

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday evening 15 October 1933

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"

A beautiful figure, the branch; it would be quite familiar to the Jews; they were acquainted with the vine, and the Jewish church in the Old Testament is over and again likened to a vine. In the Psalms it is said of God that He brought the vine out of Egypt and planted it in the goodly land of promise, and it filled the whole earth; the branches spread abroad. In Isaiah, it is said by God that He had a vine, that He planted it in a very fruitful hill; He gathered out the stones, fenced it, looked that it should bring forth good fruit. By Jeremiah, the Lord said that He had planted the Jews a wholly right seed, a noble vine; and so they were acquainted with this beautiful figure. This is Christ; "I am the true Vine". "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away, and every branch that beareth fruit He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit". Graft into Him; the wild olive grafted into the good olive. Two kinds of grafts; one, merely, only external, inserted into the vine, as you may have some acquaintance with that process. Yet, never receiving living sap to make it fruitful, it just remains what it has been called - a mechanical union. O, how many professors have just that. Perhaps some of you fear you may be only that kind of graft, just outwardly united, tied to the vine, as you see a graft is tied when inserted into the stock. The other is a graft that is inserted and becomes united by receiving sap, and so becoming fruitful, bearing fruit. The first He taketh away; profession may last long, but there being no fruit of faith, hope, love; no prayer, no repentance, no living to the praise of the glory of God's grace, the time comes when that branch is taken away. Some solemn judgment, some heretical teaching, some peculiar temptation will come and take the poor professor away. Away from his profession, away from his seeming steadfastness. And every branch that beareth fruit, that is, faith,

repentance, prayer, a broken heart, a contrite spirit, sorrow for sin, hope in Christ, cleaving to Him, every such branch He purgeth. Here are some shoots that would not become fruitful branches; these the husbandman cuts away. There is a straggling branch trailing on the ground, not fruitful; that is cut away. And this is purging it, cleaning it, making it more fruitful; tying every branch that had bud and promise of fruit, tying it up, uniting it in a way more and more closely with the blessed Vine. Some of us may fear we shall be the external graft, a branch that has no living union, that does not receive communications of grace, has no life from Christ, no holiness of nature, spiritual nature. Dark, dead, ignorant, wandering away from God. You are afraid sometimes, are you not? Real branches, that is true Christians, are the only people who have fear of this kind, and when the purging, cutting back, pruning process, comes, then it seems as if the fears are about to be realised, but it turns out not to be so. Now ye who are in Him as grafts, that have become branches to bear fruit, ye are clean. The Husbandman has cut away a good deal; you can well do without it. Though the cutting away was painful, you can well spare every bit He cuts away. And this is the word which is used - Ye are clean; you are purged. That which would have led astray is cut back; that that was too fruitful in the flesh, He cuts back. Tribulation comes, humiliating trouble comes, and the Spirit of conviction is given and you perceive what you have been doing and how you have turned away from God; and in this cleaning work He has just brought you back to Himself. "Now ye are clean through the word", not anything of your own doing, but through the cleansing teaching of the Holy Spirit. "Ye are clean". The Word of God is used for that divine purpose, to cleanse fruit bearing branches that they may bear more fruit. God's teachings do not, in the beginning of them, generally appear to be working to this end, but it comes to pass. More prayer, more cleaving to Christ, more following after Him, warmer desires to be with Him in communion and to have the Holy Ghost. These things the Lord's people, the true branches, have. Then Christ says, in the words of the text, "Abide in Me". What is He? Who is He? The Son of God incarnate, the Head, the Root, the Foundation, the Refuge, the Hiding Place, the blessed Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world, and therefore the only true hope, by His precious blood. King of kings, Lord of lords; the King, the Prophet, the Priest. Being all these things He says, "Abide in Me". "Just as the branch

cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in Me". And this is what I purpose speaking about as I may be helped.

Abide in Him as the Almighty, eternal God incarnate. Remember, dear friends, what you profess. You profess His eternal Deity and Sonship. You profess that He is eternal, self-existent; of the same substance with His Father and the Holy Ghost. I name this to you because the world, the religious world, is full of denial of the Deity of Christ and His human nature is degraded by its being ignorant and weak and mistaken in many things; so men teach. Now the only ground on which we can stand and be safe is, by the Holy Ghost, to hold fast and abide in this doctrine of Christ, that He is, as Himself declares, and as John reports it: "I AM THAT I AM". "Before Abraham was, I AM". All the virtue of the sacrifice of Himself is derived from the union of His human nature with His divine Person. All the strength that you may ever have in your hearts to follow Him, you derive from this divine Person. All the hope of glory you derive from this Person. Therefore, as I judge, the strength, the point, the meaning, of this exhortation - "Abide in Me" - stands, in the first place, in this - Christ said, and John repeats it - "If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins". Men may profess Christianity, but unless they believe that Christ is God, one with His Father and the Holy Ghost, they will die in their sins. May none of you come into that awful word. "Except ye believe that I am He", the Scripture promised in the Old Testament, the Person promised, prophesied of; except ye believe in the writings of Moses and the Prophets, and the Psalmist spoke of, "ye shall die in your sins". Do you find your faith cleaving to Christ, though the infidelity of your nature would deny all that the Scriptures speak of Him? Do you find yourselves cleaving to Him as Almighty God? It is a grand point my brethren; here may we fix, here may we stand, believe, pray, hope, and rejoice; that Jesus is Almighty God. This blessed Man in heaven is true Almighty God.

Abide in Me as I have offered Myself without spot to God, a sacrifice, and thereby made an end of sin. This is a great point. What hope can a guilty creature have if Christ did not put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself? How can you approach Jehovah if blood does

not track and point out the way, and give you purity? What plea can you use before Jehovah if the efficacious blood of Christ be not your plea? What can you hope for if His sacrifice be removed? The infinite value of the death of Christ becomes, not an article of faith simply, but a power in faith, a strength to faith, an argument for faith, a hold for faith, a ground for faith, a refuge for the sinner. Abide in that dear friends. We must, to a man, sink into hell, if this be not true. So, if it be true, may the Lord help us to abide in it, cleave to it all our days, and more and more. Is it any wonder that the devil tries to move people from this? Is it any wonder that the mocking Ishmael of unbelief in each heart here, each gracious person, should try to move that soul from this blessed ground, the death of Christ, the precious blood of Christ? Though you may not often feel its efficacy cleansing you from all sin, yet may your faith be strengthened so as that you can say, whether I live or die, be saved or lost, this is my hope, this is my plea. "Other refuge have I none". O, what a wonder to be a believer, a quickened believer, in the precious death of Christ. Think of it as an act of obedience. My Father doth love Me. Why? Because I lay down My life. No man taketh My life from Me; I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father. That commandment, obeyed, gives an infinite efficacy to the death of Christ and the death itself of Christ is an infinitely efficacious death, a vicarious death. Hold it fast. Bind, by faith, the sacrifice with cords unto the altar and then you can come to the altar and you will not be consumed.

Abide in Me as the root of life. I have laid the foundation in the Person of Christ and in His vicarious death. Now look at the next point, the root of life. When you see bunches of grapes hang on the vine in the summer, what do you see? If your seeing mind goes a little further than the bunches, you will see the root, and you will see the root is in all this; the root in its virtue, efficacy. So, when you have faith and hope and love and prayer and contrition and humility, when you lie flat before God, grieve over sin and pray against it; when you look to be supplied, to be justified, to be sanctified, to be helped through, to be brought honourably to your grave and into heaven; what are all those fruits? They are just the power of Christ in you; that is what they are, the power of Christ's resurrection in

you, raising you above the old man, which is crucified with the affections and lusts; the root of life. All gracious influences that subdue sin, that make you careful of your spirit, tender in your conscience, hopeful in trouble, come from this root. All the light that ever illuminates your understanding, comes from Christ. Everything that is good, the child of God does thankfully ascribe to the Lord Jesus. Abide in Me as the root of life. O, the death that you feel and mourn; the deathly feelings, the corruptions that kill your affections sometimes, the ignorance that darkens your understanding at times, the prayerlessness, the yielding to sin, giving way to temptation; these are the fruit of the flesh, the flesh lusting against the Spirit. The contrary, faith, hope, love, zeal, humility; these come from Christ. You know what I am saying is true; you bear witness in your own conscience to the truth of what I say. All good, all good feelings, good frames, pleasantness in your spirit, pleasure in God, pleasure in the truth, pleasure in Christ, pleasure in prayer; they are all from Him.

Abide in Me next as the Prophet. You do not know about God without Christ; cannot know Him. We read by Moses that a prophet the Lord God would raise up to Israel, like unto himself, Moses, and that the people should hear Him. What did Christ come for? To declare His Father's Name, purposes, goodness, wisdom, love. He said "I have preached Thy righteousness in the great congregation". My friends, the One who came from heaven to make known His Father's Name and purposes is the Speaker in the text, Jesus Christ. Heavenly counsels in eternity, He came to declare. The purposes of grace are in Him and He opens them. The promises of the gospel are all issuing from the covenant of grace, which Christ is. God said: I have given Thee for a covenant of the people, a light unto the Gentiles, and so when you have any teaching, any real revelation of God, you have it according to the Scripture, from Christ, brought by the Holy Spirit. Therefore leave yourselves, leave your reason which is corrupted, leave your understanding. Put them, if you can, with their emptiness and nothingness before the Lord, and pray that He would illuminate and teach and bring Himself to you.

"Abide in Me". Trial is a good means, disagreeable to the flesh, but a good means of bringing people to Christ in this - "Show me the

way wherein I should walk for I lift up my soul unto Thee". Do you want that? Show me how to pray. "Lord teach us to pray as John taught his disciples....." Do you want to walk uprightly? He said: "I am come a light into the world that whosoever believeth in Me should not walk in darkness but have the light of life". Do you find yourself seeking this? Cleaving to Him, following after Him, to teach you. Fools are made wise; wayfaring men are kept from erring in this blessed path, for the light of life shines in it. O, dear seekers, this is the teaching, the Teacher rather, the Lord Jesus, and He sends His good Spirit to His children. May we abide in Him in this particular.

Abide in Me in the next place as the Priest, the great High Priest of our profession. We shall never get to the end of the worth, the blessedness, and the glory of the Priesthood of Christ. The types are beautiful, but they are a shadow, as Paul says, and the body is of Christ. His Priesthood is necessary; no sinful creature can approach Jehovah in Himself, in his own name. If ever we get access to God it is by the Priest, Jesus Christ. You, of course know, being well acquainted by your reading of the Bible, that the Jewish nation got no access, as such, to God, but by the priest. They may, and must, take offerings, but the offerer must be the priest. Think of it. If the type excluded the nation from the presence of God unless there was a sacrifice, a priest, what shall we say of the poor, guilty, wicked people who are convinced of their sinfulness? This only, that we may not go to God. Not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth, but a poor, guilty creature, who has in him the Holy Spirit as a teacher who directs his heart and mind and steps to the great Altar, whereof we have a right to eat if we be believers; directing the steps to the great High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus. And when a backsliding heart turns us aside, it turns us from this High Priest. When a self-righteous spirit moves us away, it moves us away from our High Priest. When a self-sufficient spirit comes, it moves us away from our High Priest. We need this exhortation - "Abide in Me". Would you be near God; you can only be near Him by Jesus Christ. Would you be cleansed from sin; only by the offering of this High Priest. Would you see the glory of God? You can only see it in Him. The Jew, the believing Jew, when he had taken his offering, and the priest had offered it, might see the ascending smoke and feel

satisfied that his sacrifice had been offered by the priest, and now a hope of acceptance would cheer his heart. When you, by faith, see Jesus, and perceive the blessed incense of His merit covering you, covering the mercy-seat, then hope is lively, love is warm. Wait here, cleave here. In your troubles go to this Priest; with your leprosy go to this Priest; with the offerings of thanksgiving, go to this Priest. The whole of the access of a living child of God, of the whole Church of God, is just here, fixed here. God will never accept a sinner's prayers or praises in any other Person, by any other means, than Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Abide in this. You will have the devil against you if you do; you will have flesh and blood against you, if you do; you will have tribulation if you do. Your reason will rebel, your will will rebel, your pride will rebel, and your corruptions may make you despair, but God will see to it if you are enabled to abide by the Lord Jesus, your great High Priest, all will be well.

Abide in Me as the King of kings and Lord of lords. Yes, kingly self must go; everything that would pretend to appear to manage, rule and have authority must give way and bow to the King of kings. He has the persons, circumstances, the souls, the trials, the opposers, the devils and men and false doctrines, He has them all under His authority. Yes, there is not an enemy of Christ in the world that is not under His authority. There is not a tongue moving in the world that is not under the authority of Christ. There is not a corruption in your hearts, there is not an Ishmael mocking in your spirits, that is not under Christ, the King of kings, the Lord of lords. One may exhort the Lord's people here and say this: Do not try to manage yourselves. If you do, He may let you go on for a time, but be sure of this, your attempts to manage will bring confusion and shame and barrenness to you. O, to believe in Him of whom Erskine writes:

Who all from nothing's womb disclosed
Can make the amazing product cease
By Him confusion brings forth peace

Well, it is a wonderful thing to believe in Jesus. To abide in Him you must have faith, else you will never come to Him, and faith in exercise will cause you to abide in Him. Leave yourselves and your

circumstances, your troubles, your fears, your devils, your corruptions and every evil thing, leave to Him; and your little faith, your little hope, your waning love, leave all with Him. He is the root of life; He is everything. And as I judge, this is implied in the word - "Abide in Me and I in you". In the communications of living sap, in the communications of divine love, in the communications of His precious atonement, He abides in His people. Then, further, He comes Himself. Christ in you, the hope of glory. O, what a ground, what a hope, the immutable Jesus Christ in a sinner, the hope of glory.

"As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine". If it be an external branch, with just an external union and nothing more, it cannot bring forth fruit, and if a poor branch should seem at any time severed, sin separating, temptations separating, prayerlessness coming over the soul like death itself, there is no fruit, no fruit. Why could not we cast the devil out of that young man? said Christ's disciples. "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting". And sometimes there may be so little life in you, so much evil and death, that you may seem like a separated and cut off branch; you bear no fruit, need to be revived.

"No more can ye except ye abide in Me". Cleave close to Him. Thomas Hardy in one of his letters says "It is hard for guilt in the pulpit to reprove sin in the pew" and I find it difficult to press this on your notice because I am in grievous shortcoming in respect of it, but here it is. "No more can ye". You will never bear fruit, you will never have faith in exercise, nor warm affection for Christ, never offer prayer and supplication, never wait for answers, never look for supplies, except you are enabled by the Holy Ghost to cleave close to Christ. How many of us believe it? Examine yourselves; do you believe it? When you go to business, what is there about Christ in you? When you have trouble, what is there of Christ in you? Have you grace enough to humble yourselves, grace enough to get down into the dust, grace enough to say, Lord I deserve it, and hell afterward? How often have I made that confession: Lord, I deserve it; I have brought it on myself; I deserve hell at the end. That has not been the worst place I have been in. A coldish feeling, no desire for the time being to get near; that is the worst. When you are in that bad

case, if God did not come and make new things in your heart, what would become of your profession? But He does come, and He does create new desires, bring up old things; He does, and causes the soul to cry mightily unto Him: "When my heart is overwhelmed within me lead me to the Rock that is higher than I". To abide is to continue. Not a flash; you may have many flashes that are good and many that are bad. This abiding is not a flash, not a day; No - as long as you live in this life as to the principle, there is this abiding. I say, the principle, because the activeness of it may often, alas, be absent. But there in the soul, deep in the soul, is that blessed faith of which Hart writes and we sing

Though damped it never dies

"Abide in Me". Now look at yourselves. Do you feel, can you perceive in yourself, this principle that, when challenged by the devil and temptation, does rise? This principle that, when mocked at by Ishmael, rises and says but there is no hope for me except in Christ; no life, but what I receive from Him. And so the abiding is thus brought to light. No life, no grace, no faith, no hope, no goodness, but in and from this blessed Person, the Lord Jesus Christ. "I am the Vine, ye are the branches". I am everything you can need; you can ask for nothing that I have not; desire nothing but what you may find in Me. Communion, flowing from union; comfort, flowing from His love; peace, made by His blood; justification in His righteousness; helps by the way; tokens for good; touches of His power; all, all from Himself, in Him as their root. Their very being is in Him and so the Lord help us who make a profession of His Name, to obey Him in this - "Abide in Me" - because as the branch can never be fruitful but by vital union with the stock and root, so you can never honour Him but by union with Him and by continuing to abide in Him. May the Lord give us this great blessing.

AMEN.