

# Rev Dr Charles Calder Mackintosh of Tain

## “Abide in me”

*Abide in me, and I in you.*  
John 15:4

These words were first addressed by Christ to the eleven, who were “in Him” not by profession only but in reality, and to whom He had a little before spoken such words as these: “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me” (John 14:1), “I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also” (John 14:18,19), “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27), and of whom He had just said (Judas having previously left them), “Now are ye clean through the word which I have spoken unto you” (John 15:3).

1. Union to Christ
2. Abiding in Christ
3. The implications of abiding in Christ

### **1. Union to Christ**

He makes use of the simile of the vine-stock and the branches to illustrate the union that subsists between Him and His people. The vine-stock and the branches make up one tree - Christ and His people are one. Plainly this is no mere external union, neither is it a mere union of sentiment of feeling (for in this sense the holy angels are entirely one with Christ). Nor yet is it what we call a relative union, such as subsists between the Representative and those whom He represents, or between the Surety and those for whom He engages. This is necessarily included in it; but it is more than all this. The leading thought is the sameness of life. As the same life subsists in the vine-stock and in the branches, so it is the same life which in its surpassing glory and all-fullness is in the God-man the Mediator that is also in the weakest believer. It is the same Spirit, poured out upon the Head and received by Him without measure, that in measure is given to His people, first to quicken them and then to dwell in them. And this is peculiar to redemption; as truly peculiar to it as is Incarnation and as is Substitution. It is very true that holiness is the same in the holy angels that it is in Christians; as indeed it is the same in essence in God and in His holy creatures. But the peculiarity of the life of Christ’s people lies in this, that the God-man is its spring; and that it is His life-giving power that evokes it out of death, that preserves it, and that causes it to grow from grace to glory.

Hence arises a peculiarly close dependence of Christ’s people upon Christ, just in proportion to the intimacy of the union. And hence also their blessed security in having their life bound up in His life: because He lives, they shall live also. For this union is an indissoluble one. Once formed, it lasts for ever: death cannot break it; on the resurrection day it will be perfected. No doubt Christ speaks of certain branches in Him being taken away, cast forth and withered. But these are branches that by bearing no fruit unto perfection show that they are not truly united to the Vine, and do not partake of its life and fatness: the mysterious

union on which salvation turns has never been made up between them and the Saviour, through His Spirit quickening them and their coming to Him for life. We must be living souls, living branches in the living Vine, in order that the union may be indissoluble.

## **2. Abiding in Christ**

And it is not enough to be in Christ; we must abide in Christ. As it is not enough for a *sinner* to know that Jesus is the common Saviour, or to know that all whom the Father hath given Him shall come to Him; as his knowledge of these things will but increase his condemnation unless he comes to Christ for salvation; so neither is it enough for the *believer* to know that nothing shall separate him from the love of Christ. For, if it be a blessed truth that the love of Christ is unchangeable, it is just as sure that those who are interested in it work out their own salvation (Philippians 2:12) and do not "draw back unto perdition" (Hebrews 10:39). All care and anxiety about the soul does not leave a man, once through grace he is in Christ. The fear of the wrath to come should indeed be removed by faith in the blood of atonement; but there must be the same care to continue in Christ that there was to find Christ. And no comfort can be drawn from the unchangeableness of His love unless we are thus striving to abide in Him. Our first care must be to attain to a state of salvation through union to Christ; our continued care must be to have our salvation advancing and the spiritual life in us increased through daily experience of the power of Christ as the Life.

So then the sum of the Christian's duty may be said to be comprehended in this - abiding in Christ. Jesus, in addressing His people, filled with concern for their comfort, their stability, their growth, and their fruitfulness, says, "Abide in me". Can we, from experimental knowledge and blessed remembrance, understand the feelings of the soul that after long seeking rest and finding none has now found Christ, and so can say, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee" (Psalm 116:7)? Oh how deep the sense of personal unworthiness then! How vivid the impression of the Saviour's glory and preciousness! - Christ as a covert, Christ as the life, Christ as the soul's all! Now think of these words as coming from *His* lips to the sinner who has been just received by Him and who is tasting of His graciousness. Oh who would say that the soul would ever again be found departing from Him?

## **3. The implications of abiding in Christ**

What is implied then in abiding in Christ?

### **1. A sense of need of Christ**

There must be a deep continued sense of need of Christ and an abiding perception of His all-sufficiency and fullness as a Saviour. The poverty of spirit to which the blessing is attached by our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3) is characteristic of the Christian not at the outset of his course only, but while he is in this world. It will leave him at death, when sin will leave him. Then he will be perfected in humility, and perfectly blessed in the enjoyment of Christ; but he will be no longer poor in spirit. Till then he will be growing in this grace. The richer in grace, the poorer will he be in spirit, because he will be increasingly humble, because there will be increasing sensibility to sin and a more and more enlarged apprehension of how much he has to attain. And thus, as he grows in grace, he will more and more need the same Saviour who received him at first when he came in his guilt and his rags and his misery, and who showed him

mercy. But along with a sense of need of Christ, there must be a continued and growing perception of the suitableness and fullness of Christ through a spiritual understanding of the record concerning Him. Without this the Christian, with his deep exercise, would be of all men the most miserable.

The blessedness of the poor in spirit lies in this, that theirs is the kingdom of heaven to enrich and ennoble them; and the blessedness of the Christian growing in poverty of spirit lies in this, that Christ is his to be more and more known by him in His unsearchable riches. It is under this sense of need on the one hand, and this persuasion of the Saviour's all-sufficiency on the other, that a sinner is first drawn to Him; it is under a deepening sense of need - the feeling that without Christ he can do nothing, and a growing knowledge of His preciousness, that the believer abides in Him. We cannot be too jealous of the religion that dispenses with poverty of spirit, or that manifests itself in calm confidence and high assurance while having quitted the humbling work of mourning for sin and of growing in a sense of its evil. If we think we have learned enough about sin and our own sinfulness, and if we do not care to grow also in the knowledge of Christ, we may take it as a sign that we are strangers to fellowship with the Saviour.

## 2. Dependence upon Christ or trust in Christ

Abiding in Christ must imply dependence upon Him or trust in Him - trust, namely, for all that is needed to maintain and perfect the spiritual life, or to secure the soul's peace, growth in grace, and eternal salvation. It implies dependence upon Him for righteousness. The soul must abide in Him as the strong tower out of which it cannot be safe. Or, to use another of the precious Scripture metaphors, it must put on Christ for justification continually on every fresh approach to God, and after every approach, to have the iniquity of holy things taken away. The more the Christian grows in grace, the more simple will be his dependence on Christ for righteousness, the more afraid will he be of mixing anything else - anything even of what the Holy Spirit may have wrought in Him - as a ground of hope before God, with the righteousness of Emmanuel. Then it implies dependence upon Christ for teaching, to open up the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, and to show us the path in which He would have us to go. It implies, moreover, dependence upon Him for sanctifying grace, as having no hope of obtaining holiness except through the grace of His almighty Spirit. Thus abiding in Christ is the exercise of active dependence upon Him; such dependence as evidences itself in the peace, the hope, the strength which flow from Christ to the soul through its exercise. This certainly is one of the main things implied in living a life of faith on the Son of God.

## 3. Continuing in Christ's love

To abide in Christ is to continue in Christ's love. It does not much matter whether we say abiding in the contemplation of Christ's love or abiding in the exercise of love to Christ and love to the brethren. For it is in contemplating Christ's love that love to Christ is drawn forth and exercised. And it is under its blessed influence that His people are constrained to live not unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again (2 Corinthians 5:15). "Abide", saith Christ, "in me." If in coming to Me your hard hearts have been broken, if you love Me who first loved you, if under the influence of this love you inquire, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?" (Psalm 116:12), then continue in My love, that you may keep My commandments.

## 4. Adherence to the Redeemer

To abide in Christ is to adhere to the Redeemer - to His Person (that is to Himself, the living Saviour) and therefore to His word, His cause, His people - under all temptations to depart from Him. No sooner does one set his face Christward, than he meets with trials of a new and peculiar nature. And no sooner has he come to Christ than he may encounter temptations to go away from Him.

It may be false doctrine, another gospel, tempting him as the primitive churches - especially those of Galatia - were tempted to depart from the simplicity that is in Christ and to seek, after having begun in the Spirit, to be made perfect by the flesh (Galatians 3:3). When thus tried, the soul that is kept by Christ will say, "To whom can I go but unto Thee? Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). There is a blessed heart-assurance of the divinity and infallible certainty of the way of salvation in Jesus that accompanies the first exercise of faith; and because of this, the soul that has tasted that the Lord is gracious will seek not another gospel but a fresh view and taste of the same gospel of the grace of God.

Another of these temptations is to sloth on the one hand and to legalism on the other. One who has been zealous and hot in God's service may wax cold and lifeless, contented to pray without any real pressing after communion with God, and to read and hear the word without any experience in the conscience and affections of its searching and cleansing power. Surely he has then ceased to abide in Christ. Or he may fall for the time under the power of legalism - that is to say, of self-righteousness - one of the most subtle and powerful enemies with which the believer has to contend. Could he but receive in simple faith the promises of free grace in Christ, and trust in the Lord for their fulfilment, how different, many a time, would it be with his soul in light, comfort and growth! But why is it difficult, at any time, to exercise this simple faith? Mainly because of the remaining legalism of the heart.

Worldliness is another powerful temptation - that is to say, conformity to the world or the love of a present world. Some of God's people have fallen under this temptation and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. The seed sown among thorns had sprung up, and there was every promise of abundant fruit, but the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choked the word, and it became unfruitful (Mark 4:19; Luke 8:14). If you would abide in Christ you must feel your need of Christ's almighty grace to keep you whilst engaged in the world's engrossing business, that your heart may still be where Christ is.

Spiritual pride is another of these temptations. When the great apostle was caught up to the third heaven, we might say, "How humble will Paul be in the experience of such grace!" Yet, lest he should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to him a thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7). And if Paul needed this discipline in order that he might be kept humble and abiding in Christ, what Christian is not in danger of spiritual pride, especially after any unwonted experience of the Lord's goodness? And may it not be that the reason why some Christians have so little settled comfort and joy is that they are so ready to put their enlargements in the room of Christ. "Abide," He saith, "in *me*."

The only other of the manifold temptations to depart from Christ which we shall now mention - for we must consider it - is despondency or readiness to faint, especially in time of trial. Despondency is no friend to humility, though some of God's dear children are often visited with it and kept low under its influence, saying, "My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgement is passed over from my God" (Isaiah 40:27). But He says, "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth

not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength" (Isaiah 40:28, 29).

#### 5. Abiding in Christ to the end

To abide in Christ must include in it to abide in Him to the end, even when the flesh may seek repose and when something may whisper that there has been enough of confession of old sins and struggling enough with indwelling sin. To the end - till the soul can "go no more out" (Revelation 3:12), till it be made white in His blood and be filled with all the fullness of God, finding its heaven in giving back all that it has received, in adoring thanksgiving to the Lamb that was slain (Revelation 5:12).

The Redeemer tells us what the happy effects are of abiding in Him. They are such as these:

First, the bringing forth of much fruit, even that fruit by which the Father is glorified and which is the evidence of discipleship (John 15:8).

Second, the knowledge of God as the hearer of prayer, because in keeping close to Christ prayer flourishes, and the believer not having a condemning heart, has confidence towards God to open his mouth wide that the Lord may fill it (John 15:7,16; 1 John 3:20-22).

Third, that his joy is made full, so that he finds, even when sorrowful, that he may be "alway rejoicing" (John 16:24; 17:13; 2 Corinthians 6:10).

But let us not forget that Christ speaks of some who do not abide in Him, and that their misery is proportioned to the joy of those who do. How terrible are His words! "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:6). How sad the case of a person who once seemed to be in Christ, a believer in His name, an ardent lover of His person, His people and His cause, a student of His Word, an honourer of His laws - when he leaves his first love, nay, goes back to the world and is again entangled in its pollutions! Are there any such among us? If there be one, may the Lord in infinite mercy, ere it be too late, so deal with him as that out of a deeply wounded heart the cry may come forth, "O that it were with me as in the years that are past!"

Is there one who fears that he has lost, or all but lost, the evidence which he once had of being in Christ, because the faith, repentance, love, self-denial, or what he once thought to be the beginnings of these blessed graces in his soul, cannot now be discerned by him? What is the remedy for such a case? Is it to brood over old experiences or to look more and more *within*? The Lord *may* give deliverance in this way. But what you are especially called to, if you now feel that to be without Christ is the sum of all misery, is to come as a sinner, as the chief of sinners, to the Lord Jesus. If you cannot say with confidence that you are in Christ, yet you *may* say that He invites you to come to Him, with the promise that He will in no wise cast you out. Apprehend the grace of so blessed an invitation, delay not compliance with it, come to Christ; and the rising of the Sun of Righteousness upon your soul will scatter the darkness, in His light you shall see light, and peace and joy will return with a melted heart. But inquire at the same time, if it be so that you have all but lost the evidence you once had of being in Christ, when was it that doubt began to fill your mind? was it after you were less earnest and diligent in secret prayer, after you had given place to spiritual sloth, and after the Word of Christ had ceased to be continually searched by you and to dwell in you? Then understand and profit by the solemn lesson which this teaches you. It is in connection with self-examination, with prayer,

with making His own Word precious that the Lord Jesus manifests Himself to His people, keeps them abiding in Himself, and restores them from their wanderings.

Finally, how sad is the case of those to whom it cannot be said, "Abide in me," because they are not in Christ! With whatever unconcern it may be listened to, to be without Christ is a dreadful thing. It is to be under the curse of God and the dominion of sin, to be living to God's dishonour, to be walking in the broad way that leadeth to destruction. But if Christ seeks you when you seek Him not; if there is mercy enough in Christ for you, efficacy in His blood to cleanse you, and power in His grace to sanctify you, then think how fearful it would be to live and die a rejecter of this Christ, to appear before the judgement seat without Christ, to be driven from Christ's presence, to have it said by the blessed Saviour Himself, "Depart from me!" (Matthew 25:41). These are not unmeaning words. You will yet know that these are the things which concern your peace. Will you not then seek the Lord while He is to be found, while you are not on the bed of pain, while you possess your reason, while you still have precious Sabbath time, while Jesus still knocks at your door?