, no matter how closely associated you are with his people or even his word, you can have a very close relationship with the church.

[4 : 38] It doesn't mean that you're connected to Christ in a living way. Something that you always have to remind yourself of.

By their fruits, the people of God are known. Those who are in Christ bear fruit that speak of their association with him as a living, a lively association.

And the main lesson Christ conveys here is that just as there are offshoots of the vine, if they are not connected to that vine, if they are not truly connected, they will not bear fruit.

They will not be recognized as fruit bearing. And again and again, Christ refers to these two things.

The idea of abiding and the idea of bearing fruit. Abiding and bearing fruit. You must abide in the vine in order to be able to bear fruit.

[5 : 48] And if you abide in the vine, you cannot but bear fruit. But that's a sort of background to what we have here.

Octavius Winslow, the divine, has a very succinct description of what Christ is teaching here.

He describes the preaching or the teaching of Christ here as a discrimination of character where Christ lays bare the evil to which men were exposed.

And he clearly warns those who are in his hearing of the danger of self-deception, of hypocrisy.

He distinguishes between what is true and what is not true, what is true and false. Christ describes in very striking terms the end that befalls those who are not in Christ.

[6 : 58] Christ describes just as clearly what awaits the person who is in Christ. Christ. Well, that aside, what I want us to think about briefly tonight is this.

And even the minute you hear me say what we're going to look at, I'm sure you'll say there's no way on earth he'll do justice to what we have here.

Because we have in this text three things that are spoken of. Christ refers to a father's love. He refers to a saviour's love.

And he refers to abiding in love. Three things that are clearly spoken of. In verse 9, As the father has loved me.

A father's love. So have I loved you. A saviour's love. Abide in my love. And the reason why I say that it is so perhaps a broad or a deep or a mysterious subject in many respects is that no matter what we say about it, no matter how much we try and get to grips with what the Bible tells us about it, I don't think we'll ever be able to understand the love of God as we ought to understand it.

[8 : 43] We can, we ought to endeavour to describe it. We ought to endeavour to explain it. We ought to endeavour to get to grips with it. But I don't think that we will ever be content with an explanation of it other than simply to say that, well, we've explored something that we will be exploring if we are God's people throughout the endless ages of eternity.

Christ himself is what explains to us the love of God. Christ is the exegesis, if you like.

He is the person who imparts to us the knowledge of the love of God. We know that the Bible speaks about God as love.

It speaks about the deity as being love. And we believe that as God is love within the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, love is the dynamic that is operational within the Trinity.

It is something that we understand that binds them together and that makes the deity function. Now even that use of language may appear to some to be improper.

[10 : 30] But there's no way we can understand the love of God except the way we find it spoken of within the Scripture.

Sometimes it's described to us. Sometimes it's just alluded to. Sometimes it is there as an impetus to the love that we see round about us in the world, the love that we see in the activity of Christ in the world.

But the relationship of Christ with God is often a subject that we find in these last chapters of John's Gospel.

In John chapter 13, Christ says in verse 3, Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going back to God rose from the supper.

Now that's just a simple description of what had taken place. But it's still a certainty of the nature of the relationship that existed between God the Father and God the Son.

[11 : 47] God the Son had come from God. God the Son was going to go back to God. God the Son was going to go back to God. He had given all things into his hands.

There's a confidence and assurance there. In chapter 14, we read in verse 9, Jesus said to him, Have I been with you so long and you still do not know me, Philip?

Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, show us the Father? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you, I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.

Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves. Now, again, that's a description, if you like, of a relationship, a mysterious relationship.

Language there. How can we understand what Christ is saying there? I am in the Father and the Father is in me. And yet, you cannot explain that or understand that unless you understand the fact that the relationship essentially is a loving relationship.

[13 : 05] It's a relationship that is based in love. Verse 20. Later on, verse 20, verse 21. In that day you will know that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you.

Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me, and he who loves me will be loved by my Father. And I will love him and manifest myself to him.

Christ there teaches, if you like, the outcome of loving him, describing it in terms of something that is akin to the love that he has for his Father and the Father has for him.

Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me, and he who loves me will be loved by my Father and I will love him and manifest myself to him. Now, the love of God, as the scripture describes it to us, is something that we may want to understand, but we cannot dispute, even though our understanding of it may be limited.

God is love. God loves the Son. God loves the Son in the same way that the Son loves the Father. The divine Don Carson draws attention to the language, to the Greek tense that is used here.

[14 : 36] And Christ uses the term, has loved, in the sense of it perhaps indicating the perfection of the love, the completeness of the Father's love for the Son, including his love for him before the world was.

As the Father has loved me, may not appear to us, as it's written there in English, but in the Greek, it is suggesting to us that this love, is a love that originates with God, and as God has no beginning, his love has no beginning, his love for the Son has no beginning, and indeed it can have no end.

God was, God is, God will be, just as surely the relationship with the God of heaven, between God and Son, are the same always, is the same always.

God himself declared that love clearly. This is my beloved Son, he said, in whom I am well pleased.

He took pleasure, he took delight in his Son. No, you don't doubt that. You don't find any reason to question that.

[16 : 05] You don't find any reason for dwelling upon it, because it's so obvious, surely it's so obvious, then why do we need to spend time on it?

Simply because Christ makes this statement, as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.

because he is using this as an example, an example that not only describes the love that he has for his church, it is like the Father's love for him.

It is a love without beginning and without end. It is a love that is deep, it is a love that is meaningful. He is pointing to something that is so great, so awesome, that we fail when language is all the means at our disposal to convey what it means.

We try and analyze it, we try and speak of it, but we fail. And yet Christ says, here you are. I want you to understand I love you.

[17 : 26] And this is the way I love you. I love you the way God loves me. And God loves me in what way? God loves me the way he's loved me always.

Before time, God loved me. The love that I had for God, the love that God had for me, is there to look at, to compare, to measure the immeasurable.

Now if Christ is doing that, if he is directing us to think of that first and foremost, then surely what he is saying about his own love for his church is something that needs to be understood, that needs to be grasped with both hands.

He is not saying that the quality of his love for his people is of a different quality to the love with which God loves him.

He is not saying that. As God the Father has loved me, as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

[18 : 41] I'm sorry for dwelling on it, but it's so remarkable, it's so awe-inspiring that any person could be the focus of a love of this nature and think of it without being overwhelmed by it.

In many respects, what Christ is saying here, it's something perhaps that sheds light on it in a sense.

He is saying what he is saying with his face turned towards the cross. He is saying what he is saying with a measure of understanding that suffering is in his cup and that is what he is anticipating.

He is saying what he is saying looking forward to that and yet he is saying my love for you is like the love that God has for me.

Again, Don Carson there in his commentary makes a comment about the grammar about this the Greek there which says to us that Jesus depicts love for his own as a completed thing.

[20 : 08] so eminently does the cross stand in view. It's a completed thing. It's something that does not depend on an action that he will carry out in the future.

My love for you will increase once I go to the cross. My love for you will increase once you close in with me. Once you're sanctified, once you're purified, my love for you will be greater.

That's not what he is saying. It is my love for you is like the father's love. And if you go back to the beginning of chapter 13, before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his heart had come to depart out of this world to the father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

How can you read these words and not be in awe of them? Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. To what end?

you find different commentators, different theologians trying to grasp this love of Christ. What words will we use to describe it?

[21 : 32] Because we feel that we have a better access to it. You know, when you talk about triune love, the love that is within the Trinity, you are a spectator from afar.

You are looking into eternity with eyes that can barely discern what's happening in eternity. A love that existed before the world was.

How can your eyes look in that direction? But when you're looking at the love that Christ has for his people in this world, you're looking at a love that surely you understand because you've experienced that love, you've felt that love, you've returned that love.

And you bemoan the fact that your love is not of the same quality, of the same depth, of the same strength, of the same feeling as the love that the Son has for his people, of which he speaks often.

Divine speaks of the depth of the love of Christ for his people, the wholehearted nature of the love of Christ for his people, the purity of it, the personal nature of it.

[22 : 53] It's intelligence, it's endurance, it's abiding nature, all of these things we understand, we find scriptures that speak of these things as being applicable to the experience of the church of Christ, the believer the focus of Christ in his love.

Some of you know the name of the divine Max Lucado. Max Lucado is someone who uses humor a lot, and yet he manages to convey the depth of meaning that scripture has in a way that lodges in your memory.

and he uses a description of the love of God for his people or the love of Christ for his people that perhaps we might not be comfortable, but the more I think of it, the more it intensifies an understanding that we ought to have of the love of God.

If God, he says, had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. If he had a wallet, your photo would be in it. He sends you flowers every spring and a sunrise every morning.

Whenever you want to talk, he will listen. He can live anywhere in the universe, and he chose to live in your heart. You have to face it, friend.

[24 : 28] He says, God is crazy about you. Now, these pictures, you might think, they're too trivial. They're too ordinary to think about the love of God.

But you think about it. How many homes have I gone into and I've seen on the wall there a picture? Not a photograph, but a picture drawn by a child in school.

And why is it on the wall? Is it because of its beauty? Is it because of its quality? No, it's because it was drawn by someone who had the greatest of love in your heart.

You had a love for them. That's why the picture was there. That's what Lucado was saying. If God was like this, this is the way he would demonstrate.

But he has done it more clearly. He has done it more demonstrably in the way in which he has shown his love and Christ has demonstrated his love for his people.

[25 : 33] In sending his son to the cross and the son in coming to the cross. As God, as the father has loved you, so as the father has loved me, so I have loved you.

But he doesn't stop there. He doesn't leave it there. He adds to it. he says to us, abide in my love.

Abide in my love. Continue in my love. Remain in my love. This love with which I have loved you, you are to continue in it.

Now, what is it that's in the nature of love? What is it that is? How can you continue in love? He doesn't say, continue to love.

You would make sense of that, wouldn't you? Continue to love the way that I have loved you. But that's not what he is saying. He is saying, abide in my love.

[26 : 45] And you remember the context. You can't divorce these words from the context. The context is the imagery of the vine. Belonging in the vine.

Fruit bearing because of this connection with the vine. And he is saying, you continue, you abide in my love.

And by abiding in my love, then you will remain in communion, in fellowship with me, continually enjoying the benefits of being loved by me, of returning this love for me.

Can I leave a question with you? What's more precious to you? Your conscious awareness of being loved by Christ, or your conscious awareness of loving Christ in return?

I don't think there are many Christians who doubt the love of Christ for them. but they find plenty reason to doubt their own love for Christ.

[28 : 06] I mean, theologically, logically even, the two things must come together. And you find conviction in the sense of the love that Christ died for, shown by dying for his people.

You're convinced of that. This is what Christ has done for me. I believe that he has died for me. I believe they have come to the cross. I believe that I take shelter there. I believe that I apply to the blood of the Savior.

But I can't see suitable evidence. I can't see consistent evidence. I can't see repeated evidence of my love for him the way that I would like to.

I can't see. I can't see. Look at the way this next verse goes. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.

That's how he describes it. You abide in his love by doing what Christ wants. By living the life that Christ expects.

[29 : 18] By following his example. By regulating your life by the precepts that his word brings to bear upon our lives in whatever area that we live in this world.

We are the beneficiaries of his love. We have the ability to show love to him by obeying what his word says to him.

It's not complicated. It's not difficult to understand. We make it complicated. We make it seem as if there's difficulty there. And there's none.

The love of God is awesome. The love of God to his son, we can't question it. It's there for everyone to believe because how can any member of the Trinity not love another member of the Trinity.

It's almost something that you can't believe possible. You can't believe that Christ doesn't love his people.

[30 : 35] Why else would he go to the cross? Do you believe that you love Christ? How can you, how can you argue that you love Christ?

You do that by remaining in his love. And you remain in his love, abiding in his love, by keeping his commandments, submitting to his will, applying to his word so that you know what his will is.

And it's a lifetime task. It's a daily chore for some. Chore is perhaps the wrong word. It's a privilege. It's a pleasure. It's something that we would wish to do every day of our lives.

And surely when we spend the Thursday evening in preparation for remembering the death of Christ until he come, there's a wisdom in considering whether we are really abiding in his love as befits the Lord's people.

Are we sort of in and out? Are we running hot and cold? Are we one minute demonstrating that our relationship is strong, that our relationship will stand any test?

[32:10] And at other times we wonder if there's any relationship at all. Well, may God give us the insensitiveness to look at his word and to look at how we relate to it and how we demonstrate our love for him by submitting to its teachings so that if what Max Lucado said about God is crazy about you, can be said about you, am I crazy about God?

Is my love for him something that's of an all abiding nature, an ever present reality that no one can deny? Well, would it be that that would be the case?

Let us pray. Oh, Lord, God, help us to understand some of the mysteries of the truth that bring before us the love of God that passes the understanding of many of us because of our limited capacities.

We give thanks that thy word declares it to us. May we lay hold of it, may we glimpse it so that it may convince us of the greatness of God.

Hear our prayers and grant forgiveness for sin in Jesus' name. Amen.