**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**JOHN-080**. **ABIDING IN LOVE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you: continue ye In My love. If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love. These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."*

*John 15:9-11*

The last of these verses shows that they are to be taken as a kind of conclusion of the great parable of the Vine and the branches, for it looks back and declares Christ's purpose in His preceding utterances. The parable proper is ended, but the thoughts of it still linger in our Lord's mind, and echo through His words, as the vibration of some great bell after the stroke has ceased. The main thoughts of the parable were these two, that participation in Christ's life was the source of all good, and that abiding in Him was the means of participation in His life. And these same thoughts, though modified in their form, and free from the parabolical element, appear in the words that we have to consider on this occasion. The parable spoke about abiding in Christ; our text defines that abiding, and makes it still more tender and gracious by substituting for it, abiding in His love. The parable spoke of conduct as fruit, the effortless result of communion with Jesus. Our text speaks of it with more emphasis laid on the human side, as keeping the commandments. The parable told us that abiding in Christ was the condition of bearing fruit. Our text tells us the converse, which is also true, that bearing fruit, or keeping the commandments, is the condition of abiding in Christ. So our Lord takes His thought, as it were, and turns it round before us, letting us see both sides of it, and then tells us that He does all this for one purpose, which in itself is a token of His love, namely, that our hearts may be filled with perfect and perennial joy, a drop from the fountain of His own.

These three verses have three words which may be taken as their key-notes--love, obedience, joy. We shall look at them in that order.

**I. First, then, we have here the love in which it is our sweet duty to abide. As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you. Abide ye in My love.**

What shall we say about these mysterious and profound first words of this verse? They carry us into the very depths of divinity, and suggest for us that wonderful analogy between the relation of the Father to the Son, and that of the Son to His disciples, which appears over and over again in the solemnities of these last hours and words of Jesus. Christ here claims to be, in a unique and solitary fashion, the Object of the Father's love, and He claims to be able to love like God. As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you; as deeply, as purely, as fully, as eternally, and with all the unnameable perfectnesses which must belong to the divine affection, does Christ declare that He loves us.

I know not whether the majesty and uniqueness of His nature stand out more clearly in the one or in the other of these two assertions. As beloved of God, and as loving like God, He equally claims for Himself a place which none other can fill, and declares that the love which falls on us from His pierced and bleeding heart is really the love of God.

In this mysterious, awful, tender, perfect affection He exhorts us to abide. That comes yet closer to our hearts than the other phrase of which it is the modification, and in some sense the explanation. The command to abide in Him suggests much that is blessed, but to have all that mysterious abiding in Him resolved into abiding in His love is infinitely tenderer, and draws us still closer to Himself. Obviously, what is meant is not our continuance in the attitude of love to Him, but rather our continuance in the sweet and sacred atmosphere of His love to us. For the connection between the two halves of the verse necessarily requires that the love in which we are to abide should be identical with the love which had been previously spoken of, and that is clearly His love to us, and not ours to Him. But then, on the other hand, whosoever thus abides in Christ's love to Him will echo it back again, in an equally continuous love to Him. So that the two things flow together, and to abide in the conscious possession of Christ's love to me is the certain and inseparable cause of its effect, my abiding in the continual exercise and outgoing of my love to Him.

Now note that this continuance in Christ's love is a thing in our power, since it is commanded. Although it is His affection to us of which my text primarily speaks, I can so modify and regulate the flow of that divine love to my heart that it becomes my duty to continue in Christ's love to me.

What a quiet, blessed home that is for us! The image, I suppose, that underlies all this sweet speech in these last hours, about dwelling in Christ, in His joy, in His words, in His peace, and the like, is that of some safe house, into which going, we may be secure. And what sorrow or care or trouble or temptation would be able to reach us if we were folded in the protection of that strong love, and always felt that it was the fortress into which we might continually resort? They who make their abode there, and dwell behind those firm bastions, need fear no foes, but are lifted high above them all. Abide in My love, for they who dwell within the clefts of that Rock need none other defence; and they to whom the riven heart of Christ is the place of their abode are safe, whatsoever befalls. As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you. Abide ye in My love.

**II. Now note, secondly, the obedience by which we continue in Christ's love.**

The analogy, on which He has already touched, is still continued. If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. Note that Christ here claims for Himself absolute and unbroken conformity with the Father's will, and consequent uninterrupted and complete communion with the Father's love. It is the utterance of a nature conscious of no sin, of a humanity that never knew one instant's film of separation, howsoever thin, howsoever brief, between Him and the Father. No more tremendous words were ever spoken than these quiet ones in which Jesus Christ declares that never, all His life long, had there been the smallest deflection or want of conformity between the Father's will and His desires and doings, and that never had there been one grain of dust, as it were, between the two polished plates which adhered so closely in inseparable union of harmony and love.

And then notice, still further, how Christ here, with His consciousness of perfect obedience and communion, intercepts our obedience and diverts it to Himself. He does not say, Obey God as I have done, and He will love you; but He says, Obey Me as I obey God, and I will love you. Who is this that thus comes between the child's heart and the Father's? Does He come between when He stands thus? or does He rather lead us up to the Father, and to a share in His own filial obedience?

He further assures us that, by keeping His commandments, we shall continue in that sweet home and safe stronghold of His love. Of course the keeping of the commandments is something more than mere outward conformity by action. It is the inward harmony of will, and the bowing of the whole nature. It is, in fact, the same thing (though considered under a different aspect, and from a somewhat different point of view), as He has already been speaking about as the fruitof the vine, by the bearing of which the Father is glorified. And this obedience, the obedience of the hands because the heart obeys, and does so because it loves, the bowing of the will in glad submission to the loved and holy will of the heavens--this obedience is the condition of our continuing in Christ's love.

He will love us better, the more we obey His commandments, for although His tender heart is charged towards all, even the disobedient, with the love of pity and of desire to help, He cannot but feel a growing thrill of satisfied and gratified affection towards us, in the measure in which we become like Himself. The love that wept over us, when we were enemies, will rejoice over us with singing, when we are friends. The love that sought the sheep when it was wandering will pour itself yet more tenderly and with selector gifts upon it when it follows in the footsteps of the flock, and keeps close at the heels of the Good Shepherd. If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love, so we will put nothing between us and Him which will make it impossible for the tenderest tenderness of that holy love to come to your hearts.

The obedience which we render for love's sake will make us more capable of receiving, and more blessedly conscious of possessing, the love of Jesus Christ. The lightest cloud before the sun will prevent it from focussing its rays to a burning point on the convex glass. And the small, thin, fleeting, scarcely visible acts of self-will that sometimes pass across our skies will prevent our feeling the warmth of that love upon our shrouded hearts. Every known piece of rebellion against Christ will shatter all true enjoyment of His favour, unless we are hopeless hypocrites or self-deceived. The condition of knowing and feeling the warmth and blessedness of Christ's love to me is the honest submission of my nature to His commandments. You cannot rejoice in Jesus Christ unless you do His will. You will have no real comfort and blessedness in your religion unless it works itself out in your daily lives. That is why so many of you know nothing, or next to nothing, about the joy of Christ's felt presence, because you do not, for all your professions, hourly and momentarily regulate and submit your wills to His commandments. Do what He wants, and do it because He wants it, if you wish that His love should fill your hearts.

And, further, we shall continue in His love by obedience, inasmuch as every emotion which finds expression in our daily life is strengthened by the fact that it is expressed. The love which works is love which grows, and the tree that bears fruit is the tree that is healthy and increases. So note how all these deepest things of Christian teaching come at last to a plain piece of practical duty. We talk about the mysticism of John's Gospel, about the depth of these last sayings of Jesus Christ. Yes! they are mystical, they are deep--unfathomably deep, thank God!--but connected by the shortest possible road with the plainest possible duties. Let no man deceive you. He that doeth righteousness is righteous. It is of no use to talk about communion with Jesus Christ, and abiding in Him, in possession of His love, and all those other properly mystical sides of Christian experience, unless you verify them for yourselves by the plain way of practice. Doing as Christ bids us, and doing that habitually, and doing it gladly, then, and only then, are we in no danger of losing ourselves on the heights, or of forgetting that Christ's mission has for its last result the influencing of character and of conduct. If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love, even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love.

**III. Lastly, note the joy which follows on this practical obedience. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain, (or might be) in you, and that your joy might be full.**

My joy might be in you--a strange time to talk of His joy. In half an hour he would be in Gethsemane, and we know what happened there. Was Christ a joyful man? He was a Man of sorrowsbut one of the old Psalms says, Thou hast loved righteousness ... therefore God hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows. The deep truth that lies there is the same that He here claims as being fulfilled in His own experience, that absolute surrender and submission in love to the beloved commands of a loving Father made Him--in spite of sorrows, in spite of the baptism with which He was baptized, in spite of all the burden and the weight of our sins--the most joyful of men.

This joy He offers to us, a joy coming from perfect obedience, a joy coming from a surrender of self at the bidding of love, to a love that to us seems absolutely good and sweet. There is no joy that humanity is capable of to compare for a moment with that bright, warm, continuous sunshine which floods the soul, that is freed from all the clouds and mists of self and the darkness of sin. Self-sacrifice at the bidding of Jesus Christ is the recipe for the highest, the most exquisite, the most godlike gladnesses of which the human heart is capable. Our joy will remain if His joy is ours. Then our joy will be, up to the measure of its capacity, ennobled, and filled, and progressive, advancing ever towards a fuller possession of His joy, and a deeper calm of that pure and perennial rapture, which makes the settled and celestial bliss of those who have entered into the joy of their Lord.

Brother! there is only one gladness that is worth calling so--and that is, that which comes to us, when we give ourselves utterly away to Jesus Christ, and let Him do with us as He will. It is better to have a joy that is central and perennial--though there may be, as there will be, a surface of sorrow and care--than to have the converse, a surface of joy, and a black, unsympathetic kernel of aching unrest and sadness. In one or other of these two states we all live. Either we have to say, as sorrowful yet always rejoicingor we have to feel that even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness. Let us choose for ourselves, and let us choose aright, the gladness which coils round the heart, and endures for ever, and is found in submission to Jesus Christ, rather than the superficial, fleeting joys which are rooted on earth and perish with time.