

Abiding in Christ
Chapter 8: A Most Excellent Love

The Difference between Ten and One

There are two sets of commandments. There's the set of Fathers commands, which Jesus summed up as "Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as much as yourself." Then there is Jesus' one and only command. Jesus kept His Fathers commandments on our behalf. One beautiful thing about being 'in' Christ is that Jesus is the guarantee of a better covenant. Because you are **in** Christ, you come into all of His obedience. Because you're in Christ you come into the fullness of the experience of His obedience. That's what it means to be in Christ. What He is, you become. "As He is, so are we in this world." So His obedience becomes yours like His righteousness is yours. We live in the righteousness of Jesus.

We're not trying to have our own righteousness. We just accepted His. If I do not accept His righteousness, I am not born again! I am righteous because of who He is. I'm obedient because He's obedient. He obeys the Fathers commandments and because I'm in Him I Father sees me as exactly the same in obedience. I can do whatever Jesus does. I can be whatever Jesus is. That's my right. It's my privilege. It's my inheritance. That's why Jesus' said to the disciples, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another even as I have loved you. That you also love one another; by this all men will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another."

Shunning When We Should Be Restoring

I've never understood why the western church often turns away from people when they're going through difficulties. It's as though the church deems them to be unworthy to be in membership because of the nature of the sin committed. **It's as though the church believes that God is punishing them for their sin. And that couldn't be further from the truth.** When there's sin in your life, you need to be loved even more. "Where sin abounds, grace does **much more** abound." The love of God overwhelms everything. And people need to be outrageously loved in order to be restored.

I'm gonna digress for a moment into one of my other passions. One of the things I love about my soccer team, even though they got a bad result today, I love being at the home ground where you've got nearly 80,000 people and they sing non-stop for like 2 hours. They sing songs about our own team. Every player has a song that they sing for him. We sing songs about the opposition which are less than flattering. We even sing songs about teams we're not even playing on that day. It's fun. But the thing I love about the supporters of my team is that when a player is playing poorly, they sing his song. They encourage him. They start singing his song. They start treating him as though he's having the best game of his life. And the player usually picks up his game. Why? It's because there's love coming off the terraces, all this love coming out of the crowd.

God is like that. He sings over us, doesn't He? He has love songs in His heart about you. He loves loving. He is love. And if we're going to represent

Him, we come into that same love singing of the heart. We are made to be lovers of God and lovers of people. And it's really important that your heart **feels** outrageously loved. It's important to know that your obedience comes as a consequence of being radically loved and radically loving God in return. It's the power of abiding, agape (love) operating in our life, that enables us to keep God's commandments. Why? Because you want to! It becomes your greatest desire!

A Change in Affection Will Change the Desire

One thing I know about human beings is that every single one of us does exactly what we want to do. You can't stop people from doing exactly what they want to do. Well, I **want** to be loved by God. And He already does. I just need to believe it with all my heart. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Don't even lean on your own understanding." I **want** to love the people around me. I'm not saying I always do it or that I do it well. But it is a passionate pursuit and I'm learning and I'm growing toward that. Yet I know that **until I love God with all my heart, I will not love the people around me**, especially those who abuse me. "If anyone loves Me," Jesus said, "he will keep My word. And My Father will love him and we will come to him and we will make our abode with him. We'll come and dwell with him."

The Difference between State and Standing

It's called reciprocal abiding. We abide in God and God abides in us. And love is the currency of all relationships. God made us to be in relationship with us, a love relationship. Love is like the air that you breathe. Reciprocal abiding, the mutual abiding of God in you and you in God, is the goal of the Holy

Spirit in all things. He teaches us to abide and He enables us to perfect the discipline of dwelling and remaining in Jesus. You're in Christ! It's the difference between **state** and **standing**! **State** is how you see yourself. We very often consider ourselves to be in a negative state. We see ourselves as weak, powerless, sinful and undeserving and our performance is not good. Therefore God can't love us. Therefore I'm not acceptable and all that kind of stuff. That's **state**.

God has come into your heart to take you out of your **state** and put you in your **standing**. Your **standing** is who you are in Christ. It is how the Father sees you in Christ! So the Father puts you into Jesus. That means, when He looks at you, He doesn't see anything wrong with you. Because you're in Christ, He sees you through the lens of Jesus' life. So, He doesn't see what's wrong with you. He only sees what's missing from your current experience of Who He is and who He wants to be for you.

Your Perception Is Your Reality

God always intends to correct your misperceptions of Him. God knows the next piece of truth He wants to bring into your revelation. He knows the area to concentrate on. He knows exactly what He wants to do in the area where you are least like Jesus. He has a plan. God is committed to increase your wisdom and revelation about who He is for you in your current situation. So the only reason God puts His finger on something in your life is because He has a Divine Exchange planned. He wants to show you that you don't need that particular piece. You need this other one! You can give up that

piece which you thought was true in order to take this piece which is His truth on the matter.

God is not obsessed by sin. He's consumed with life. He's dealt with sin once for all in Christ, so He's not dealing with it any more. Rather than dealing with sin, He's revealing the truth about His love and your love! When God comes to you, He's not coming to smack you about sin. He's coming to reveal to you the 'how to' of abiding which will lead you to the 'Christ-life' that you desire. Keep in mind that He knows that the reason you are doing this sin, is because you do not believe the He loves you, regardless of your behavior. Only when you truly believe that God's agape (love) is never daunted by your sin can you receive the full measure of the love and life of God in you. "Consider yourself dead to sin, but alive to God ..." God only shines a light on an area of your life where you're not doing well because He is ready to help you overcome its darkness.

So He brings us under a conviction that something needs to change in this area. What He's convicting you of is your need for an upgrade. "I so want to touch this area of your life." And what do we do? We feel guilty and ashamed about it and run away. What is that? That is criminal insanity! And we actually relate to God as if he is as human and selfish as us. We think that He's annoyed with us, or offended by us. That is an affront to the Gospel. And it's a slap in the face of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's role in the believer is to guide us into all truth. He does this by revealing our wrong thinking (misperceptions) about God's love and forgiveness.

Right now, give yourself permission to change what you believe. I am not telling you to join a false religion, but to correct the false impressions you have of Christianity.

Jesus took all of sin's offense and paid for it, IN FULL. Has Jesus been punished enough? Yes! Has he been judged enough? Yes! So there is no judgment in this life. Instead, there is mercy and grace to help us in our time of need. You can boldly come before the throne of grace any time (even immediately after committing your worst sin). You have that right. "Father, I've got a problem, I need Your help!" "I know! I've been waiting for you. Bring it right here. (Big smile; fully accepted; totally loved) Let's just get on with it." God cannot release you from guilt, shame and fear unless and until you decided to believe that "Jesus Paid It All!"

Repentance Is A Change of Mind, Not Groveling

Many of us have wasted many years, maybe even decades, feeling unacceptable and unworthy. That is not what the Holy Spirit is saying. That is the evil one telling us logical (in human terms) but false things as they pertain to God's ways. Jesus said, "When the Spirit of Truth comes He'll guide you into all truth ...". And it is the truth about yourself that is most important to know. But, the Holy Spirit will also bring you clarity and truth about Who God really is. The Holy Spirit will show you Who Jesus is for you. He'll single out an area of your life. Then He'll show you what Jesus is for you in that area.

"He'll tell you the things of Mine and show them to you." Why? So that you can take them onboard and use them to accomplish the purposes of God for

you! You need to run with the Spirit of Revelation about the true nature of God and what He is really, really, really like! We need to revel in the Love of God. And you know what? You can change really quickly if you get a hold of the true nature of the agape (love) of God for you. When you are feeling unworthy, repent! Repentance is to change your mind about something, in this case, God! You can only replace a mindset with another mindset. Change your mindset about God. Change your mind about Who He is and what He's like.

Reciprocal Abiding

Reciprocal abiding is the goal of the Holy Spirit. God lives in you and you live in God. We're learning the discipline of dwelling and remaining in Who Christ is for us. And you should be having a great time in your life. Even on the toughest days it's brilliant to be a Christian. It's brilliant to know God even on the worst days. It's amazing. Anything can happen with God. Jesus lives in us to keep His word to us. And as we abide in His obedience and as we trust in that obedience, in His nature, we are free to keep His word to other people.

I love loving my friends! I have some brilliant friends. I love thinking about them. I love anticipating what comes next. I love asking the Lord questions: "So what's happening right now with Barbara?" Barbara is funny, she's kind of goofy, her husband is one of my best friends; he's the worship leader in our church. And Barbara's nick name is '4MT' because she acts like she's the 4th member of the Trinity. She is the boss of all of us. She organizes us. A huge crowd of us go out every Sunday for lunch. She

organizes everything. She's like an old sheep dog. She herds us in the right direction of the restaurant. She's incurably noisy and we all adore her. 4MT! Brilliant friend! And she just has this way about her. The thing about Barbara is that she knows she is wonderfully loved by Jesus. So, she expects to be wonderfully loved by everyone that she meets. She's never met a stranger. She just like comes up, and you find yourself saying something about yourself to her and you've never even met her before. She has that way.

I love thinking about Barbara and thinking about her in terms of what's next for her in the Lord? What is she becoming? And what's emerging in her life with God? I like thinking about my friends. Where are they right now? What are they struggling in? How can I stand with them? What's coming next? What have we got to look forward to? How are they going to be changing? I love all those conversations with God. Often we have meals together. We'll sit there and just tell one another what we like about each other. I like that. Just a whole evening of saying, "You know, Bob, this is what I really value about you." I like that because there's something really powerful in that kind of friendship. It's called intentionality.

You Cannot Escaping Being Beloved

God is very, very intentional. You know, God loves to tell you the things He likes about you. I really struggled with this, years ago. And God said to me one day, "You know, Graham, you are My beloved son in whom I am well pleased." And I'm going; "Shush, shush! You're not supposed to say things like that. I'm not Jesus. You only say that to Jesus." He said, "I was." I said, "What do you mean?" And

He said, "I'm saying it to Jesus in you. You're in Him. So you're My beloved son in whom I am well pleased." "Okay, well, I can't get my head wrapped around that." "What? You don't believe Me?" "Well it's not that I don't believe You, I just think You're being nice." "You think I'm being nice?" "Uh huh." "Well you think I'm like lying to you?" "Well no." I'm thinking, okay, I'm getting on dangerous ground here. "Well no." "Well, what does 'no' mean?" "It means 'no, not exactly. No possibly' but, I don't want to say yes." He said, "Graham, you're such a dummy." "We agree on that score!" "Okay, I'm going to prove it to you."

Over the next 18 months I think there were 416 people who came to me at conferences and meetings. All of them put a piece of paper in my hand and when I opened it, it was the same verse: "This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased." 416 times! After 50 I was done. "I'm done. I believe You! Lord, I believe You!" "What's that?" "I believe You." "No. No you don't." "Honestly I do." (50 more) "I get it, I totally believe You." "No. No. I'm not sure. You're saying you believe Me now, but you might not believe Me." (Another 100 people coming) "God told me..." "Yeah. Yeah. Great. Thanks." 416 times He rubbed my nose in it. And the 416th was an elderly lady who is one of my intercessors. She comes up to me. She looks at me. And she says, "The Lord says, "This is the last time He's going to tell you." "Great!" And she has that look like are you stupid or what? Like, she knows stuff. Thank you Sandra, I am stupid, but I'm wonderfully loved apparently.

"He's your Father." "Nah," "Like really, He's your

Father.” “Honestly?” “Don’t look at me like that!” “He’s your Father.” “Okay, who wants to be slapped first?” “He’s your Father. And He loves you!” My experience of my earthly father was so horrendous, for years I couldn’t relate to God as Father. But, you know what? I’m His beloved son in whom He is well pleased! And He’s my Dad. He’s my Father. I am wonderfully, outrageously, unconditionally, totally and completely hopelessly loved by God, Who thinks the world of me. And that is the truth that sets me free. That’s **my** truth that sets **me** free. I am totally loved. I am very confident in Who God is for me. I know that I am wonderfully loved on my worst day. I know that when I’m having a bad day with God, He is not having a bad day with me. He loves me. And He’s happy.

God Is the Happy That Grandpa Is A Dummy

God is the happiest person I know. He has the sunniest disposition of anybody you’re ever going to meet. I have some great friends who are brilliantly funny, totally hilarious and compellingly fun to be with, like my friend Jesse. He’s an American guy who lives in Vancouver BC. He is a pastor there. He builds hot rods in his spare time. He’s a ventriloquist who also plays the banjo. And he’s killingly funny. He has this dummy called grandpa. Grandpa is a little old guy who is like a Baptist, Presbyterian Methodist minister for 40 years and then he retired and got saved. So he’s like really annoyed that he served God for 40 years and didn’t know Him. And now he got saved.

Grandpa loves the prophetic and loves to preach. Jesse’s very strongly prophetic himself. So he gets grandpa up and sometimes grandpa makes all the

announcements or he takes the offering. When grandpa takes the offering it's always big. He has the anointment. That's what he calls it. He says I'm under the anointment now. And he's such a great act. But when Jessie starts prophesying using grandpa, 'Oh, my goodness, things get wildly funny.'

He picked out one guy in a conference we were doing together and Jesse nails this guy prophetically using grandpa. Right? And you can see the guy sitting there and he's thinking, "That's the word of the Lord! But it's the word of the Lord coming out of a dummy? What's with that?" So grandpa just leans forward and says "Now, son, don't get too proud, you've just been prophesied to by a dummy." It's hilarious. Jesse is like one of the funniest people you'll ever meet in your life.

Elvis and Tony the Tiger

I was doing a conference in Vancouver and he comes to pick me up at the airport dressed as Elvis. I Kid you not! And his associate is dressed as Tony the Tiger. So I come out of customs hold into the main part of the airport. Fortunately for me, there was a plane load of Koreans who had exited the customs hold before me. So they all come out and see Elvis standing there with Tony the Tiger. And Jesse has this guy with a camera taking pictures. They're gonna take a video of Elvis greeting me and they have this big sign, "Welcome Prophet!" It freaked me out! And I'm looking up at the sign. And I have this sense of impending doom. I'm looking at Elvis and this Tony the Tiger and I'm thinking O shoot! ... or words to that effect.

But there's a plane load of Korean's between me and Elvis. So all the Koreans see Elvis and start getting their cameras out. They are all there taking pictures and Jesse gets totally caught up in his 15 minutes of fame. "Hello, Welcome to Vancouver." Tony the Tiger is like posing. And I walk right past them and his cameraman. I'm walking past them smirking. That's Jesse. I know that's Jesse and it was so funny because we have this crowd following us all the way through the terminal. The Korean's are going like, "Ah, one more picture!" You know, it was great!

So we're on the way home and Jesse decides that he wants a hamburger because he's Elvis. So we stop at this hamburger joint. It's full. And he walks in and the whole place just stands up and starts cheering. He's going around signing autographs. That's Jesse. He's one of my best friends. He's killingly funny to be with. You laugh all day long with Jess. He's one of the most joyful people I know. And when you go out walking with him around his neighborhood, everyone knows him. Little kids, older people, bikers and everyone else greets him, "How's it going?" He's always got a joke to tell. Everyone smiles around Jesse. He has that kind of personality.

God's Humor Is Enormous

Well God is like Jesse to the power of a million. God is like that. I'm not saying God would dress as Elvis, though I wouldn't put it past Him! He can show up in very surprising ways. But He has a brilliant sense of humor. I mean, look at this. Look around. You're telling me God doesn't have a sense of humor? My goodness! God is extremely, incredibly

and wonderfully joyful. When He says, “Enter into the joy of the Lord, it’s like entering into everything I Am! He knows how to laugh. He loves to laugh with us, mostly He laughs at us, because He finds us funny, I think, on days. But He has this incredible lightness of spirit. That’s God!

You know that about Him. He’s so light hearted. Yeah. Jesus was only acquainted with grief. It wasn’t His best friend. He was happy and joyful. He’s a happy God. He overflows with smiles and laughter. He loves to lift up the light of His countenance, which is a wonderfully poetic way of saying, God has a brilliant smile! He has a sensational smile. “I will lift up the light of My countenance upon you.”

Stumbling Toward God

And He doesn’t mind if we are struggling. He just has an intentionality towards us that’s huge. So, you that are parents, reflect on when your kids were learning to walk. Remember how they stood there holding onto the edge of the couch with those fat little legs. And what do you do? You get down in front of him. You fling your arms wide and you put this brilliant smile on your face. Then you say, “Come on then. Come on.” And the kid looks at you. “Come on - you can do it.” And they start wobbling towards you. Then they drop down and cheat and crawl towards you. You don’t mind a bit. You pick them up and you find their tummy. And you do a raspberry on their belly button. You swirl them around. You kiss them and hug them. Then you put them right back up and assume the position in front of them, “Come on then!” And you don’t care how many times your kid

falls down or stumbles, as long as they're stumbling towards you.

Well God is exactly the same as that. Where'd you get that from? It's in your DNA from heaven. God doesn't care how many times you fall over and stumble, as long as you are stumbling towards Him. Yeah? He's happy! He's happy with you right now. He's happy with you because He always has a plan. He knows the next thing you need and He's so deeply committed to giving it to you. And just the thought of giving it to you makes Him happy. That's what He's like. You can't be miserable around God. He's just too happy and His happiness overwhelms you. And when His joy touches you, you break out into smiles.

Smile When You Think About God

When I think about God, I start smiling. I pray and I start smiling. I talk in meetings about God and I'm smiling, because He's a smiler. He grins. He has a great sense of humor. He's light. He's brilliant to be with. He's like the best person to hang out with because He's gonna find something to say that's funny. He's gonna find some way of putting a smile on your face because He's committed to life, love and laughter. "From age to age He loves to lift up the light of His countenance upon us." He has a brilliant dazzling smile. And abiding in Him provides you with the anointing to smile, grin and to laugh out loud no matter what is occurring.

In eternity, when you're not worshipping, you're gonna be laughing at something. Joy is a permanent emotion and rejoicing is its expression. Abiding is

about joy being manifested as part of life. Grief, sorrow and sighing or any kind of despondency can only, ever be temporary. Get rid of them as soon as you can. “Weeping may last for a night, but joy comes in the morning.” “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.” “They will find gladness and joy and sorrow and sighing shall flee away, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads.” Isa. 51 “In His presence there is fullness of joy”.

Jesus said, “No one will take away your joy!” But you can give it up. Some of us have given up our joy. We’ve settled for being miserable. But, there is a deep outrageous joy that belongs to you. You simply need to pick it up. God can come to you when you’re going through a nightmare of an experience and He can make you laugh. I’ve known this myself, for the last several years, in what I’ve been going through personally, I felt that incredible comfort of the Holy Spirit blessing me.

There are some days when the Holy Spirit has just breezed into my room and started telling me jokes. He loves Pharisee jokes. Like, “If your favorite words in the Bible are the ones you wrote in the margin, you might be a Pharisee!” “If a \$20 bill looks small when you take it to the grocery store and big when you bring it to church, you might be a Pharisee.” He’s a joker. And there were some days when I would just be in fits of laughter. I remember one day I was doing a conference and I was really struggling and He came into my hotel room at 6 in the morning and He just comes in and says, “You know what My favorite excuse in the Bible is?” I’m thinking, “No, but you’re gonna tell me.”

“Do you remember that time when Moses is up on the mountain for the second time and he’s bringing down the tablets, we all know there’s a big commotion going on in camp because they all think he’s dead, he’s been away for 5 weeks. They’re all thinking, “He’s toast.” God’s killed him, so let’s all party. So they’re all partying down there doing unspeakable things and Moses comes down the mountain, he’s got these tablets, he’s feeling like really important. Bless him, he feels so important bringing the tablets down, and he gets to the camp and he hears the sound of singing.

Aaron meanwhile has been making this golden calf out of all the gold the people gave him. And Moses gets to the edge of camp and the word about his presence spreads. He said, “You have never seen anyone so panic stricken in your life as Aaron.” So Moses comes into the middle of camp and here’s Aaron in front of the golden calf and he says to Moses, “Hi! How are you doing? You want to come and get something to eat?” But, Moses is saying, “What’s all this going on and what’s that behind your back?” “Ah, uh, what?” Moses brushes him out of the way and Aaron goes, “Well, um, they gave me all this gold and I threw it in the fire and this came out!” And the Holy Spirit said, “We laughed like anything. I turned to the Father and I said, ‘Did You hear what he just said?’ He said, “That’s like the most outrageous excuse I’ve ever heard!”

And of course I’ve totally forgotten what I was miserable about! I’m ready to face my day!