

“Remain in me, and I will remain in you”

An Exegetical Study of John 15:1-17

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The setting for our exegetical study is a portion of Jesus' farewell address to his disciples (John 13-16). Jesus had been with his disciples for three years and during that time he made use of many teaching opportunities. He taught his disciples through word and example that he was the Christ, the Messiah promised long ago. The disciples, in turn, had begun to grasp what Jesus was teaching them, but they were far from perfect. There was still so much to learn! Time was now running out.

It was Maundy Thursday evening, the night Jesus met with his disciple's in the upper room. Before that night was over, Jesus would be betrayed by one of his own, denied by one of his own, and he himself would be left all alone.

These last few hours provided Jesus his last opportunity to teach his disciples and prepare them for what lie ahead: his arrest, conviction, execution and their life without his visible presence.

Before we go any further, it should be noted that there is some disagreement among scholars as to whether this discourse took place in the upper room or on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane. John 14 closes with the words, "Come now; let us leave." John 18:1, doesn't have the disciples leaving until after Jesus prayed for himself, his disciples and all believers. My personal opinion is that this discourse did take place in the upper room, Maundy Thursday, before Jesus and his disciples left for the Garden of Gethsemane. However, it doesn't really matter where he said these words. What matters is that he did.

In this paper we will consider exegetically the well-known allegory of the vine and the branches. Here Jesus told his disciples, and all future disciples, that just as the branch will only produce fruit by remaining in the vine, so also believers will only produce fruit by remaining in Christ. May the Holy Spirit guide our study.

John 15:1-11 “Remain in me” - the believer's relation to Christ

Picture yourself as a teacher in a classroom setting. Your job is to make sure the students are comprehending the material you are teaching. In order to get your point across and keep the student's attention, you might use a variety of methods and means. One that always seems to work is the use of visual aids: the chalkboard, overheads, videos or object lessons. When visual aids are used properly the students have something they can visualize for themselves and makes the learning process that much easier.

We all use visual aids. Jesus, the Greatest Teacher, used them too. Jesus used a vine to get his point across.

Verse 1

Ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ἀμπελος ἡ ἀληθινή, καὶ ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ γεωργός ἐστίν.
“I am the genuine vine, and my father is the vinedresser.”

Ἐγώ - emphasis

ἡ ἀληθινή (ἀληθινός, η, ον) - “genuine, real, original,” as opposed to ἀληθής- “true,” in contrast to false.

The article is specific. Jesus asserts there may be other vines - but as the genuine vine he stands in contrast to all others. He alone embodies the complete will and purposes of God.

ἡ ἀμπελος - “vine,” with the article (specific) - as opposed to all other vines.

γεωργός - “farmer, vinedresser, one who tills the soil.” The vinedresser is God the Father.

ἐστίν (εἰμί) - 3 p. sing. pres. act. indicative

The fact that Jesus would use the allegory of a vine is not entirely strange or new. For those acquainted with Old Testament Scripture, as the disciples certainly were, a vine was often used symbolically. The vine was used as a picture of fruitfulness or as a picture of God's people (Psalm 80:8, 14; 128:3; Is.5:1-7; Ezek.17:8; Joel 2:22; Zech.8:12; Ma1.3:11) (Hendriksen).

It is also possible that the reason Jesus would refer to a vine is that he and his disciples had just celebrated the Lord's Supper and had taken part of the "fruit of the vine."

We should also take note of the imagery used in this verse. God the Father is depicted as the vinedresser. Just as the vinedresser cares for everything in the vineyard, so also God the Father guides and controls all things, even the mission of his son, "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38).

Jesus Christ is depicted as the vine. Just as the vine is the source from which the branch receives life, thereby enabling it to produce fruit, so also Jesus is the source of all spiritual life.

Verse 2

πᾶν κλῆμα ἐν ἐμοὶ μὴ φέρον καρπὸν, αἶρει αὐτό, καὶ πᾶν τὸ καρπὸν φέρον καθαίρει αὐτὸ ἵνα καρπὸν πλείονα φέρῃ.
"Every branch in me that does not produce fruit, he takes it away, and every (branch) that produces fruit he prunes it in order that it might produce more fruit."

κλήμα - "branch" especially of a vine. No article, qualitative. The branch refers to Christians, cf. verse 5.

ἐμοὶ - Dative, 1 p. personal pronoun.

φέρειν (φέρω)- Pres. act. participle, neut. "Bear, produce."

καρπὸν (καρπός) - "fruit," no article - qualitative. Every kind of fruit (good work).

αἶρει (αἶρω) - 3 p. sing. act. indicative. "Take away, cut off."

καθαίρει (καθαίρω) - 3 p. present act. indicative. "Prune" by removing the superfluous wood.

ἵνα - purpose.

πλείονα (πολύς) - comparative with a singular.

φέρῃ (φέρω) - 3 p. sing. pres. act. subj. "Bear, produce." Used to express purpose.

The work of the vinedresser (gardener), God the Father, is described. Here is an instance in Scripture where the work of sanctification is ascribed to God the Father (Meyer - Dogmatics Notes, p.122). He is looking for a response of faith from those who are connected to the vine, Jesus Christ. Good works, the fruit he looks for, include everything the believer does out of faith and love for Christ.

The branches are divided into two groups: fruitful and unfruitful. The fruitful branches are those believers who produce fruits of faith. The unfruitful branches are former believers who have fallen away from the faith. They would not have been connected to the vine (Jesus) unless they were believers at one time.

The unproductive branches are cut off from the vine. This is God the Father's judgment against sin and unbelief. This action is taken as a result of the actions taken or not taken by the unfruitful. Their unbelief is what causes God to remove them from the vine.

The role of justification in the process of sanctification is emphasized. The fruitful branches are pruned, in order that fruitful branches might be even more productive. Producing fruit is only possible by connection to the vine.

The pruning God the Father does to fruitful branches, to believers, is Christian admonition and encouragement. Christians cannot stand still in their sanctification. It is an on-going process.

Verse 3

ἤδη ὑμεῖς καθαροὶ ἐστε διὰ τὸν λόγον ὃν λελάληκα ὑμῖν.

“You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.”

ἤδη - adverb. “Now, already.” Implies others will follow the disciples.

ὕμεις - emphatic.

καθαροί (καθαρός) - Plural. “Pure, clean” in a moral or religious sense.

ἐστε (εἰμί) - 2 p. pl. pres. act. indicative.

διὰ - with the accusative. Causal.

τὸν λόγον (λόγος) - “word” (with the article - that specific word). The word is the cause of their being cleansed.

Power is seen in its efficacious authority.

ὃν - Acc. m. sing. relative pronoun.

λελάληκα (λαλέω) - 1 p. sing. perf. act. indicative. “Speak, proclaim.” The perfect may indicate that the word may remain with them (Morris).

The disciples were already clean. They had already been pruned, though not every one of them. Judas was an example of a branch that was cut off. Earlier that night, after washing his disciple’s feet, Jesus pronounced, “You are clean, though not every one of you” (John 13:10). The Eleven, however, were clean and were now able to produce fruits of faith. How did this all come about? It was because of the word Jesus had already spoken to them.

Jesus shared with the disciples his mission here on earth and prepared them for their work ahead. Jesus had shared with his disciples that he was the Christ, the Promised Messiah who had come to save them from their sins. As a result of that message, the Holy Spirit worked the miracle of faith in their hearts. The disciples believed. And now, by the grace of God, their sins were forgiven and they were declared to be justified. They were now prepared to produce fruits of faith.

What comfort this is for us today! By the grace of God, we have also heard the word and been brought to faith. Our sins have been forgiven. We have been declared justified. We have also been prepared to produce fruits of faith. And as we’ve already learned in these verses so far, fruits of faith are expected.

Verse 4

μείνατε ἐν ἐμοί, καὶ γὼ ἐν ὑμῖν. καθὼς τὸ κλῆμα οὐ δύναται καρπὸν φέρειν ἄφ’ ἑαυτοῦ ἐὰν μὴ μένη ἐν τῇ ἀμπέλω, οὕτως οὐδὲ ὑμεῖς ἐὰν μὴ ἐν ἐμοὶ μένητε.

“Remain in me, and I in you. Just as the branch is not able to produce fruit on its own unless it remains in the vine, so neither are you unless you remain in me.”

μείνατε (μένω) - 2 p. pl. aor. act. inv. “Remain, abide.” Expressed command to either do right now or begin to.

It is a command of sanctification, to remain in their relationship with Christ.

“Remain” (μένω) is emphasized by its use = eleven times in this section. It emphasizes that the disciples are already in Christ and he in them. But it also suggests this vital connection might be broken.

“Produce fruit” (καρπὸν φέρον) is emphasized by its use = seven times in this section.

ἐν - “in,” indicates a close connection with the whole.

καὶ γὼ - “And I.” Often expresses a reciprocal relation.

καθὼς - “just as.”

τὸ κλῆμα - “branch” (with the article - a specific branch).

δύναται (δύναμαι) - 3 p. sing. pres. pass. indicative.

φέρειν (φέρω) - pres. act. infinitive. “Produce”

μένη (μένω) - 3 p. sing. pres. act. subj. “Remain” on the branch.

μένητε - 2 p. pl. pres. act. subj.

μένη + μένητε - present tenses denote continuous remaining, “remain always.”

ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ - 3 p. sing. personal pronoun. Indicates outcome.

οὐδὲ - "and not"

οὕτως - "so" - refers to what precedes.

It is self-evident that if a branch is cut off from the vine, it will die. If we are cut off from Christ, we will also die. No matter what the sinful human nature says, on our own we are unable to do anything to please God and work our way to heaven. We can do nothing. Therefore, we'd better stay close to the vine.

We remain in Jesus and he in us when we come into contact with the Means of Grace, his word and the sacraments. Through word and sacrament, the Holy Spirit strengthens our faith. The more we are into his word, the more we gain a firmer understanding and appreciation for what Christ has done for us.

As previously stated, the branch that is cut off from the vine, loses its source of nourishment and will be unable to produce fruit. Unless we remain in the vine, we will not be able to produce fruits of faith. Continued production demands constant contact with our life source - Jesus Christ.

Verse 5

ἐγὼ εἶμι ἡ ἄμπελος, ὑμεῖς τὰ κλήματα. ὁ μένων ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ γὰρ ἐν αὐτῷ οὗτος φέρει καρπὸν πολύν, ὅτι χωρὶς ἐμοῦ οὐ δύνασθε ποιεῖν οὐδέν.

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who remains in me and I in him this one produces much fruit, because without me you can do nothing."

ἡ ἄμπελος - article of previous reference, v.1.

μένων - pres. act. ptc. nom. sing. masc.

οὗτος - nom. sing. masc. demonstrative pronoun. Resumes something previously mentioned.

φέρει (φέρω) - 3 p. sing. pres. act. indicative. "Produce, bear."

καρπὸν - indicates result, outcome. "Be very fruitful."

ὅτι - causal.

χωρὶς - with the genitive, "without, apart from."

οὐ - "no." In combination with the other negatives strengthens the negation.

δύνασθε (δύνασθε) - 2 p. pl, pres. pass. indicative.

ποιεῖν (ποιέω) - pres. act. infinitive. "do, accomplish."

οὐδέν - "nothing."

Our relationship to Christ is officially revealed. He is the vine and we are the branches.

The object of a fruit-bearing plant is to produce fruit. The gardener wants to receive the most possible from each branch. If the branches remain in the vine, they will produce fruit. The fruit produced are our thank offerings to God and proof for ourselves that our faith is alive. If the branches are cut off, no fruit.

Once again, the point being emphasized is this: As long as there is a connection between us and Jesus Christ, fruits of faith will be produced. If that connection is broken, there is no fruit.

Unbelief causes God to remove the unbeliever permanently from the vine. What about "pseudo-Christians" who, by their own words and actions, are not producing fruits of faith (i.e., delinquents)? Is it a matter of being weak in faith or unbelief? What about hypocrites still retaining membership in the Visible Church? Ultimately God will judge. He alone knows who is to be cut off (cf. verse 2).

A significant aspect of this verse is producing "much" fruit. How does a person go from a weak faith and very little fruit, to a strong faith and abundant fruit? How do we produce more fruit ourselves and lead our members to do the same?

As pastors, we need to continually be reminded of the fact that if we are to fulfill our duty of equipping the saints for works of service, we need to be in contact with the Means of Grace ourselves. By the grace of God, a weak faith becomes strong and produces abundant fruit when we come into contact with God's word and

the sacraments. Our own faith is strengthened when the Holy Spirit, by the grace of God, comes to us through our daily devotions and personal study of Scripture. We receive the forgiveness of sins and the assurance of eternal life through receipt of the Lord's Supper. And now compelled by what has been done for us, we produce fruit as a thank-offering and are enabled to lead our members to do the same.

We have to get into the word! Priority of ministry comes into play here. We reach the largest number of our members on a weekly basis through the sermon, followed by Bible classes. We must make the time for sermon and Bible class preparation. Equipping the saints for works of service is our job. To do our job successfully, we've got to get into the word. If we're in the word, the Holy Spirit will do the rest.

Verse 6

ἐὰν μή τις μένη ἐν ἐμοί, ἐβλήθη ἔξω ὡς τὸ κλῆμα καὶ ἐξηράνθη, καὶ συνάγουσιν αὐτὰ καὶ εἰς τὸ πῦρ βάλλουσιν καὶ καίεται.

“If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown out like a branch and withers; and they gather them and throw them into the fire and they are burned.”

ἐὰν - with the subjunctive. Present general condition with a gnomic aorist (to be translated as a present) in the apodosis. The condition of expectancy intimates that some will fail to remain in Jesus.

τις - indefinite pronoun. The subject of συνάγουσιν and βάλλουσιν.

μένη - 3 p. sing. pres. act. subj. Continues to “remain.”

ἐμοί (ἐγώ) - 1 p. personal pronoun.

ἐβλήθη (βάλλω) - 3 p. sing. aor. pass. indicative. “Expelled from fellowship, to throw.”

ἔξω - “out.” Here, “out of the vineyard” (Morris).

ὡς - acts as a particle denoting comparison.

τὸ κλῆμα - (with the article - specific). Reference to Judas?

ἐξηράνθη (ξηραίνω) - 3 p. sing. aor. pass. indicative. “To dry out.” Passive= wither.”

ἐβλήθη and ἐξηράνθη - aorist verbs refer to accomplished action the past. They are used here to emphasize immediacy and finality of action. Everything depends on abiding in Christ.

καὶ - connective.

συνάγουσιν (συνάγω) - 3 p. pl. pres. act. indicative. “Gather in.”

αὐτὰ - the subject of καίεται.

τὸ πῦρ - refers to the fire of hell.

βάλλουσιν (βάλλω) - 3 p. pl. pres. act. indicative. “Throw.”

καίεται (καίω) - 3 p. sing. pres. pass. indicative. “To burn.”

βάλλουσιν and καίεται - indicatives show that it is assumed that these things actually happen.

Here are the consequences for anyone who does not remain in Christ. He is thrown out ἐβλήθη ἔξω.

After they have been cut off, the unproductive branches wither. Thoughts of God's grace and the desire to be in contact with his word are no longer present. Only self-indulgent thoughts rule the heart now. The next step is to gather the dried out branches to burn them. The plural of συνάγω shows that many will be affected.

This judgment on the unfruitful is made by the vinedresser who has the right and ability to “*destroy both soul and body in hell*” (Matthew 10:28). Such a warning must not be taken lightly (Sermon Studies on the Gospels, ILCW Series B, p. 201).

Verse 7

ἐὰν μείνητε ἐν ἐμοί καὶ τὰ ῥήματά μου ἐν ὑμῖν μείνη, ὃ ἐὰν θέλητε αἰτήσασθε καὶ γενήσεται ὑμῖν.

“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.”

ἐάν - Future More Vivid clause. ἐάν with the aorist subjunctive in the protasis plus the aorist imperative in the apodosis.

μείνητε (μένω) - 2 p. pl. aor. act. subj. "Remain." Remain permanently in a relationship with Christ.

τὰ ῥήματα - "words," with the article - specific words previously spoken.

μείνη - 3 p. sing. aor. act. subj.

θέλητε (θέλω) - 2 p. pl. pres. act. subj. "Wish, wish to have, desire." The present tense - at any time.

αἰτήσασθε (αἰτέω) - 2 p. pl. aor. mid. inv. "Ask, ask for self - demand."

αἰτέω is used instead of ἐρωτάω, which implies, "to seek information."

γενήσεται (γίνομαι) - 3 p. sing. fut. mid. indicative. The apodosis for the FMV clause. "Done, take place."

The blessings are described for the believer who remains in the Lord. Whatever we ask for through prayer, according to the New Man, we will receive as long as the believer is seeking the Lord's will in his life. Jesus will grant every request that will help accomplish this end.

Franz Pieper wrote:

"We must not forget that the will of Christians, as far as they are Christians, coincides entirely with God's will and that accordingly they ask God to give them not what their whim dictates, but what accords with His command and promise. The Christian disavows in advance all outcroppings of his carnal self-will. The supreme rule regulating his praying is: "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt." Just as the constitutions of some of our congregations contain the provision that any resolution of the congregation is null and void from the outset if it conflicts with God's Word, so every Christian prays with the understanding that wherever his petitions go beyond God's command and promise, they are a priori null and void. He prays in submission to God's will. "This is the confidence that we have in Him that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us" (1 John 5:14). Christian Dogmatics, Vol.3, p.82.

Verse 8

ἐν τούτῳ ἐδοξάσθη ὁ πατήρ μου, ἵνα καρπὸν πολὺν φέρητε καὶ γένησθε¹ ἐμοὶ μαθηταί.

"In this way my father is glorified, that you produce much fruit and show yourselves to be my disciples."

ἐν τούτῳ - the pronoun looks back, at the same time the thought already indicated is developed in the words which follow (Wescott).

ἐδοξάσθη (δοξάζω) - 3 p. sing. aor. pass (gnomic) indicative, "glorify." The aorist views the glorification as complete.

ἵνα - result; "that" explaining the τούτῳ.

πολὺν - comparative, "many."

ἐμοὶ - pl. nominative from ἐμός.

φέρητε (φέρω) - 2 p. pl. pres. act. subj. "keep on producing."

¹Variant

γένησθε - 2 p. pl. aor. subj. The UBS text preference, but only gives it a D rating.

γενήσεσθε - 2 p. pl. fut. mid. indicative. "And then you will become." The Nestle text preference.

The present translation handles this verb as an aorist subjunctive. John's reading reflects a Hebraic manner of speech in which two parallel ideas (i.e., "you bear much fruit" and "you show yourselves to be my disciples") are understood as communicating a single idea. The meaning of v.8, then, is that the Father is glorified when Jesus' disciples are fruitful disciples. (GWN, p. 204).

Most commentators feel either could be used without changing the intent of the verse.

Our Lord Jesus says that believers as branches in him, the heavenly vine, are not to be content to be static at the level of doing good works to which they had attained (Habeck - Our Great Heritage, Vol. 111, p.117). Rather, we are to produce more fruit.

Verse 9

καθώς ἠγάπησέν με ὁ πατήρ, καὶ γὰρ ὑμᾶς ἠγάπησα· μείνατε ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ τῇ ἐμῇ.
“Just as the father has loved me, I also have loved you; remain in my love.”

καθώς - “just as,” connects with the preceding thought.

ἠγάπησέν (ἀγαπάω) - 3 p. sing. aor. act. indicative, “To love.” God’s love for his son.

ὁ πατήρ - father, specifically God the Father.

ἠγάπησα (ἀγαπάω) - 1 p. sing. aor. act. indicative. God’s love to man.

ἠγάπησέν and ἠγάπησα - the two aorist indicatives state two past facts, and they are wound together: the one love is exactly like the other.

μείνατε - 2 p. pl. aor. act. inv, “Remain once and for all!” Expressed command to either do right now or begin to - command of sanctification.

τῇ ἀγάπῃ - Dat. possession, “Remain in Jesus’ love.” It is a specific love which gives but expects nothing in return.

τῇ ἐμῇ - Dat. of possession, used for emphasis.

καὶ γὰρ - correlative to καθώς.

“Just as the father has loved me” - Jesus the Son of God remained in his Father’s love by keeping his Father’s commands.

Jesus came here to earth in perfect obedience to his Father’s will. He became man, lived among sinners and willingly gave up his life so that our sins might be washed away. God the Father loved Jesus for what he did. And now, that same love extended from God the Father to Jesus, is offered to his disciples.

Verse 10

ἐὰν τὰς ἐντολάς μου τηρήσητε, μενεῖτε ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ μου, καθὼς ἐγὼ τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ πατρὸς μου τετήρηκα καὶ μένω αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ.

“If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my father’s commands and remain in his love.”

ἐὰν - Future More Vivid clause. ἐὰν with the aorist subjunctive in the protasis and the future indicative in the apodosis.

τὰς ἐντολάς - with the article, all the specific commands Jesus has given.

τηρήσητε (τηρέω) - 2 p. pl. aor. act. subj, “keep, observe, fulfill, pay attention to.”

μενεῖτε - 2 p. pl. fut. act. indicative.

τῇ ἀγάπῃ - Jesus’ love.

καθὼς - connects with the preceding thought.

ἐγὼ - you will remain in my love, i.e., make it possible for me to continue to love you.

τὰς ἐντολάς - with the article, God’s specific command to Christ. Go into the world to save mankind.

τετήρηκα (τηρέω) - 1 p. sing. perf. act. indicative, “keep.” The perfect tense shows completed fact.

μένω - 1 p. sing. pres. act. indicative.

τῇ ἀγάπῃ - cf. v. 9.

Keeping Jesus' commands is proof of our connection to him and our love for him, not according to the Old Man, but the New Man. Jesus gives the New Man the power to keep his commands just as he kept his Father's. That power is relayed to us through the Means of Grace.

Verse 11

Ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν ἵνα ἡ χαρὰ ἣ ἐμὴ ἐν ὑμῖν ᾗ καὶ ἡ χαρὰ ὑμῶν πληρωθῇ.

"I have told you these things in order that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete."

Ταῦτα - 2 p. pl. act. neuter demonstrative pronoun, "these things." The plural summarizes all that Jesus has said in v.1-10.

λελάληκα (λαλέω) - 1 p. sing. perf. act. indicative, "speak, proclaim."

ἵνα - purpose

ἡ χαρὰ - "joy"; With the article, the kind of joy only Christ can give.

ἣ ἐμὴ - possessive pronoun.

ᾗ (εἰμί) - 3 p. sing. pres. act. subj. Indicates the joy now continuing in the disciples.

ὑμῶν - subjective genitive - possession

πληρωθῇ (πληρόω) - 3 p. sing. aor. pass. subj., "to fulfill, complete." Literally, "your joy may be full." The passive points to Jesus as the agent who will fill this joy to the fullest.

Jesus wanted his disciples to experience his joy, the joy he received from his Father. The only way this joy can be found is through Christ. This joy would be made complete when they were anointed with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Jesus intended his disciples to obey his commands. But this was not to be a burden. Obedience was a guarantee of success. Jesus did not plan his disciples to fail. Joy follows naturally when disciples realize they will be producing fruit - something they could never do on their own (Expositors).

John 15:12-17 "Love one another" - the believer's relation to one another.

Verse 12

αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐντολὴ ἣ ἐμὴ, ἵνα ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους καθὼς ἠγάπησα ὑμᾶς.

"My command is this, that you love one another just as I have loved you."

αὕτη - f. nom. demonstrative pronoun. With reference to what follows.

ἐστὶν - 3 p. sing. pres. act. indicative.

ἡ ἐντολὴ - with the article, a specific command.

ἣ ἐμὴ - possessive pronoun. Strong emphasis.

ἀγαπᾶτε (ἀγαπάω) - 2 p. pl. pres. act. subj., "love." A genuine Christian love patterned after the love Christ has for us.

ἵνα - result. Subject is ἐντόλη.

Earlier Jesus had told his disciples to obey his commands. He now summarizes those commands in one word - love. The disciples were to love each other, expressing the same love as Jesus. This is the **agape** love, the kind of love Christ has for those he came to save. It is characterized as an unconditional, selfless love that gives and addresses every need.

Jesus would soon leave his disciples but his love would remain. This love was now to guide them in their relationships with each other and everyone they met. The only way they would be able to express this love is if they remained in Christ and his love.

Verse 13

μείζονα ταύτης ἀγάπην οὐδεὶς ἔχει, ἵνα τις τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ θῆ ὑπὲρ τῶν φίλων αὐτοῦ.
“Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.”

μείζονα - comparative. Used with a genitive of comparison. “Great.”

ταύτης - Demonstrative pronoun, genitive of comparison.

ἔχει (ἔχω) - 3 p. sing. pres. act. indicative, “have.”

ἵνα - result. appositional to ταύτης.

θῆ (τίθημι) - 3 p. sing. aor. act. subj., “to lay down.”

ὑπὲρ - “in behalf of.” Used after expressions of suffering, dying, devoting oneself, etc.

τῶν φίλων (φίλος) - “friend,” with the article, specific people.

τὴν ψυχὴν - “earthly life,” with the article: his own life.

Can you think of a greater love than having someone lay down his life for his friends? Jesus was just about to do that. He indicates how far his love is able to go. His disciples were about to reap the benefit of this act of love.

Jesus is not asking us to prove our love for each other by giving up our lives. Giving up our lives can never duplicate what Jesus did. But what Jesus does want is for us to duplicate his self-sacrificing nature. Our love for each other is to pattern itself and measure itself after the selfless, self-sacrificing love he showed for us when he gave his life on the cross.

Verse 14

ὁμοῖς φίλοι μου ἔστε ἐὰν ποιῆτε ἃ ἐγὼ ἐντέλλομαι ὑμῖν.

“You are my friends if you do what I command.”

ὁμοῖς - emphatic, “you.” Only those who keep Jesus’ saying are his friends. He was still stressing what he taught in v.10 & v.14.

ἐὰν - Present general condition, “if.” The present general condition states a general truth or repeated action in the conclusion that follows every time the condition is fulfilled.

ποιῆτε (ποιέω) - 2 p. pl. pres. act. subj., “do.”

ἐντέλλομαι - 1 p. sing. pres. mid. indicative, “command.” The middle voice - so as to affect himself.

“You are my friends” - the condition on which this relationship exists and continues is that the disciples keep doing the Lord’s bidding.

Christians are commanded to produce fruits of faith. When we follow Christ’s commands and live sanctified Christian lives, we will be blessed. This is what our New Man lives for. If we choose not to follow Christ and disregard his commands, we are no longer Christians but unbelievers (Old Man). We will have separated ourselves from the vine and reap the punishment - eternal life in hell.

This is an unequal friendship. Jesus is the perfect Son of God. His disciples are sinful human-beings. But by his grace, we are allowed to respond to his friendship.

Jesus’ friends are those who believe that Jesus laid down his life to pay for their sins. Compelled by the love shown them, they express their faith and obey his commands. Only the believer, the one who in faith remains in Jesus’ love can do what Jesus commands, namely, love others. These believers then receive the assurance that they are friends of Christ.

Verse 15

οὐκέτι λέγω ὑμᾶς δούλους, ὅτι ὁ δοῦλος οὐκ οἶδεν τί ποιεῖ αὐτοῦ ὁ κύριος· ὑμᾶς δὲ εἴρηκα φίλους, ὅτι πάντα ἃ ἤκουσα παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μου ἐγνώρισα ὑμῖν.

“I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know what his master is doing; rather I have called you friends, for everything I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you.”

οὐκέτι - reference to time, “no longer.”

δούλους - refers to the relationship of men to God, “servant, slave.”

ὅτι - causal.

οἶδεν - 3 p. sing. perf. act. indicative, “know.”

ποιεῖ (ποιέω) - 3 p. sing. pres. act. indicative, “do.”

ὁ κύριος - with the article, specific. “Lord, master.”

δὲ - shows a contrast, “but, rather.”

εἶρηκα (εἶπον) - 1 p. sing. perf. act. indicative, “call.”

ὅτι - causal.

ἤκουσα (ἀκούω) - 1 p. sing. aor. act. indicative, “hear.”

παρὰ - after verbs of learning, coming to know, hearing, asking, “from.”

ἐγνώρισα (γνωρίζω) - 1 p. sing. aor. act. indicative, “make known, disclose.” The aorist contemplates the completed work of, to make known Christ (Barrett).

The disciples are elevated from “servant” status to “friends.” As Jesus explains, a servant is someone who goes about blindly obeying orders. Jesus didn’t want that of his disciples. Jesus wanted his disciples to be intimately acquainted with his work and mission. They had become confidants.

Jesus had confided in his disciples everything his Father wanted them to know. He explained why he had come to earth, why he would soon die, why he would leave, what he would do when he returned, and how man is saved. This information would now compel them to carry out his commands. This work would not be considered a burden. Their obedience to his commands was to be an expression of their love.

Verse 16

οὐχ ὑμεῖς με ἐξελέξασθε, ἀλλ’ ἐγὼ ἐξελεξάμην ὑμᾶς καὶ ἔθηκα ὑμᾶς ἵνα ὑμεῖς ὑπάγητε καὶ καρπὸν φέρητε καὶ ὁ καρπὸς ὑμῶν μένη, ἵνα ὅτι ἂν αἰτήσητε τὸν πατέρα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου δῶ ὑμῖν.

“You did not choose me but I have chosen you and appointed you that you should go out and produce fruit and (that) your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask the father in my name, he will give it to you.”

ὑμεῖς - emphasis.

ἐξελέξασθε (ἐκλέγομαι) - 2 p. pl. aor. mid. indicative, “to choose.”

ἐγὼ - emphasis.

ἐξελεξάμην (ἐκλέγομαι) - 1 p. sing. aor. mid. indicative, “to choose.”

ἔθηκα (τίθημι) - 1 p. sing. aor. act. indicative, “appoint.”

ἵνα - result.

ὑπάγητε (ὑπάγω) - 2 p. pl. pres. act. subj., “to go.”

φέρητε (φέρω) - 2 p. pl. pres. act. subj., “produce.”

ὑπάγητε and φέρητε the present tense pictures the actions as they proceed.

μένη (μένω) - 3 p. sing. pres. act. subj., “remain.”

ἵνα - result. States what Jesus furthermore appointed.

αἰτήσητε (αἰτέω) - 2 p. pl. aor. act. subj., “ask.”

τῷ ὀνόματι - “name.” Refers to Jesus.

δῶ (δίδωμι) - 3 p. sing. aor. act. subj., “give.”

“I chose you” - is not a reference to election/predestination. The context points to the fact that Jesus chose his disciples for a specific work. They were chosen to work as his messengers to spread the word throughout the world (Matthew 28:19,20).

Jesus tries to take away any fear his disciples might have about carrying out his commands. He lets them know that they were chosen and appointed by him. He trained them himself. That is comfort in itself. But he follows that up by promising that whatever they ask for in his name, God would give it to them. Jesus is guaranteeing their success!

Just as God the Father loves the Son, he also loves those who carry out his Son’s commands. The disciple’s were guaranteed success because what they would be doing was in complete agreement with God the Father’s will.

The comfort we exact from this passage is that as modern day disciples of Christ, we are also expected to obey his commands. But we do not need to worry. We also have been chosen and appointed by Christ for specific work. We are to produce fruits of faith. We are to share his word. And just like with his original disciples, success is guaranteed.

Now we know that we can go to our Heavenly Father in prayer and know that whatever we ask for in Jesus’ name, if in keeping with his will, it will be.

Verse 17

ταῦτα ἐντέλλομαι ὑμῖν, ἵνα ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους.

“This I command you, that you love one another.”

ταῦτα - “This”; Refers back to his motivation for love. It indicates that all Jesus has commanded them is designed to teach them the lesson of mutual love.

ἐντέλλομαι - 1 p. sing. pres. mid. indicative, “command.”

ἵνα - result. It states what the Lord commands the disciples to do.

ἀγαπᾶτε (ἀγαπάω) - 2 p. pl. pres. act. indicative, “love.”

This is a repeat of verse 12, only changing the noun ἡ ἐντολή into the verb ἐντέλλομαι.

Lenski sums up this verse quite well. Paraphrasing his text, “The disciples are to love each other as the chosen friends of Jesus, to whom he has made his entire mission known. They are to produce fruits of faith. Their prayers in Jesus’ name will be answered. Linked together in this way, how can the disciples do anything other than love each other with that love of purpose which they share with Jesus?” (p.1054).

Conclusion

The allegory of the vine and the branches teaches us that just as a branch will only produce fruit by remaining in the vine, so also believers will only produce fruit by remaining in Christ.

Producing fruit is expected of true believers. True believers are expected to obey Christ’s commands. True believers are also expected to love each other just as Christ has loved us. What is more, true believers want to do these things out of love. The justification Jesus purchased for us is the basis for these admonitions.

The love God the Father and God the Son have for us made the following possible:

1. His love makes our spiritual life possible.
2. His love keeps us live.
3. His love leads us to produce fruit.
4. His love makes us, as Paul says, “*heirs and co-heirs with Christ*” (Romans 8:17), and more - his friends.
5. His love chose us to produce fruit for him.
6. His love leads us to love others.
7. His love guarantees our success!

To God alone the glory!

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