

VCBC SLG—The Gospel of John
Lesson #9
Upper Room Discourse#3—Chapter 15

Recap Last two Discourses: as Christ seeks to show the full extent of His love to His disciples before His trial and death (13:1)

Discourse #1: The washing of feet—Like master, like slaves

- Setting Judas’ betrayal in motion
- Predicting Peter’s denial

Discourse #2: I AM the Way, the Truth and the Life—Will come back to us to Himself

- Seen “me”, seen “Father”
- Promise of Holy Spirit—another helper
- “Peace I leave with you”

Chapter 15—I AM the True Vine

Introduction:

This is quite clearly a two part discourse

vv. 1-17: As branches of the True Vine, we are commanded to “remain” in Him

vv. 18-27: The world hates us because it hates our Master

The Opening Question: how does this discourse serve to show the full extent of Jesus’ Love?

(Read through vv. 1-8 once)

15: 1-8 The Command to remain in Him (I)

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.

**2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit,
while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes [or cleanses]
so that it will be even more fruitful.**

3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

4 Remain in me, as I also remain in you.

No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine.

Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

[5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.]

**6 If you do not remain in me,
you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers;
such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.**

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

8 This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples

1“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.
2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit,
while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes[or cleanses]
so that it will be even more fruitful.
3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

V.1: I AM the True Vine—meaning He is the true vine, all else would have to be false

- Throughout the OT, “vineyard” and “vine” (especially the latter) are often used as a favorite metaphor for Israel (Psalm 80; Isaiah 5, Jeremiah 2 and more)
- Psalm 80:8: **“You transplanted a vine from Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it.”**
- Psalm 80:14: **“Return to us, God Almighty! Look down from heaven and see! Watch over this vine,”**
- Psalm 80:16: **“Your vine is cut down; it is burned with fire; at your rebuke your people perish.”**

[In many of Jesus’ parables, two figures or two characters are often used to contrast the legalistic, self-righteous Jews versus the believing, repenting (esp.) Gentiles—like the Prodigal Son, the two brothers, the sheep and the goats etc.]

- The false vine would be the Jews who still think of themselves as the true people of God
- But the truth is: Jesus is the True Vine and only those who belong to Him (His branches) are the true people of God!

V.2: As Israel shows no fruit (of repentance—the most basic of all kinds of fruit)
- they are being cut off—forsaken by God—they do not belong to Christ!

But for those that bear fruit (of repentance)

The Father will prune (same word for cleanse/*kathairo*)

The purpose: as in a vine, the branch will bear more fruit

So, the question the disciples would naturally ask: *“Which kind of branches do we belong to?”*

The answer is: the latter, because you are clean already!

How: because of the hearing (and reception) of His word!

This is great news, obviously, but this is not the main message, the main message is to follow:

4 Remain in me, as I also remain in you.
No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine.
Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.
[5 *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”*]
6 If you do not remain in me,
you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers;
such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.
7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you,
ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.
8 This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples

The message is in fact a command and the command is:

- “Remain in Me!”

This is a rather puzzling command, because

- As branches, are we not automatically become part of the True Vine?
- Why should we be told to “remain in Me”?
- It appears to be able to remain in the vine
 - Will take a conscious choice, and
 - Will take some effort or action
- And what if we do not “remain in the vine?”

The Lord does not seem to give any answer as to how we can remain in Him, and focuses on

- (1) What happens if we do not remain in Him, and
- (2) The purposes (or benefits) of remaining in Him

So, negatively He says:

- Like branches not remaining in the vine, we simply cannot bear any fruit
 - More than not being able to bear fruit
 - “Apart from me, you can do nothing!” (what does that mean?)
- Also, like dead branches you will be...
 - thrown away and withers;
 - such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

[As a parable, we cannot push every aspect of the metaphor—so it does not mean we will be burned, but here is a picture of utter uselessness—what a waste!]

And positively, He gives the purposes and benefits of remaining in Him, and they include

A. His words will remain in us,

“If you remain in me and my words remain in you.”

[In Jesus’ (visible) absence, the disciples know that they need His words to guide, to give them wisdom, and to give them strength]

What is true of them is equally, if not more true of us!

B. The result is: our prayers will be answered!

“ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

[This is interesting: Jesus in 14:14 already gives them the promise of answered prayers, if they pray in His name, within the context of doing greater works for Him; here such a promise seems to tie to whether they have His words remain in them, and that is so true, as James reminds us that one of the reasons for unanswered prayers is: “**you ask with the wrong motives** (or badly)’ (James 4:3) and thus, the words of the Lord will purify such wrong motives (see v.3 above that the disciples are clean because of Jesus’ words)].

C. Will bring Father glory,

8 This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit,

[So, both answered prayers, in Jesus’ name (14:13-14) and our bearing more fruit will bring the Father glory—this is always our motive in all that we do (I Cor. 10:31; Eph. 1)]

D. We prove ourselves or show the world that we are His disciples!

showing yourselves to be my disciples

[In other words, there is no non-fruit bearing disciple or we will be sidelined!]

Still the question of “How we may remain in Him” has yet to be answered!

15: 9-17 The Command to remain in Him (II)—[Read this section once]

“9 “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

Now remain in my love.

**10 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.**

**11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you
and that your joy may be complete.**

12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.

14 You are my friends if you do what I command.

15 I no longer call you servants,

because a servant does not know his master’s business.

Instead, I have called you friends,

**for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to
you.**

**16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and
bear fruit—fruit that will last—**

and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.

17 This is my command: Love each other.”

The command to remain in Him continues, except that it is a command to remain in His love

- The 1st question is: is it a new command? Is remaining in Him the same as remaining in His love?
- If so, how can we remain in His love? And
- Are the benefits or purposes of remaining in His love the same as remaining in Him?
- **“9 “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.**
- **Now remain in my love.**
- **10 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.**
- **11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you
and that your joy may be complete.**

Well, if we remain in Him, we definitely will remain in His love (logical?)

- so in that sense, they are one the same and
- Here Jesus gives us the answer of how we may remain in His love
- And i.e. **“If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love!”**
- So, the way to remain in Him, as well as in His love
 - Is to obey Him (His words, His commands)

The reason?

—This is how Jesus remains in the Father’s love!

And the purpose or result of remaining His love?

Jesus’ joy may be in us

If we remain—dwell, taste, enjoy and protected by His love

In fact, this is the “complete joy”—filled to the brim!

[This is best solution to the disciples’ fear—as their hearts are troubled!]

Food for thought

- The command to remain in Him implies that being part of the True Vine in status only is just the starting point
- But we need to make a conscious choice to stay remain in Him and make an effort to do so
- And the “method” is simple—obey His words, His commands
 - Then we can continue to bear fruit
 - To hear and grow in His word and in knowing Him
 - To know what and how to pray in His name that our prayers can be answered
 - And that would bring glory to the Father
- And by remaining in Him—the fruit (of life) we bear will testify to the world that we are His followers, His disciples
- And living in His presence, dwelling in His love
 - We have the greatest, deepest, fullest joy—the joy that really Jesus’

The question though is:

- Do we remain in Him?

The test would include

- Does His word remain in us?
- What fruit are we bearing that would allow others to see we are really His disciples?
- Can we honestly say that our lives are marked by obedience?
- Do we experience prayers being answered as our prayers are guided by His words?
- Do you honestly experience joy that is deep, full and divine?

For the above to be true of us, Jesus highlights one particular command (or fruit) that we need to obey (or bear)

12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.

14 You are my friends if you do what I command.

15 I no longer call you servants,

because a servant does not know his master’s business.

Instead, I have called you friends,

for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—

and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.

17 This is my command: Love each other.” *(A very clear and obvious inclusio!)*

Yes, there are so many commands that are asked of us, and from time to time, we do fail to obey all of them, or at least not readily or instantly. But one that is key to us remaining in Him and His love is being spelled out here-- **Love each other**

The reason (why):

Because “**I have loved you**”—there is no choice for us but to love Him and one another as commanded

How then? Follow How Christ has loved us which includes

- 1) **Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.**
- Loving others more than our lives
 - We most likely do not have to sacrifice our lives for others
 - But we do need to deny ourselves, die to ourselves, putting others' interest before ours!
- 2) **I no longer call you servants (but friends)**
- We who are sinners, slave in essence are so loved and now even called friends by Him
 - We are to love our fellow brothers and sisters as friends
 - Deserving our friendship
 - Sharing our lives and trusting them enough to confide in them (Ps 25:14—**“The Lord confides in those who fear Him and makes His covenant known to Him”**)
 - Jesus does so, taking risks for trusting us with His life
 - Not only with Judas, but with all 12 of them
 - Risking their denial
 - Risking disappointment
 - Risking their lack of faith!
 - That is true friendship, true love—taking risk!

Final words about Fruit Bearing

**16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—
and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.
▪ **17 This is my command: Love each other.**”**

It is not a choice!

- It is our appointment, our destiny!
 - To bear fruit that will last (the word is “remain”)—play on word by Jesus
 - On the one hand, the fruit that He desires us to bear is fruit that last (for eternity)
 - On the other hand, if we do not remain in Him, whatever fruit that we may have to show for, is not His—because it does not come from our remaining in Him!
 - If time permits (my own testimony)
 - And bearing lasting fruit is also key to answered prayers!
 - Which makes sense—why would God give “whatever you ask”
 - If you have no intention of bearing fruit to God's glory!

Finally: no loving one another, no obeying His command—no remaining in Him and His love—a life of fruitlessness!

15: 18-27 The World Hates US

There appears to be a shift now in Jesus' message, from “Remaining in Him” to the reality of living in a world hostile to Him and His followers.

Q. The natural question we have is: Why is there a shift in focus?

Q. Is it totally unrelated to the previous message?

Q. How is it part of Jesus' showing the total extent of His love (13:1)—Let's read on.

“18 If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. 20 Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. 21 They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me.

15: 18-21—The spiritual reality of living in this world

(a) The reality: the world will hate us

- The word “if” denotes that it is a possibility, but the rest of the Lord’s word is painting more of a reality, than possibility—since they did persecute Him!

(b) The reasons:

- It hated me first: which is a reality—they did not only just hate Him, they crucified Him
- We have been “chosen out of the world”
 - i. Yes, He has not chosen to “take us out of the world” (17:14-15)
 - ii. Yet, we no longer belong to the world and the power it is under
 - **“In which you lived when you followed the ways of this world and the rulers of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient”** (Eph. 2:2)
 - iii. So, the choosing of side is essential for us, as we have been chosen out of the kingdom of the air (referring the satanic realm) and have become part of the Kingdom of God—such is our engagement in a spiritual warfare!
 - iv. Thus, we are hated because we are its enemy, not one of its own!
- No servant is greater than his master (13:14)

(c) Is it really an “if”—the key is: “**because of my name**”

- In v.27: we are commanded to “testify” for Christ: and so, if we do not testify for Christ, and do not publicly acknowledge His name (i.e. as His followers), perhaps, the world may not hate us. But since we do: such hatred is no more an “if” but a reality of being His disciples!

[This part of the Discourse also gives us an added understanding about the command to “remain in Him” to the disciples which carries the command of “no turning back!”]

15: 22-25—The World Stands Guilty of Its Sins

22 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. 23 Whoever hates me hates my Father as well. 24 If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. 25 But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: ‘They hated me without reason.

Q. Why is the world guilty of its sin?

(a) **“If I had not come and spoken to them”**

(b) **“If I had not done among them the works no one else did”**

The incarnation of Jesus

- His sinless life
- His powerful teaching

- Is enough for the world to believe in Who He is, and
- Repent and be saved

On top of that:

- His many miracles
 - Undeniable
 - So powerful and numerous that no one else could ever do
 - They are enough for the world to put their faith in Him
 - And be saved!

Their rejection means that

- They hated both the Father and the Son
- [Although to these days, the Orthodox Jews think that they love God and consider their rejection of Christ and His followers an act of righteousness, their zeal for God!]
- But the truth is: they have fulfilled what was prophesied in the Law
 - **“They hated me without reason”** (Ps. 35:19; 69:4)

[Worth noting: Jesus’ uses of the term “Law”, jives with the overall usage in the Bible to cover the whole book of OT.]

“Since the world hates us and will persecute us—what are we to do?”—the disciples must have wondered:

15: 26-27—The “Helper” (II)

“26 “When the Helper (*parakletos*) comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—He will testify about me. 27 And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.”

With these words, the Lord would go into greater details about the work and role of the Holy Spirit, as our Helper in His “visible” absence—which we shall consider next lesson (in ch.16)

Here, in continuation with the message of being in a world which is hostile to Him and His disciples, He gives them (and us) this short-version of the Great Commission

- **“You also must testify (about me).”**

Reason #1: **“for you have been with me from the beginning”**

Reason #2 **“The Spirit of Truth...will testify about me.”**

- The reason is simple logic
- No one can be a valid witness, unless he or she is present to serve as eye-witness
- And these 11 disciples were with Jesus from the very beginning (harken back to chapter 1 beginning with John the Baptist)
 - They heard his teachings, loud and clear
 - They had the chance, more so than anyone, to ask questions and clarify their doubts for a good three-year period
 - They had been eating, sleeping and walking with Him, and
 - They had seen most of His miracles, first-handed
 - There are no more credible and more powerful witnesses than them!

The question to us is: what about us? We have not been with Him “from the beginning”?

- The emphasis on “from the beginning”, obviously applies only to the 11 disciples who were puzzled with what to do upon the departure of Jesus
- Here in the Upper Room Discourse, they have been given assurance in many ways that they should “remain” in Him, and to take up this important role of testifying about Him and it is a “must” that they could not shy away from
- And this appears to prompt Peter to use it as one of the most important “criteria” in choosing Judas’ replacement—“**Therefore, it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.**” (Acts 1: 21-22)
- Such was Peter’s understanding of these words of Jesus, except that, as it turns out, Doctor Luke uses the bulk of the Book of Acts to tell of another God-anointed Apostle who had been perhaps an even more powerful witness than all the 11 combined—the Apostle Paul—who was really not with them “from the beginning” and yet He was able to testify by the power of the Holy Spirit!
- In fact, this is likely because of Peter’s insistence that an apostle needed to be with them from the beginning that throughout the ministry of the Apostle Paul, he had to defend his apostleship, time after time!
- So, while those “from the beginning” could not shirk from their responsibility, we all, by the power of the Holy Spirit
 - Have been commissioned just the same, and
 - Can, with the “**Helper**” be effective witnesses for Christ’s death and resurrection as we have been “born again” by the Spirit—we have experienced His power of resurrection, just the same; our lives testify to His presence in us!

Final thought on “**Remaining in Christ**”

It is natural that this term conjures up our daily time of devotion, as we spend time drawing close to the Lord in prayer and the study and reflection of His Word. That’s certainly a very important “spiritual discipline” without which, we would not be “connected” to the Vine, drawing nutrition from it. It is simple (but extremely valid) common sense. Perhaps, it is so simple and basic that the Lord chooses not to emphasize in this Discourse.

But what He has chosen to emphasize deserves our attention and that is

- We must respond to the Words that “remain” in us
 - Meaning our drawing close to Him is not meant to be just a feel-good, loving experience but a conscious “**hiding**” of His Word in our hearts, “**that we might not sin against Him.**” (Ps. 119:11)
 - But in this Discourse, the Lord desires a step further for us, and that is we have to “**obey**” the Words that we have hidden in our hearts—only then would we be truly “**remaining in Him (and His love)**”, and
 - Such obedience to His Words begins with and is grounded in “**love each other as He has loved us.**” (John 14: 12)