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Sermon preached by Mr J H Gosden
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Wednesday 10 August 1921

JOHN 15 v 4

"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."

Salvation depends upon union with the Son of God. Vital union to Jesus Christ is the cause of salvation but that it is possible, and that it is a fact that mortal men - a number that no man can number - are united to God's Own Son, is an infinite wonder of divine love, and divine wisdom.

Hail sacred union, firm and strong,
How great the grace, how sweet the song,
That worms of earth should ever be
One with incarnate Deity

The union that exists between the church and her Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, is set out in various figures in the holy Scripture. It is spoken of in one place as being built upon Christ, Himself being the chief corner stone. It is set forth here by the Vine, the root, and the branches, and all the figures in the Scripture that speak of the union that exists between the church and Christ show that the church is united to Christ as her source, and foundation, and living Head, and that the cause of the church is the Person of Christ, the counsel of God in the Son. And this puts true religion in its right position, growing out of, coming down from, God. Not growing out of nature up to God, but coming down from God, as John himself was taught in that revelation he had when he saw the city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven having the glory of God. Our prejudiced, blinded minds, and hardened hearts, and proud wills, constantly attempt to reverse this, and put religion, as to its source, and vital power, in the creature. What a mercy it is, and what a humbling truth it is, to experience that, with respect to any movement God-ward, we

are utterly incapable without the first communication of life, and strength, and will from God Himself. And all through a Christian's experience this is I believe more or less realised, that all subsequent movements God-ward come from the same source. And this word that I have read by way of a text exemplifies this. In this chapter the Lord Jesus Christ, God's Own Son incarnate, condescends to compare with His disciples very familiarly, and He sets Himself out in this union of Himself with His people in the figure: "I am the true Vine, and My Father is the husbandman". So that we have in this verse the blessed doctrine of a triune Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. "I am the true Vine and My Father is the husbandman". The Sonship of Christ, and the Fatherhood of God the Father, and the real personality of the Holy Ghost subsisting in one Godhead is a doctrine of the greatest importance to be known - without it we are lost - and the real Sonship of this Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son incarnate, is most necessary to be known and held, for without that truth we have, if we hold the doctrine of a trinity, three Gods and not One God. And it makes all the condescending conferences that Jesus Christ held with men very wonderful as this truth is made out to a soul. To realise that it is the very Son of God incarnate who speaks to men and who teaches men and who laid down His life to redeem men, and who is in Himself the root of the church, the vine, who is the foundation of the building, the church of God, it makes the church secure, and this union that does exist between the Son of God and the church is an everlasting one. There is, first of all, we might say, that mystical union, real, virtual union, that subsisted in a past eternity, when the church, every member of it, was given to Christ, and He accepted that church. That was a union, an eternal union, and an unbreakable one, for God the Son received the Church as a gift from the Father and, in His acceptance of the Church, the Church was blessed in Christ with all spiritual blessings. Her eternal glory was secured. Her eternal life was secured in Christ when that Covenant transaction was entered into. That is an unbreakable union, an unalterable union, an unintermitted union. There never was a time, there never will be a time, when the Church was not united to Jesus Christ, and secured in Him. If His Person can fail, the Church can, and will fail, but if His Person cannot fail, then the Church cannot fail. She was united to Him when He became incarnate, and she was virtually, and really, and effectually, in God's sight, united to

Him when in His flesh, He went to the end of the law, when He suffered its full penalty, when He poured out His soul unto death. She was united to Him then, and she is united to Him now. Never more, never less, was the church in numbers. Christ received a certain number. Did He receive us? That is a vast question. We are not great people and important in ourselves, but our souls are infinitely valuable to us. They are immortal, and whether we, in our persons, were in eternity given to Christ to keep, to save, to redeem, to bring to Himself, to save from hell, is a vast question to be answered. And there is a union that exists between the Church and Christ which may be called an experimental union, and it is of this union, together with that consequent professional union, that I believe the Lord Jesus Christ here speaks of in this gracious, and solemn injunction: "Abide in Me, and I in you". He did not in eternity unite the church to Himself by an act of His will and love, for that union to be maintained by the power of the creature. If He had done so, what would have become of us? "Chosen in Christ Jesus before the world was" is the Scripture concerning the church. We had no more to do with it than we had with our own birth, if we were so chosen. But when this union becomes an experience in the souls of the elect people of God, then there is, so to speak, the possibility of the experience being from time to time broken. The union, with respect to the feeling sense and experience of it being suspended, it does not invalidate the union, but it makes a great difference to the feelings of those who are united to Christ. This is a union of faith. Faith is that gracious gift of God to the elect, whereby they, each one, come to be experimentally united to God's Own Son, and therefore faith is a great gift, and a great grace, and a precious grace. We sometimes sing in our hymn:

Faith in the bleeding Lamb
O what a gift is this!
Hope of salvation in His Name
How comfortable 'tis

and it is by the power of the Holy Ghost quickening dead sinners into life that they become united to Jesus Christ experimentally and practically, and this life which is given in Christ Jesus to the church, and which is given by the communication of it by the Spirit of

Christ, is a life, a real life. God does not secure His people and put them into a garrison, there to sleep, and to be unconscious of anything, but every essential for human life you have a counterpart of in divine life where it is, and the first essential that there is in life is a sense of need, and perhaps there may be some here who hardly know more about divine life than that, that they are painfully, and solemnly conscious of a deep sense of the need of being sustained. All life has that in it, it is natural to it. Not much understanding in it, but just in a babe there is that sense of need of being sustained whereby, when the babe becomes hungry, it cries. A sense of sinking, and need of support, and nourishment, and this is in divine life, and it is this, working by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men, that brings them to Him who is the very source and spring of their life, Jesus Christ. It is the Spirit's work to quicken dead sinners and lead them to Him who is their life, God the Son. So before there can be any abiding in Christ there must be experience of coming to Him and though, perhaps, not the assurance of union, yet the experience of union with Him. Was it ever so with you, and me, that we really were brought in our souls with our life in our hand, with a sense of destruction in our ears, with some consciousness of what our sins deserved; were we ever brought to Christ, the refuge for sinners? Did we ever come to Him and seek at His hands that deliverance from a deserved hell which He alone can give? If there has never been any coming to Christ in a practical, and experimental, and personal, and spiritual, and earnest way, in our souls by the Holy Ghost, then this word "Abide in Me" will have no effect, for who can abide in that to which he has never come, into which he has never entered? But I would that you should not conclude that you are not united to God's Own Son - though it be a very tremendous privilege, a great, and high privilege to be united to Him - because you have not the assurance of that union. Take the point of need and of desire, and the searching after Him. Whence does that spring? If it be a real sense of need, and of desire, and of searching, what is it but life? Nature does not feel its need of Christ. Nature may see need in some kind of profession of religion of the Name of Christ, but the Person of Christ nature never sees the need of. Hence men today think, and say, that we make too much of Christ's Person. If you are born again, if I am, I believe that we shall find in our soul's experience a growing desire to know that Person. A Christ that is merely nominal,

a letter Christ, a Christ in the Bible, a Christ dreamed of in heaven, will not do for living people. What they want is to know Him as Paul says: "That I might know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death". (Philippians 3 v 10) You want something from Him, some living communications, such as the woman wanted when she pressed through the crowd to touch the hem of His garment. Life must have real sustenance. It would not do a babe any good to show it food. It gives a babe no nourishment if it is really hungry to show it food, but it must have sustenance, or die. So it is really and truly in the case of the living people of God; they cannot live without their sustenance, and that sustenance must come down to them from their life, which is Christ. Did you ever receive anything out of Christ's fullness into your heart? I know what some of you may be objecting, that it is too particular. It is coming too close to speak of these communications, but you must seek them, and you must have them, if you are the living people of God. You cannot live on fancies, and notions, and doctrines merely as doctrines, except you experience the vital substance, and living reality of the doctrines in your souls from Him who is the substance of all doctrine, Jesus Christ.

"Abide in Me" Now what is it for a poor, ignorant, dark, convinced, weak, distressed, fearful soul to abide in Christ? He has no experience of union to Him, therefore says He, this word is of no interest to me; it leaves me out. Now you consider this, that there is such a thing as coming to Christ with desire, and abiding in Him in your desire. It is not a local coming to Christ, but a spiritual, and a desire for Christ, a true appetite for Christ, a hungering for righteousness, is as truly coming to Christ as is coming to Him with understanding, and worship, and love, and joy, and peace; only the difference is in yourselves with respect to your comfort. So if there are any here who have never reached higher than this, than

Give Me Christ, or else I die

may the blessed, and condescending Jesus, speak this word to you: "Abide in Me". It contains in it a blessed promise, a kind - if I might dare to use such a seemingly arminian word - a kind of offering of

Himself: "Abide in Me". I am full - "Abide in Me". Your desires are great and urgent, you are very necessitous, and weak, and fearful, but you cannot need more than I have. Your needs are not so big as My supply: "Abide in Me" in prayer. It is a great thing to be empty and to desire Christ; to be narrowed up to this one thing

Give me Christ, or else I die

A man had better be in that state, low though he will be, and troubled, and weak, than to be a fat, and flourishing professor with doctrine at his fingers' ends, and never know what it is to feel his heart troubled for want of Christ. "Abide in Me". The Lord Jesus says in one place, inviting poor, restless souls, and weak ones, He says: "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest". When He says: "Come unto Me", it is as if He should say, I have all you want. It is as though, when that word reaches your heart, He shows you a little of Himself, so as that your heart might be strengthened to venture to come. And so it is with respect to abiding in prayer for those blessings you are taught to need in Christ. He shows you by His Spirit what there is in Him. Now the language of your own natural minds and mine, will be this: "Why should I wait for the Lord any longer?" I do not make any progress; my heart has long been faint; I sigh for rest, I feel worn out with trouble, this soul trouble. "Why should I wait for the Lord any longer?" And temptation may come along from the devil at this juncture, and say, Yes, why should you, you are not united to Christ, you cannot prove your election, that mystical, and real union that subsisted from eternity; that Covenant of Grace never encircled you or you would not be in the condition you are. You have been on the verge of despair these months; do you think an elect vessel of mercy, one for whom Christ died, would be in such a case all that time? You ought now to give up, you have given it a good trial. Now, says the Lord Jesus, "Abide in Me". And so Peter, once answering a gracious, and sweet, and solemn appeal by the Lord Jesus said: "Lord" - as if he looked round and saw nothing but hell, and confusion, sin, terror, blackness, and death everywhere else - "Lord to whom shall we go, Thou hast the words of eternal life". And a poor sinner that is in somewhat of the position you were just now singing about - pressed on every hand with troubles, and temptations, and fears - what shall he

do? Stand still; that is easy sure. Is it? Not if you are born again, it wont be easy. Not if you are a living soul, it wont be easy. But when Christ says by His Spirit in substance in your heart: "Abide in Me" that will hold you. It will give you to see a little bit into what is an infinite fullness of all that your soul can need, and therefore though you have not, as you feel, anything from that fullness, it will keep you abiding in a constant beseeching of the Lord to communicate from His fullness that which you must have. "Abide in Me" But the Lord does not leave His people in this condition. You say, you are in that condition; He wont leave you in that condition. Why, He has said - concerning those who mourn their leanness, and who mourn the lack of assurance, and of experience of God's love and pardon, those who really mourn because they are sinners, and cannot be satisfied with a little outward conformity to the Word of God, but want the salvation of their souls assured to them by the Spirit - "Blessed are they that mourn". Not merely because they mourn - though they are blessed because they mourn, because God makes them mourn - but the blessedness consists in the promise that is attached to the mourning, and shall be fulfilled. "They shall be filled". You will never abide waiting at the posts of the doors of God's mercy in Christ, you will never abide there without getting some benefit, a benefit so great, and so lasting, and so satisfying, and so strengthening, as that you will want eternity to enjoy the benefit, and to bless Him who has so benefited you. O this is a gracious exhortation: "Abide in Me". Not a hard task given to a person saying, I have loved you, now you mind that you keep up with that love by what you do. It is not legalising the gospel itself. Rather it contains a gracious promise: "Abide in Me". You think you ought not, you think that you will tire Me, you think that My patience is worn out because if you had dealt so with an earthly friend as you have dealt with Me, it would have been worn out. Now I am the same, My fullness is the same, My blood is the same: "Abide in Me". Plead My blood, lean upon that precious blood, upon the atonement made, by pleading it before the Father; that is abiding in Christ. The Lord does not set His people at that hopeless and impossible business of maintaining, by their own strength, and power, and light, a sense of their comfortable abiding in Christ. It is a life the Lord's people live, and it has vicissitudes in it, changes in it. There is a going into the presence of Christ, and a coming out again. Not a disunion

from Him, but an experience of His absence. It is necessary to us though we should not, and will not, if we know Him, seek for that absence. Alas some of us know too much of it; still "Abide in Me"

Abide in My righteousness. Can you clothe yourself in it then? Can you snatch that righteousness from Christ's hand and put it about yourself, and claim it for yourself? O no; worms of earth cannot act like that, but there is such a thing as abiding in Christ's righteousness in the power of the Holy Ghost, by seeking no other, and the Lord will shut you up to it. What He enjoins in a word like this, the Holy Spirit will, despite all your kicking, and all your rebellion, and all your pride, He will shut you up to it, and bring you to conform to it. "Abide in Me". He will perhaps give you an experience of what your own righteousness can do, and if you lean upon it He will show you what a rotten prop it is, that it will let you down. And so you will say at times that you are glad to return, and indeed you will pray with Jeremiah at times "Turn Thou unto me and renew my days as of old." You will wonder if the Lord will allow you to turn to His righteousness after that you have been so foolish as to seek to find your mind, and conscience, and soul satisfied and pacified with your own actions, because sin is quiet, and because your outside conduct has been smooth. O, the Lord Jesus Christ will sooner or later make you see, and know, and feel, that there is no other garment that can possibly clothe you as to make you clean, and spotless, and acceptable before the throne of God's glory, but that robe which Jesus wrought out and laid up, an everlasting righteousness, for His people. And by these means the Lord brings His people into an experience of what is in Himself. He does not hide His righteousness; He does not withhold it from His people; He does not shut up His precious blood to His Father, but He declares it by His Spirit's witnesses; the Holy Spirit is the witness of Christ's atonement in the conscience of sinners, and He is the justifier, and bringer of the righteousness of Christ, and puts it about people, and makes them trust in it, and at times it may be only for a short time, gives them a sweet hope that they are clothed with it, and when that hope is with them, then they do indeed abide in Christ. Then they desire for the full experience of being clothed and washed. Then they want union with Him. The nearer Christ approaches to you by the

Spirit, the more He shows of Himself to you, and of yourself to yourself, the more you will want Him and that is abiding in Him. It is not only seeking Him at the first, but all through. Not that there is no finding all through, there is here and there. The people of God get such a sweet peace, a nourishment from Christ, their heavenly root, as that they feel strengthened, and satisfied, and restful, and expectant, and they are enabled a little humbly to praise the Lord for His great and wonderful mercy and love. They are enabled at another time quietly to rest and patiently hope for the salvation of God, the full experience of salvation, and by these means they are enabled to trust in the Lord. Experience brings hope and patience, all blessed graces growing out of faith, by which the soul is united to Jesus Christ. And so men abide. Living creatures, with changes in their feelings, abide in Christ. "Abide in Me and I in you". O, this is a wonderful thing: "And I in you". As you do so abide, so I abide in you. O this is a gracious word. I have been under legal bonds, and looked at this word legally, and thought of the helplessness concerning my own case, but as the Spirit shows the Person who speaks, the work of that Person with respect to His people who are united to Him, His death, His atoning sacrifice, His complete righteousness, His removal of the curse, His faithfulness as High Priest in heaven, as this is shown to a poor sinner, it turns this blessed word from a fear, and hopeless, and impossible task which legality, and temptation will make it appear to be to you, into a blessed promise: "Abide in Me and I in you" Can you, dare you, think God's Son Jesus Christ is in you? Did you ever know what it is to possess Him as your portion, as your hope of glory in your heart, formed there by the Holy Ghost? "I in you".

And this union, my friends, is maintained by the love, and the faithfulness, and the power, and the mercy, and the merit of Christ, by the Holy Ghost. O, there is no breaking of this union. "And I in you". Only how often we feel it to be broken do not we? How at times we do have to say - I do, in my spirit I say it frequently - "Can ever God dwell here?" It is a bitter feeling because it comes out of a shameful sight of what is in the heart. O, what one has been guilty of; of the thoughts that occupy the mind of the dwellingplace; of the thoughts, and of the affections, and the stubbornness of the will, and the pride of the heart. These things as seen, O they make

one say - "Can ever God dwell here" But does not the discovery of these things make it so absolutely needful for you to abide in Christ for your hope? Does it not turn to the furtherance of the gospel in you sometimes by making you afresh say: "Give me Christ or else I die." O come to me Lord or I shall sink under the sight of this sin. Does it not make you say at times

Without Thy sweet presence I could not live here
Sin soon would reduce me to utter despair

So the Lord makes Himself precious in the want of Him and at times, very precious, in some sense of the possession of Him, and so He abides in the affections, and the soul abides in its hopes, and desires, and in its love, and in all its aspirations. At times the poor sinner abides in Christ, and there is a mutual communion and inter-communion between these two. The great God, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, the Shepherd, the Friend of sinners, the Redeemer, the great High Priest, God's Own Son incarnate, and a poor sinner comes to Him, leans upon Him, trusts in His precious blood, and trusts in His promises, and abides in the promises. O, it is a great thing to abide in the promises as they are in Christ Jesus. If you abide in a promise in the Scripture that has been spoken into your heart, by pleading that promise to be fulfilled from time to time in your experience, that is a true abiding in Christ, for all the promises are in Christ Jesus yea and amen to the glory of God by us in the fulfilment of them, whereby praises and thanksgiving flow from our poor hearts to Him who makes and fulfils the promises.

And this has a connection with fruit-bearing. O, how desirable it is to be fruitful. I speak truly my own experience that not many hours go by but I groan in my spirit because of the fruitless life I live. I would be fruitful, fruitful in meekness, and humility, and in faith, and in love, and hope, and in the graces of the Spirit. In patience, and brotherly kindness, and charity, and godliness. Now the Lord here shows that there can be no fruitfulness only as the soul abides in Christ. This makes, first of all, fruitfulness to be impossible to us naturally, and it makes also fruitfulness to be possible as united to the root. When there is fruit on a tree, the force and sap, and goodness, and life of the root produces that fruit.

No efforts in the branches produce it, but, as it were, the root throws up all the nourishment and throws forth fruit on the branches. The branches bear the fruit, but the root is the source of the fruit, and so it is with poor sinful mortals, redeemed souls, saints of God. When they do bring forth any fruit it is from their union to Jesus Christ. "I am like a green fir tree", says the Lord, "from Me is thy fruit found." So that there is no room to boast; we shall not boast much if we know ourselves but shall be led by the Spirit more and more clearly into that solemn, but blessed, truth: "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God". And then He will have all the praise. Boasting will be excluded, and salvation will be precious and sweet to our souls, and the Saviour will be the Chiefest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely One. "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."

One word in conclusion. I speak of a professional union to Christ. Now this professional union to Christ is seen by men and it may exist where there is no practical, and experimental, and mystical union. Of all such branches so united to Christ by mere profession, the Lord said: "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away". A solemn word, a solemn word to us professors who feel barren. May the Lord make it a powerful word in us, that we may by it, and by the attractions of the blessed Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, be enabled with true contrition of heart to confess our barrenness, and our sins, and come to Him, for He says: "Return unto Me, for I have redeemed thee". I am the source of your fruit. "From Me is thy fruit found". Return unto Me. May the Lord help us to do so for His Name's sake.

AMEN.