



“The Vine...a life connected.”

Part 3 – “Loving like Jesus”

John 15:1-17

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Part #3 - “Loving like Jesus...”

1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 "You are already clean because of the word which I have

spoken to you. 4 "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. 5 "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. 6 "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. 8 "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. 9 "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. 10 "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. 11 "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. 12 "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. 14 "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. 15 "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you 16 "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. 17 "These things I command you, that you love one another.

The fruit that Christ seeks here in John 15 is both the fruit of the Spirit, and the fruit of discipleship. The love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control that comes out of a spirit-filled life, as well as kingdom service and ‘good works’ that come out of a truly redeemed life. Experientially, I have never seen the one type without the presence of the other. They flow from the presence of one unto the other.

Jesus calls for His disciples to “abide in me.” This is so poignant today in a religious world that seems rather to simply “visit” Jesus on occasion. Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving. Sundays maybe, or when we are in trouble, in need, or in want.

Jesus is a lot like Batman to many of us. We don’t have an intimate relationship with Him, we just grab the bat-phone and call Him up in times of crisis. But Jesus isn’t a superhero from a comic book. He’s God, a personal friend of mine that seeks to know me, relate to me, and walk with me in times of trouble as well as blessing.

So He herein calls upon us to “abide” in Him: to be “held, kept, and remain continually.” Being a Christian is not to “visit” Jesus once in a while, then take a hike when things calm down on the field of battle. Nor is it to establish some “level” of *Christian-like living* and then park. These in the latter camp invariably decide they have committed enough, given enough and loved enough, and will then turn to involve themselves in the temporal distractions and hobbies of this world. These folks tend to believe that they are somehow “due” because they feel that they have already given to God so they can guiltlessly participate in this or that worldly distraction.

Its “deal-making” with God and of course it is a farce, for God doesn’t make deals. He wants *all* of you. Furthermore, He actually demands it. But we want “in” while still holding onto our favorite worldly practices. This principle weighs heavy on our society today, and profoundly affects how the greater church is viewed by

the unredeemed world. We have so many people who wear the badge, but fail in the responsibility and accountability of the Christian position.

You see, in reality there are no renegade Christians. We can't go all 'cowboy' on the body of Christ, or be a one-man show. There are no faith-filled Christian Rambo's. Our embrace of that model exposes our immaturity. It only means that we fail to grasp the fundamentals of the faith, and fail to know what the scriptures tell us. Whatever it was that we "accepted," it wasn't Christ.

It's easy and common to nestle up to Jesus when we are feeling good, or for some of us, when we are feeling really *bad*. But when the Caretaker comes along and begins to trim away the things He wants out of your life in order to make you a more "lean, mean, fightin' machine," we universally begin to buck and run away from the Caretaker. We want Jesus, but we want our stuff too. And thus many of us spend our lifetimes fighting against the supposed Master. We struggle over the control of our lives and the "division" of our property!

What I have found is that this "life-trimming" so often comes immediately after a period of growth and maturity. We don't generally prune young baby plants. We however might think that such would be easier to handle when we are spiritually older, but it's not. Often because we think we have grown up enough that we no longer need to examine and prune our lives. We no longer need to say "no" to the weights that slow us down, say "no" to practices and involvements that take away from our service, fellowship, relational investments...our evangelism and disciple making.

Please note that Jesus is talking to the apostles here. These guys had been there following Christ now for years, yet both the call and the warning is going out to them. At least one of them was an imposter, and he didn't make it despite having jumped through all the hoops. The other's would yet stumble and despite a very sure belief that they were in good standing with God...unmovable in their faith, they would indeed fail Jesus. This was because *they still had someplace else to go*. They had not burnt their bridges. They still kept their foot in the door and much of who they were were still the same men that they were before they knew Christ. They had a "plan B" whether they would admit it or not. **Do you?**

The passage seems to be clear that the Caretaker is never going to stop pruning, nurturing, and seeking greater and greater production out of us, individually or as a church! There is no end, no "finish line" except death. He must prune our lives as Christians if we are to bear the fruit He seeks. He must 'prune' the church also, cutting away the unproductive branches if we are to produce and grow as He desires.

The rejection of these facts and revelations, is what so painfully trips many of us later in our lives as believers. After all we have experienced, after the years that have passed, after we have grown so much, we find God is still asking us for more; for greater discipleship, for greater sacrifice. Often we fail personally ever to know our true and complete calling in God's kingdom because we fall short of "completing the race." We have drawn a line in the sand with God saying He can have *this* much but no more. We essentially declare areas of our lives "off limits" to the Spirit of God. We have prevented the Caretaker from pruning further to achieve all He has for us.

We must be able to not only confirm our actual salvation by our fruit, but authenticate our devotional health, our spiritual life, our proximity to Jesus by that same fruit coming from our lives. You see, the "abiding" is for a lifetime. And so is the fruit production. And God wants his vineyard...every branch, to produce more fruit than the year before. There really is nothing static about Christianity except the love He has for us!

"...the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, (and) neither can you..." When we cease to stay connected, we cease to produce, and ultimately we cease to live. This is not an option. There is no such thing as a "fruitless Christian." Therefore, there is no such thing as a living branch that is not connected to the vine. Christ speaks extensively concerning our being a part of His body. If you are out there on your own, no church, no fellowship, no service, no unity and accountability, you are 'off the vine.'

Don't give me the argument "I just belong to the universal body of Christ, not to a church." It's a farce; *it's a lie*. You cannot serve your brothers and sisters if there are none around. You cannot tithe if there is no church. You cannot give and receive the benefit of God's Spirit, gifts that exist to bless others in the body. You are not accountable. You are a disembodied organ and for all practical purposes you are dead. And if you are dead, you are not a part of anything.

Verse seven says, "**IF** you abide in Me." Therefore this "abiding" is obviously an option. Not optional to the Christian life, but it is certainly an option to humanity in their natural form. This is why it is so important to understand what it really means to be a born again Christian before you 'plunge into the pool.' For there simply is so many people who do not grasp the all-encompassing nature of this thing we know as "Christian," and will be horrified on the day of judgement to hear those words "depart from me, I do not know you." This thing called Christianity isn't a hobby, or just something we add to our lives in order to smooth out the rough edges of our earthly journey. This is a radical transformation, a new life and new living, with new passions and a new direction. It's a whole new thing, meant to be complete and dramatic. And it is ONLY that...

Matthew 12:33 tells us we know a tree by its fruit. We do not know it by its words, its church attendance, or the fish symbol on the back of its car. You only know that tree by what fruit it grows. Let me ask you "What kind of tree are you?" (*wait a minute...I'll just look!*)

According to verse 9, we are the recipients of the same kind and level of love that God has for His Son, Jesus. Jesus is calling us to simply respond to that love...and respond in degree and quality.

Romans 12:1 calls us out, "*And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask?*" But again, the truth is, we want our redemption and salvation walk to not cost us anything. Or not cost us *everything*. Or at least we don't want it to cost us...*well*, that one special thing we hold near and dear to us. Not that. Never that.

Exactly how do we "abide in His love?" According to the text, we do so **by our obedience**. Take a moment and absorb this, because it is obviously critical to our faith.

He is calling us to obey. And not occasionally or selectively. When we start to compromise, we are on a slippery slope which inevitably ends in pain. Sometimes it ends worse than that. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." John 14:15. If you refuse, you do not love Him. Jesus obeyed. He is not asking anything of us that He Himself did not step up and perform faithfully.

Please note that all that He has said herein is not dictatorial. This is not a cloaked attempt at thuggery or forced concession. It is all because, out of His limitless love, His desire is that our joy would be full. Meaning this direction is because He wants us to be fulfilled and complete, even in this life. This is not for HIS benefit. We do not complete our redeemer by our actions. He is need of nothing. Ps 50:12 "*If I were hungry, I would not tell you; For the world is Mine, and all its fullness.*"

Verse 11 says "**These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.**"

The proof of this truth is clear. We only need to observe the results in those who reject this passage today. When we do not obey, when we do not abide in obedience but attempt to "cheat the system," there is clearly a deep unhappiness and unrest. Their joy is not full. Is yours? A recent Harris Poll says that nearly 70% of all Americans will actually ADMIT to being unhappy.

Verse 12 says "*This is My **commandment**...*" Let us take note: it is not His *suggestion* nor is it His *desire*. It is His **command**.

Jesus is calling His disciples, and is effectively calling us at the same time, to love each other. But what does that really mean? Jesus didn't leave us to flail about in some ambiguous puddle. Nor was He going to allow us to slide out of the accountability and responsibility of this edict by claiming we didn't understand what He meant.

We are called not only to *love* each other, but Jesus went so far as to explain *how* we are to love. We are to love as JESUS LOVED US. Now, let us step back and take a good look at that, for much of our faith manifest passes through this one door. *What does this mean to love as Jesus loved us?*

Well, just how does Jesus love us? Does He love us unconditionally? Yes. Does He love a person even if that person hates him? Yes. Does His love mean we always get what we want? - Does His love always feel good? - Is His love without responsibility and accountability? No, no, and no.

It is imperative that we come to understand and know intimately this love of Christ. For one thing it is NOT, is comparative to earthly modern love that we understand in our popular culture. This is actually quite a sore point today, a great point of debate, as church folks tend to throw the word 'love' around with great flair. Even to the point where it's no longer an actual practice but a 'catchword' for what has effectively become a nebulous, ineffective, and unquantifiable excuse to avoid our own holiness as well as avoiding any dealing with the lack of holy living and sanctification in others who call themselves "Christians." We say, "*Hey, don't judge me! You're just supposed to love me and that's all.*" To which I counter, "*I AM loving you! If I did not love you I would just go home and let you march on down the road to hell.*"

It's like the kid caught with his hand in the cookie jar, and when scolded, cries out that mom is being so unloving and hateful. That kind of love is not love at all, but lazy, self-love that wants everyone to like them at the cost of perhaps the other person's eternal soul. If you think that is Jesus love, my friend, you have never experienced Jesus love, you do not know Him, and your salvation status is called into great concern. If you think Jesus love is like our human love, you have never experienced the true love of Christ.

"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."

John never cuts us any slack, he never makes exceptions. He lays it down in black and white. Some find that refreshing. Others find it disturbing. If you are on the run from Jesus, you don't read the Book of John. If you want to excuse your flesh and allow yourself worldly latitude, you don't read John. He doesn't mess around! He just throws down saying the true believer lives *this* way, and the false professor lives *that* way.

It's not gray for John. That's why some folks just can't stand his approach, because they want gray. They want, in fact they *demand*, some gray! They want flexibility in their interpretation of Christianity. Emphatic interpretations, absolutes and singular approaches just don't jive with the half-way faith that so many want to live. They want the world **and** eternal life. Yet such will not, *cannot*, ever be.

1 Jn 2:9-11 *If anyone says, "I am living in the light," but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is still living in darkness. Anyone who loves other Christians is living in the light and does not cause anyone to stumble. Anyone who hates a Christian brother or sister is living and walking in darkness. Such a person is lost, having been blinded by the darkness."*

Jesus loved us, and we are to love others. If we do not, according to first John, we are not truly Christians at all. We are, like Judas before us, merely imposters. We are chaff among the wheat, goats among the sheep.

But there is no doubt that such a call is nothing less than great, great sacrifice. This is what we are called to **do** and to **be** for Christ! But please note, we are not just called to lay down our lives for Christ, but we are also called to do so for each other.

“You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.” Verse 14 is clear to any reader. The question therefore begs to be asked: **Are you His friend?** Few verses in scripture hit with the impact of this verse.

What do we find, then, in this text today? The friends of Jesus love each other, know divine truth, are chosen out of this world, bears fruit that lasts, and have their prayers answered.

He chose us? Why? You mean besides the obvious love factor? The answer to that question is the answer of the ages...the answer to the cosmic question of life, ***“why am I here?”*** The answer is so that “we should go and bear fruit, fruit that remains.” Fruit that lasts even after we are gone. The word “go” does not mean to just sit in a pew in the safety of this church building or in the familiarity of our local community.

And what fruit remains? I mean *really* remains? ***Salvation of souls.*** How much of our lives is truly sacrificed for the fruit of eternity? Will you lay down your life for your friends?

Again, we must note that fruit does not make you part of the vine. It simply proves you are. Obedience to the commands of Christ do not make us His friends, it just proves that we intimately are.

These are, to the rejoicing of some and the pain of others, evidence with which to prove our standing.