

## TUESDAY BIBLE CLASS

### A Study in John 13-17

#### John 15:1-17

January 7, 2008

**Intro:** John 15 is a continuation of the things that the Lord had to say to His disciples. Whether the Lord and the disciples left the Upper Room at the end of chapter 14, as I believe, or remained where they were, does not affect the meaning of what He had to say. It was all to comfort and to encourage His disciples in view of the fact that He was shortly to leave them. It must have been somewhat discouraging to the Lord Himself that the disciples did not yet understand what was about to happen to Him, that is, His death on the Cross, nor the issues involved for them in His return to the Father in heaven from which He had come. But nothing would deter the Lord from His mission on earth, and He knew that with the coming of the Holy Spirit the disciples would eventually understand and see that all of this was in fulfillment of the eternal plan of God.

Looking for a moment at all of chapters 15 and 16 we can see a pattern in what the Lord had to say to them. And the truth that is in these two chapters, along with chapter 14, were intended to be and have been for the encouragement of the Lord's people from those days about which we are reading until that wonderful day when the Lord returns for His church.

And so this appears to be the divisions of what the Lord said to His disciples on this very, very important occasion. Everything that the Lord had taught throughout His public ministry was extremely important, but it would seem nothing that He had said before was more important than what the Lord had to say here. He began by speaking of:

- 1) The believers' relationship to Jesus Himself in the days ahead in John 15:1-17. I am using the word "believers" instead of "disciples" to bring out the importance of these two chapters for believers at any time in this NT period.
- 2) The believers' relationship to the world in the days ahead. This is discussed in John 15:18-16:6.
- 3) The believers' relationship to the Holy Spirit (16:7-15). The Lord had mentioned the Holy Spirit three times before, in 14:16-17, 26; and 15:26, but in this section He went into the ministry of the Holy Spirit both with the world and with the people of God. He was clearly indicating that just as in the OT the emphasis was upon God, and in the Gospels the emphasis was upon Christ, so in the rest of the NT the emphasis as far as ministry was concerned would be upon the Holy Spirit.

The closing verses of chapter 16 were addressed especially to the sorrowing disciples. The Lord promises them that their sorrow would be turned into joy (16:20) and that their distress into peace, peace in Him (16:33). And so in the latter part of chapter 16 we have:

- 4) The Lord's special ministry to His disciples (16:16-33). Here we see the Lord's pastoral ministry to His disciples.

### I. THE BELIEVERS' RELATIONSHIP TO JESUS (John 1:1-17).

**15:1** The Lord Jesus said at this point, "I am the true vine." This should remind us that the Apostle John wrote this record of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ with His seven titles which He claimed for Himself, each beginning with the words, "I am":

- 1) John 6:35 - "I am the bread of life."
- 2) John 8:12; 9:5 - "I am the light of the world."
- 3) John 10:7, 9 - "I am the door of the sheep."
- 4) John 10:11, 14 - "I am the good shepherd."
- 5) John 11:25 - "I am the resurrection, and the life."
- 6) John 14:6 - "I am the way, the truth, and the life."
- 7) John 15:1 - "I am the true vine."

And we should add to these our Lord's statement in John 8:58 - "Before Abraham was, I am." Both the NIV and the NASB translate this statement of our Lord, "Before Abraham was born, I am." Lit. it can be translated, as in the margin of the NASB, "Before Abraham came into being," or, "Before Abraham became, I am." The "I am" in the Greek is ἐγὼ εἰμί. With the pronoun, "I," it is emphatic, and the verb in the present active it speaks of that which is continuous, *I always have been, and I always will be the bread of life, the light of the world, the door, the good shepherd, the resurrection and the life, the way the truth and the life, and the true vine*. Our Lord said in each case that He was "the" whatever He claimed to be, meaning He had the exclusive right to these titles. He is the one and only true vine, and there will never be another one. Here in John 15:1 the actual wording is "I am the vine, the true one." Others may claim some of these titles, but they are all, without exception, *impostors*. Our Lord Jesus Christ is eternal and unchanging. He never had a beginning, and He will never have an ending. His enemies put Him to death in the flesh, but it was not possible that He would remain in the tomb because He is "the resurrection and the life."

Every one of these titles is given for us to marvel at the very Person of our Savior. There have been many great men and women who have lived throughout history, but none even begins to approach the greatness, the majesty, the perfection of our Lord. He is infinite in all of His attributes. In the flesh He looked like an ordinary human being, but for those who were given eyes to see He was the incomparable, unchanging and unchangeable, and eternal Son of God Who had come to earth in human flesh.

The Lord took an illustration out of His creation to picture, as we will see when we get down to verse 5, the relationship that we all as believers in Christ, have to Him, a living, vital union with Christ. It is interesting to see how creation was designed by the Creator to illustrate spiritual truth. Now you don't need to be an expert in growing grapes to know that the branch is nothing if it ever gets separated from the vine. If you cut off a bunch of branches from a grape vine, take them home, put them in a bucket of water, you are not going to get a harvest of grapes. Even a little child would know that. So the illustration teaches us how utterly dependent every branch is to draw its life from the vine in order to be able to produce fruit, or grapes.

But what else does this first verse of chapter 15 tell us? It tells us that our Lord is "the true vine." What is the idea here? It means that He is the real vine. Although our Lord was obviously thinking about a grape vine as an illustration, yet we know that as human beings we face choices in life which determine the way in which we are going. Apart from the grace of God we are all going to make the wrong decisions. I don't think that our Lord had reference here to the doctrine of election, although that is certainly involved. Neither is the Lord talking about grafting branches into the vine, like we have in Romans 11. If we are in vital union with Christ it is obvious that God has put us there. And we need to see the true picture. It is only in Christ that there is true life. He is the real vine. And the Father is the Vine Dresser.

Now again we know that if a vineyard is not cared for, the vines will die. Christ is the Vine, and God the Father is the Vine Dresser. He is the One who does the watering, the cleansing, the pruning that is necessary for the branches to bear fruit. That is the object of a grape vine. So people need to know that there is only one true vine, and that God, the Father, is the Vine Dresser. So all of this speaks of success, or, in the case of the vine, fruitfulness. The picture is one we need to meditate on because there is a lot of rich, spiritual truth to be found in the words of the Lord Jesus.

**15:2** I think that this verse proves that we cannot take every parable or illustration in Scripture to its natural limit. Those who believe that you can be saved, and then lost again, and maybe saved over and over again love to cite this passage of Scripture. But as Ryle mentions in his commentary, we can't take one verse of the Bible to learn a doctrine which would be in direct conflict with what other Scriptures teach. For example, our Lord said in John 10:27-31:

27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

29 My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

30 I and my Father are one.

That is clear, plain teaching about salvation. The person who has eternal life will never perish. Before even the Devil could take us away from God and Christ, he would have to make the Lord release His hold upon us, and then he would have to make the Father release His grip on us. And that just is not going to happen. A creature is not going to overcome the Creator.

What the Lord was saying might apply to someone who has merely professed to be saved, but has not been truly regenerated. But it seems to me that the Lord here was just reflecting upon what a human vine dresser would do in taking care of the vine in order to get as much fruit out of the vine as possible. It would be a strange person who would just plant a vine for fun. Vines are planted for fruit. And taking care of a vineyard involves a lot of work. Fruit has to be the object. The vine dresser will even “purge” the branches in order to get the most fruit possible. To “purge” can have reference to pruning, but in those days when they did not have various sprays for different kinds of bugs, I understand that water was used to wash bugs off the plants and to destroy them. We all could talk a lot about what God does in our lives to discipline us so that we will be more fruitful, and that seems to be the idea here. In the case of the true vine, God, the Father, is the Vine Dresser, and he providentially works in our lives to make us more fruitful. We all probably have stories to tell of God’s dealing with us to make us fruitful, or more fruitful, when we allow things to come into our lives that prevent us from being fruitful.

Speaking of cleansing, let us notice what our Lord said next in verse 3

**15:3** Cleansing comes to us from God through His Word. Even as the Lord had been speaking to His disciples, all unknown to them He had been cleansing them by His Word. The Word has a cleansing effect upon our lives after we have sinned, but it also warns us to keep us from sinning. That is why it is so important for us to be reading the Bible, and to be doing what we are doing today, go to a church where we can hear the Word taught. In Psalm 119:9 we read, “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse His way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy Word.” In Ephesians 5:26 where Paul was exhorting husbands to love their wives, he mentioned how the Lord gave Himself for the Church “that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word.”

Branches don’t cleanse themselves, but that is one responsibility that we as believers have. See how Paul exhorted the Corinthian church in 2 Cor 6:14-7:1

14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?

16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,

18 And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

7:1 Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, **let us cleanse ourselves** from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

The Bible is full of warnings against sin. In that sense it has a cleansing effect upon us. I read this morning, as perhaps many of you did, the seventh chapter of Proverbs, about the prostitute who caught the young man and lured him into sin. In Proverbs 5:8 which also deals with prostitution there is the warning of a father to his children not to go dear the door of a prostitutes house, but in Proverbs 7 we read that the young man who got caught had gone “the way to her house.” She was looking for him, but he was also looking for her. How tragic when we fail to heed the warnings of Scripture. The Bible keeps us from sin. The Lord had been cleansing His disciples as He spoke. The only one who went away unclean was Judas. And he had no heart for the Word.

And now we come to two of the most important verses in the Bible. It is the only way a servant of the Lord can be fruitful, and it is the only way that a servant of the Lord can be kept from sin. **(Read verses 4 and 5.)**

**15:4** What did the Lord mean? He was going away. How could they abide in Him? Please notice that the Lord did not say abide *with Me*, but “abide in Me? To abide *in* Christ, would also include abiding with Him, staying close to Him, walking with Him. But it is not just something outward, but it speaks of an inner, genuine fellowship. People can appear to be walking with the Lord, but what we see may not be a true reflection of what is going on the their hearts. And then the Lord added, “and I in you.” We know that the Lord is always with us, and He is always in us. But for the Lord to speak of *His* abiding *in* His disciples as a responsibility that He was placing upon His disciples (and ultimately upon us) raises the question, how can we make sure that we are benefitting from His abiding in us. And I think that the answer to that question, is *our submission to Him and to His will*. The same is true of our abiding in Him. We are to submit ourselves to Him. We are to be yielded to His will, both as it is revealed in the Word, and as it appears in His providential dealing with us.

Let us note that this is a commandment, not just a suggestion. The child of God who is not abiding in Christ, is a child of God who is living in disobedience. If we are truly saved, we don’t want to be guilty of disobedience. And this is why it is so important for us to know what the Lord was talking about.

This verb, abide, appears 10 times in verses 4 through 10 in this chapter: 3x in v. 4; once in verse 5; once in verse 6; 2x in verse 7; once in verse 9, translated “continue”; 2x in verse 10. The Apostle John used this verb some twenty-five times in 1 John 2, 3, and 4. The vine and the branches give us a perfect illustration of what it means to abide in Christ to have Christ abiding in us. It speaks of knowing and living in real personal fellowship with the Lord, drawing from Him our strength to meet every need we have, the power to resist every temptation, the ability to face every trial, and the wisdom to know and to do His will. The strongest Christian is the one who is the most dependent upon the Lord. We are to live by faith in Him, not in ourselves. It is right at this point where we run into most of our trouble. We feel that there are some things that we can do on our own, but the more difficult things we need to trust the Lord for. Actually we all need to trust Him *for everything!!!*

*What is the secret, the means, of abiding in Christ? What responsibility do we have in maintaining a life of fellowship with the Lord? We are going to get good help from this part of John 15 as we will see as we go through this chapter, But to add to what we have here, please turn with me to 1 John. The Apostle John, some fifty or sixty years after he heard the Lord talk about abiding in Him, still remembered what the Lord had said, and he wrote it out in his first epistle. You will see this word in verse 19. And it is very prominent from verse 24 of chapter 2, down through verse 28. (Explain 1 John 2:19, 24-29.)*

What is fruit for a child of God? It is having the blessing of God upon us. It is manifesting the character of God. It is seeing blessing in the service of the Lord. Fruit is doing the good works, living the life, that we are commanded to live according the the Word of God. I think that there is a lot to what Dawson Trotman used to say about fruit in the Christian life. He said, “The fruit of a Christian is another Christian.” By that he meant

that fruit is when God uses us to bring another to the Savior. We know that all of salvation is God's work, but when He uses us in someone else's life, He blesses us as if it were our fruit that we are giving to Him. A Christian who does not abide in Christ is just as incapable of pleasing God and bearing fruit to His glory, as a branch is that has been separated from the vine. It is only by abiding in Christ that we can really please and glorify our Lord. But what does it mean to abide in Christ? Beyond the picture that the Lord has given us in this parable of uninterrupted fellowship, we will see in what the Lord went on to say, what our responsibilities are in such a life.

January 14, 2008

**15:5** This is the second time that the Lord has said, "I am the vine." See v. 1. But this is the first time that He has said, "ye are the branches," although it has certainly been implied in what He had been saying. And then here He went right on to stress what He had said at the beginning of verse 4. That His abiding in us and our abiding in Him is when we can expect to be fruitful. I am not forgetting the that Lord was talking to His disciples, but I want us to see that this teaching applies just as much to us as it did to them.

Others have pointed out before me that the Lord began by speaking in verse 2 of "fruit." Then also in verse 2, "more fruit." And then in verse 5, "much fruit." So this would indicate that there is a progression in our understanding of this great truth as well as an increasing way in which we will see the effect of this truth upon our lives. Too often we read of truths in Scripture, and then we expect to see a great, and possibly, a full manifestation, an immediate evidence of it in our lives. That is hardly ever the way it works. Maybe I should make that statement stronger, and say that it *never* works that way. It takes time for us to understand spiritual truth, and it also takes time for the effects of the Word to be seen in our lives. We live by faith, but it usually is a weak faith to begin with, and it grows as we grow. So we must not be disappointed if we don't see the promised blessings right away.

But notice in the last statement of this verse, the words, "but without Me ye can do nothing." The Apostle Paul made a statement where the meaning is practically the same, but he used different words. I am referring to Philippians 2:12-13:

12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

This is a basic truth of the Christian life. We have it also in Galatians 2:20:

20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

We never accomplish anything by ourselves in our walk with God, but we have responsibilities toward God, and we work as though it all depended upon us.

"Without Me ye can do nothing." What we do in our own strength, accomplishes nothing that is fruitful or glorifying to God. How often have we sat down to study our Bibles, or to teach the Gospel to someone else, or to lead others in the study of the Word, without proper prayer by which we express our helplessness if we don't have the blessing of the Lord. There is a statement which Luther made to the effect that he accomplished much more in the study of the Word by even a brief prayer than he could accomplish in hours if he did not seek the blessing of God.

This is not a statement to encourage laziness and a failure to be serious in our desire to serve the Lord. It is a statement to realize that in all things in the Christian life we are utterly dependent upon the Lord. This is true

of our living, and it is true of our serving.

I have been reading a book entitled, *Abide in Christ*. The writer has many good things to say about these words of our Lord, but he shocked me the other day when after repeating the Lord's words, "without Me ye can do nothing," he went on to say that it is also true that "without us He can do nothing." Arthur Pink must have read what I had read because he made this comment in his commentary:

But mark it well, the Lord did not say, "Without you I can do nothing." In gathering out His elect, and in building up His Church, He employs human instrumentality, but that is not a matter of necessity, but of choice with Him. *He could* "do" without them just as well as with them" (p. 406).

I might make Pink's statement even stronger. He certainly could do without us, and do it much better (at least that is the way I feel about myself), but He graciously often uses us that even greater glory might be brought to Him.

These are two very, very important verses. If you don't know them by heart, I would encourage you to memorize them, and repeat them often to yourself and to others: John 15:4 and 5.

**15:6** This is another verse, like verse 2, that has caused a lot of trouble to interpreters. I know that it does not mean that a person can be saved, and then lose his salvation. That would be contrary to the teaching of Scripture on salvation. Nor do I believe that it has to do with a person who has professed to be saved, but is not a possessor of eternal life. I think that we have to remember that when the Lord said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches, He was speaking in a parable. The Lord was both God and Man, not a vine. His disciples were also men, not branches. But the Lord was using this as an illustration of the vital relationship that the Lord had to His apostles if they were to be fruitful in their lives; it was like a vine and branches have to each other. If believers do not abide in Christ, the possibility of fruitfulness would be like branches that are cut off from a grape vine, and which men would gather and put in the fire. This was not somehow a picture of hell. It just shows how very essential it is for us as believers to abide in Christ. That is the only way that we can bear fruit to God's glory. The Lord was speaking in parabolic form, not intending that everything that would be done to an unfruitful branch would in reality like it would be done to them, but to show that a vital relationship with Him was absolutely essential to be fruitful.

Now, with the hope that we see how essential abiding is, let us go on to verse 7.

**15:7** This is one of the great prayer promises of the Bible. And I believe it tells us several important things with reference to the subject of abiding in Christ.

In the first place it tells us that one of the blessings of abiding in the Lord, is answered prayer.

Secondly, it tells us what it means to abide in Christ, or one of the characteristics that you will always see in a person who is abiding in Christ. It is that that person will have the word of Christ, which really includes all of Scripture, abiding in them. It has been said of J. C. Ryle whom I have often quoted to you, that if you would cut him, he would bleed Bible. His mind and heart were so full of Scripture that you could see it in the way he lived. You could almost guess a lot of what was in the Bible by the kind of a person he was. Charles Spurgeon was the same kind of a man. He had read the KJV so much, and memorized so much of it, that he preached with the thee's and thou's of the Bible. I am afraid that with all of our modern translations we are getting away from that. I think that this is what the Apostle John had in mind when he wrote 1 John 2:24 to which I referred a little while ago. Let me read it to you again.

24 Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain [abide] in you, ye also shall continue [abide] in the Son, and in the Father (1 John 2:24).

You see, don't try to abide in Christ if the Word does not have a major place in your life. It is amazing how

many people there are in our churches who are trying to be spiritual but who pay practically no attention to the Word of God. They are not seeking to understand Scripture, they are seeking some kind of an experience that people have told them that they need, like speaking in tongues. The Lord told the Jews of His day, referring even of the OT Scriptures, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). If you want to abide in Christ, you need to abide in the Word and make sure that the Word is abiding in you. Submit yourself to the Word until you begin to think Scripture and live Scripture. This submission to God’s Word is a vital part of abiding in Christ.

But now let us look at the promise. Wouldn’t you say that one definition of “fruit” is that we will experience answers to our prayer? I would say so. But wasn’t the Lord promising too much when He said, “If ye abide in Me, and (if, understood) my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you”? Everybody has needs, but most people also have wants over and above what we really need. Did the Lord really mean that “ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you”? Yes, He did! But how could He possibly make such an unlimited promise? He could because He knows that the believer who abides in Him, and whose Word is being stored away in that believer’s life, will undergo a great change in the things that He wants. Instead of asking the Lord for a pink Cadillac, we’re going to be asking Him for a clean heart. And instead of just asking for ourselves, we are going to find that we spend more time asking for others. The greater the place that the Word has in our lives, the more it will affect how we pray and what we pray for and the people we remember in prayer. I am not saying that it is wrong to pray for material blessings, or for physical blessings, but I am saying that abiding in Christ revolutionizes our praying. In fact, it will increase the time that we give to prayer.

But let me give a word of warning here. Although this verse sounds like when you ask, you receive. But we learn by experience, as well as from the Word, that most of the time we have to wait for the answer. God promised Abraham a son, but Abraham had to wait twenty-five years before Isaac was born. Often the answer to our prayer is delayed because the Lord wants to keep us coming. But the promise stands. If we pray and pray for things we know could be the will of God, but the answer does not come, that is always a reason for us to ask the Lord to search our hearts to see if there be any wicked way in us, as David did in Psalm 139:23-24.

This was not the first promise that the Lord gave to His disciples on this momentous occasion. Look back at John 14:13-14. To ask in Jesus’ Name is to ask what He would ask for, or again, to ask according to His will. But let us go on to verse 8 which is closely related to verse 7.

**15:8** The word “wherein” means *in this*. In what? In our abiding in Christ, and having His Word abiding in us, so that we pray and have our prayers answered. The Father is glorified (and how seldom He is glorified in this wicked world in which we live) through our abiding in Christ, and having His Word abiding in our hearts, so that prayers are prayed and prayers are answered. Whatever we do, down to eating and drinking, is to be done for the glory of God. See 1 Cor. 10:31. So we need to ask ourselves when we pray, “Is God going to be glorified if He answers my prayer, if He answers this prayer, if He does what I am asking Him to do?” Many answers to prayer means that much more fruit that we bring to God for His glory. Verses like this show us that we really need to give serious thought to what we pray for, and why.

Then the Lord added, “So shall ye be my disciples.” The word “be” here actually means *become*. Basically what is a disciple. A disciple is a learner. When the Lord said, “My disciples,” He was claiming that He was their Teacher, and they were His pupils in what we could call *the school of faith*. So when the Lord said, “So shall ye become My disciples, He was pointing out what He was doing in all that He had been telling them. But just hearing words does not mean that we, or anyone else, is learning. The Lord wanted the disciples to be disciples indeed! And they learned by abiding. They learned by praying. They learned when their hearts were

set on bringing glory to God. When do we graduate from the Lord's school? Not until we go to heaven. As long as we live, as we continue to read and study the Word of God, we are learning to know Christ, we are learning to abide in Christ, we are learning to pray, we are learning that everything must be for the glory of God. God teaches us. The Lord Jesus teaches us. And we are going to learn from these chapters we are studying in John's Gospel, that the Holy Spirit has been given to us to be our Teacher. And we are to learn from each other.

**15:9** All that the Lord has been teaching His disciples, has been glorious beyond what they could ever possibly fully understand, and far, far more than any of them could possibly have imagined or deserved. But now we come to the sweetness of it all. The Lord Jesus hear tells His disciples that He loves them like the Father loves Him. Bishop Ryle's comment on this verse is as follows:

This remarkable statement seems intended to show the depth and magnitude of our Lord's love to His people. We can form no adequate idea of the love of the Father towards His Son. The feeling of one eternal Person in the Trinity to another Person is a high thing into which we cannot enter. Yet even such is the love of Christ toward those who believe in Him – a vast, wide, deep, unmeasurable love, that passeth knowledge, and can never be fully comprehended by man (II, 343).

But let us linger here until the truth of these words really grips our hearts and fills us with the joy of the Lord and that peace which passes all understanding. This is a love that is eternal. It is a love that will not and cannot change. Think of it! We are loved by God and by Christ to the same degree that They love each other. It is no wonder that as Paul prayed for the church at Ephesus (and possibly the other churches in the same circuit) as he did in these words found in Ephesians 3:17-19:

17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,  
18 May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;  
19 And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

And so we are to "continue [abide] in My love," the Lord said to His disciples. And verse 10 tells us in a practical way how we are to continue to enjoy that love and to rest in it. This is another command by which we can profit even more from the love that God and Christ have for us.

January 21, 2008

**15:10** Bishop Ryle reminds us in his commentary on these wonderful words of our Lord, that there are many ways in which all Christians are alike, but there are also many ways in which we are different. We all have the same Savior, and therefore we all have the same salvation. We all have the same number of spiritual blessings. We all have the same Word of God. We all have a hatred of sin. We all have a desire to please God. We all have the same promises, and we all have the same warnings. We are all indwelt by the same Holy Spirit. We all have been called into the fellowship of God's Son. We all have the same privilege of fellowship with the Members of the Godhead. And the list of what we all have in Christ could go on and on.

Why, then, are there so many differences among us, and so many degrees of differences?

The answer inevitably goes back to the differences there are in our daily walk with the Lord. Some believers read the Bible every day; others are spasmodic in their reading. Among those who read there are those who read thoughtfully and prayerfully, taking time to meditate on what they read; others read to keep a schedule. Some who read pay particular attention to what the Lord wants us do, how He wants us to live, and make this a matter of daily prayer; others know that there are many things that they ought to be doing to please the Lord, and fully intend to do them some time, but they are more negligent than they are obedient. Probably to some



extent we all fall into this latter category, at least some times. There is nothing that remains the same with any of us, but constant vigilance is necessary in all of our lives if we are to experience a life of abiding in Christ.

What does it mean to abide in Christ? The answer in one word is *fellowship, fellowship with God the Father, with God the Son, and with God the Holy Spirit*. But we are also going to learn in the verses that follow it, in a secondary way, includes *our fellowship with each other in Christ*.

We all should remember that occasion when a Jewish lawyer confronted our Lord with the question, “Which is the great commandment in the Law?” You will find this in Matthew 22:36. Now as a lawyer, he was supposed to be an expert in the Law of Moses. He was to be an interpreter of the Law. Unfortunately he was not sincere in his question which he directed to the Lord. Matthew tells us that that lawyer was “tempting” the Lord, trying to get the Lord to say something that could be used against Him. Undoubtedly he had his own idea about which commandment was the greatest, and it probably was #4 in the Ten Commandments, “Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy” (Ex. 20:8). But when the Lord gave His answer, or answers, He did not mention any of the Ten Commandments. His first answer came Deuteronomy 6:5, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matt. 22:37). Some quotations of that verse in Deuteronomy, add, “and with all thy strength.” See Mark 12:30. Deuteronomy 6:5 has, “and with all thy might.” By the time the Lord came to earth Judaism had been corrupted so the extent that it was like a lot of people in churches today who are man-centered in their theology instead of being God-centered. And the Lord added a statement to that lawyer that showed him that there was no point in discussing this any further because He said very positively, “This is the first and great commandment.”

But then the Lord went on and said, “And the second is like unto it, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.’” This did not come from the Ten Commandments, but was tucked away in Leviticus 19:18. And then the Lord added another word. He said, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” “The Law and the Prophets was one way the Jews had of including all of the OT. But what did the Lord mean by the word “hang” – “on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets”? But what did the Lord mean by the verb, “hang”? It is a figure of speech taken from the idea that a door is held in place by two hinges. Without those hinges the door can’t be a door, and so without these two commandments it is meaningless to talk about any of the other commandments. What gives glory to God is that His people are motivated to obey His Word by loving God, and by loving each other. This is one of the many truths that is just as true in the NT as it was in the OT. And I am afraid that we in the Church are just as guilty of overlooking this as the Jews were in OT times, up to the time when the Lord ministered on the earth. We show our love for the Lord by our obedience to His commandments, and by our obedience to the Lord’s commandments we show our love for Him.

The Lord had emphasized this over and over in this Upper Room Discourse. He had said in John 14:15, “If ye love Me, keep my commandments.” In John 14:21 He has said, “He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me . . .” You have the same truth in John 14:23, “If a man love Me, he will keep My words . . .” And here in John 15:10 we read that our Lord said, “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in My love . . .” The Lord showed His love for the Father by always doing the things that pleased Him. See John 8:29. To keep the Lord’s commandments means more than just obeying a copy of the NT. It means, as Bishop Ryle has said,

To have His words abiding in us, . . . to keep His sayings and precepts continually before our memories and minds, , and to make them the guide of our actions, and the rule of our daily conduct and behavior (II, pp. 338, 339).

But remember, it all must be motivated by our love for the Lord, and by our desire to please Him. If we are to abide in Christ, we must not only seek to do what He wants us to do, as it has been expressed in the Word, but we must also be quick to confess anything that we do, or say, or even think, which we know to be displeasing

to Him.

So what does verse 10 say? It gives us the Lord's own words,

If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in My love, even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love.

When we live in obedience to the commandments of our Lord, we are showing how much we love Him, and He, in turn, shows how much He loves us by the blessings He pours out upon our lives. And according to our text, many of these blessings come to us in the form of answered prayers. It is interesting and extremely important how our Lord tied together all of the things that are important to us in our lives as Christ's, answered prayer, fruitfulness, and more to come, to this one, all-important theme of abiding in Christ. The days of blessing in the Church have not passed. What seems to have passed seems to be real love for the Lord expressed in close fellowship with Him, which has always been the condition of the blessing of God upon His people.

**15:11** Here the Lord speaks of another fruit of abiding in Christ. The Lord Jesus continued to build upon the theme of His message to His disciples, which was abiding in Christ.

Not only does a life of close fellowship with the Lord define what it means to abide in Christ, but it leads to fruit that remains in a holy life, and answered prayer, but it is the only truly joyful life it is possible for anyone to live here on earth. Most people spend their lives in search of what they believe will make them happy. They make themselves the center of their search – what they want to have, where they want to go, what they want to do, the place in society that they desire – but sooner or later they find that their search is in vain. Joy, true joy, a last joy, does not come from pursuing whatever there is in this world. As meaningless as it may sound to the people of the world, and even to some who profess to be Christians, true joy comes from abiding in Christ. And you have to become a Christian before you can abide in Christ, that is, before you can live as a Christian. If you know the Lord, then verse 11 belongs to you. (Read John 15:11.)

(As a side remark, if you remember your reading of 1 John, you will remember how the Apostle John followed the Lord even in his manner of teaching. He was continually saying, "These things have I written unto you . . ." Here in John 15:11 the Lord said, "These things have I spoken unto you . . ." The Apostle John was a good disciple to teach like his Master taught. Cf. John 14:25; here in 15:11; 16:1, 4, 25.)

What more could any of us ask than what the Lord promised here in John 15:11 – the Lord's joy, that it would abide with us, and that it would be full? If it is a full joy, then nothing needs to be added to it. As the Apostle Paul was concluding his epistle to the church at Rome, this is one thing that he said:

13 Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:13).

We have joy here in John 15:11, and we are going to get to peace in 16:33. They both come from God, and only from God. When most people think about joy, they don't have the slightest idea that God has anything to do with it. Actually, He has everything to do with it. But because we leave God out of our search for joy, we search for it in things that are displeasing to God, which is defined in the Bible as *sin*. There is a very important statement about Moses in Hebrews 11 and a life-changing decision which he made. Most people would say that he was a fool to give up his place as a member of the royal family in Egypt, with all of the wealth that he must have had, the honor, and some expositors of Scripture say that he may have given up the possibility of becoming a Pharaoh in Egypt. Humanly speaking, he had everything that any man could ever have desired. It was his. But he gave it up! Why? Hebrews 11:24-27 tells us:

24 By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;

25 Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;

26 Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. (Continued on next page.)

27 By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. You see, Moses gave up all that he had for a Person, “Him who is invisible.” He knew that everything that Egypt had to offer him, was nothing in comparison with Who the Lord was. And we know from Scripture that he never regretted his decision. God meant more to him than all of the treasures of Egypt. The pleasures that Egypt offered him were only “for a season.” He considered what he had in God were “greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.” We ought to be sure that we are listening to the voice of one who had it all, but considered it nothing in comparison with what he had in the Lord.

This does not mean that it is wrong to be rich, or that it is a sin to have possessions. Both are sinful if we are depending upon them for our joy. Our Lord knew how prone His disciples were, like we are, to pursue the wrong things. He would not have said the things that He said to them if He had not had great delight in them. He wanted them to know that the only source of true joy was to be found in their union with Him. It was not just that they were saved (although that is where it all starts), but that they would have fulness of joy by pursuing their relationship with Him, their fellowship with Him, in every area of their lives. We can be sure that they had their times of discouragement, and even defeat, but through all of the experiences, trials and testings of life, they were to learn that true joy, lasting joy, was to be found in their relationship with Him, just as He found His true joy in His relationship with His Father. Who knows but that those times of secret prayer our Lord had in this world, were to be strengthened by His relationship with His Father and to find true joy in pursuing that work that the Father had sent Him to do. So in our trials, in our failures, in our disappointments, we seek to find all that we need in our fellowship with Him.

**15:12** We have seen how, when the Lord was confronted by a Jewish lawyer who hypocritically asked Him what the great commandment in the Law was, the Lord knowing the deceitfulness that was that lawyer’s heart, nevertheless gave him a sincere and humble answer to his question. And the Lord gave him not one commandment, but two. The first that he was to love God with all of his heart, and soul, and strength, and mind. The second, which was also a part of the first, was that he was to love his neighbor as himself. His neighbor would have been, in the first instance, his fellow Jews. Then it would have been anyone he had an opportunity to help.

Back in John 13, verses 34 and 35, the Lord gave His disciples what He called “a new commandment.” Let me read those verses to you again because verse 12 here in John 15 is related to what the Lord told His disciples earlier. Follow in your Bible as I read John 13:34-35:

34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

Now we learned from John 15:9, that the Lord Jesus loves us with the same love that the Father loves Him. That seems hard to believe, doesn’t it? And some of you have mentioned that to me since last Tuesday’s class. I am sure you would have a hard time believing that if I had not been able to point out from John 15:9 that this is what the Lord said. Since He said it, it has to be true. But that is still impossible for us to take in such a truth. Christ loves me, and He love you, if you belong to Him, with the very same love that the Father loves our Lord. The love of the Father for the Son is so great that it is impossible for any of us, or anybody else to measure how great that love is! We believe it, not because we can understand it, but we believe it because the Lord said it, and it is recorded right here in our Bibles.

Now we are in a better position to understand what the Lord said earlier, in John 13:34 and 35 when He said that we are to love each other as He, the Lord Jesus, loves each one of us. I can imagine that the disciples may have looked at each other, and said to themselves, “That is impossible!” Have you ever said that to yourself about any verse of Scripture? If when you like a person, how could you ever love even another Christian like

the Lord loves us, and like the Father loves us. We have to admit that there are some Christians that we don't especially even *like*, so how could we love them the way the Lord loves us. *This is where John 15:12 becomes very important to us!*

I have in my library another set of commentaries on the NT which were written by a Dr. Charles Erdman who was for many years the Professor of Practical Theology in Princeton Seminary. Princeton Seminary is not today what it was when Dr. Erdman was on the faculty. He was a man who loved the Word, and was greatly devoted to our Lord. His commentaries are very brief, but they are very rich. They probably would be best described as surveys of the books of the NT. But you get the message of the book he has written about even though his books are short. His commentary on the Gospel of John is only 178 pages long. In contrast, Arthur Pink's commentary has over a thousand pages. However, both commentaries are very, very valuable.

Well, I was reading what Dr. Erdman had written on John 15, and I came to his translation of John 15:12. The KJV renders this verse as, "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you." But Dr. Erdman rendered it this way: "These things I command you, that ye may love one another." Now if those two ways of expressing what the Lord said, sound alike to you, let me explain. The KJV sounds just like the Lord was repeating what He had said in John 13:34 and 35. But Dr. Erdman made it sound that the Lord had given the commandment that this passage is primarily concerned about that by abiding in Christ we would be enabled to love one another. So I turned to my Greek Testament and, sure enough, that word translated "that" in John 15:12 is ἵνα, which means *in order that*.

*From the Greek text Dr. Erdman saw an enabling power in the commandment of this chapter and this message, that would enable us to love one another as the Lord has loved us. Even then it would not be exactly like our Lord's love for us, but it would come a lot closer to His love that if we were trying to love each other in our own strength.*

And this is consistent with all of Scripture concerning our obedience to the commandments of God which we find in the Bible. They are all beyond us. There aren't any of them that we can really obey by ourselves. We all need to go back continually to what Paul said to the Philippian Christians in chapter 2 of that epistle, verses 12 and 13. Many of you can quote those verses, but let me read them to you again for all of us. Here is what Paul wrote:

12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13).

The only way that I can obey any commandment is Scripture is if God will make me willing to do it, and then enable me to do it.

Let me give you another illustration of the way the Lord works. It is found at the end of Paul's first letter to the church at Thessalonica. He had given them a lot of things to do, like, "Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks," and several other things that none of us does all of the time like we are exhorted to do. And then in verses 23 and 24 we read these words:

23 And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

24 Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it (1 Thess. 5:23-24).

And then let's go back to the key verses of this whole message in John 13-16. I am speaking of verses 4 and 5 of John 15. Let's all be reminded of what the Lord said here:

4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

So what the Lord said in verse 12 means that it is by abiding in Christ that we will be able to love one another in a manner that will be close to the way that the Lord Jesus Christ loves us.

Bishop Ryle gives this helpful definition of what it means to abide in Christ:

To abide in Christ means to keep up a habit of constant close communion with Him, to be always leaning on Him, resting in Him, Pouring out our hearts to Him, and using Him as our Fountain of life and strength, as our Chief Companion and Best Friend (II, p. 338).

While we are not sufficient in ourselves for anything that the Lord has asked us to do, we can say with the Apostle Paul, "Our sufficiency is of God" (2 Cor. 3:5).

January 28, 2008

**15:13** As we go back to verse 9 we see that the Lord Jesus said that He loves us the same way, to the same extent, that the Father loved Him. And that we continue to enjoy the benefits of that love, and its power in our lives, by, according to verse 10 by keeping His commandments. Basically we show how much we love the Lord by how much, and in what spirit, we keep His commandments.

As we have seen, even in chapter 14, that the Lord was stressing the fact that we show our love for the Lord by our obedience to His commandments. And now the Lord is stressing again the relationship between obedience and love. Love is of the greatest importance in all that we do as Christians, both toward God, and toward each other. The value of our obedience to the Lord is measured by how much our obedience is prompted by our love for the Lord.

We see this in our human relationships. The obedience of a child for his parents, or her parents, is when that obedience is an expression of the child's love for his parents. What a husband does for his wife is of the greatest value to his wife if he meets his responsibilities toward her in love. So we know the relationship between the Father and the Son was characterized by perfect love. Our first responsibility toward God, as we have seen, is to love Him. If we love Him, and obey Him because we love Him, then our obedience brings great joy to the Father, and this is where we find the greatest joy. But it is always true that loving God produces in our hearts the same kind of love for each other that we have for God.

And then coming to verse 13 we learn no one can have a greater love for another than to lay down his life for that other one, which, of course, would have to be a friend.

I can't think of truth that is expressed here without being reminded of what Paul said about the love of God for us in Romans 5:7 and 8:

7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. But notice in this verse the Lord was stating a principle, a truth. Little did the disciples realize that in less than twenty-four hours the Lord would be demonstrating this truth. And many of you will see that in this statement that our Lord was expressing the truth of *particular redemption*. Jesus Christ did not die to save everyone. If He had, everyone would be saved. He died to save His friends. Now we all know that we pick and choose our friends. God has done the same. He took the initiative in choosing us as His friends. We would never have done that. But He did, as He went on to say in verse 16. He chose us because He loved us, but not because of

anything worthwhile that He saw in us. This term has found its way into many of our hymns. “What a Friend we have in Jesus.” “Friendship with Jesus, fellowship divine.” “I’ve found a Friend, O Such a Friend.” “Jesus, What a Friend for sinners, Jesus, Lover of my soul.” “Jesus is all the world to me, My Friend in trials sore . . . When I am sad, He makes me glad, He’s my Friend.” “Jesus, priceless treasure, Fount of purest pleasure, truest Friend to me.” The last verse of “O Jesus, I have promised,” ends with the words, “O give me grace to follow, My Master and my Friend.” What greater honor can the Lord place upon us than to call us His friends?

But how can you identify one who is truly a friend of Jesus? The Lord Jesus here gives us several ways in these verses by which we can identify one who is a friend of Jesus, beginning with this thirteenth verse.

The first is that he has a true understanding of the Cross of Christ. I have said that the Lord in making the statement that we have in verse 13 was stating a principle, a great truth. But a true child of God, a friend of Jesus, cannot read this verse without thinking immediately of the sacrificial and atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ. The death of Christ is the greatest example of friendship that there ever has been, or ever will be. He took the penalty for our sins upon Himself that in the court of heaven we might be cleared of all charges against us and be declared absolutely righteous before a Holy God Who is also our heavenly Father. This is perfect grace. The effect of Christ’s death is to secure a hope for us that is eternal. Men can take everything else from us, but they cannot touch our hope. It is, as Peter has told us, it is “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:4-5). A true friend of Jesus will see in Him the only Savior of the world.

But there is another way to identify a friend of God – and I hope you understand when I use the term “friend of God” I am speaking of one who is truly saved, “a child of God.”

**15:14** Our Lord was not saying here that you become a friend of God by doing whatever the Lord commands us to do. We are not saved by what we do; we are saved by what Christ has done for us. But we show that we are saved by doing what the Lord has commanded us to do in His Word. The person who claims that God is his Friend, but who does not read the Word of God, or hear it preached, without seeking to make his life agree with Scripture – that person does not know how a friend of God lives. How can anyone call himself, or herself, a friend of God, if he or she does not seek to do what God wants him or her to do, and so to become what the Lord wants all of His friends to be? It is important for every person who is saved, to set a time every day for the reading of the Word of God and prayer, to learn from the Word to know God and His Son Jesus Christ, and to live in daily fellowship with Them through obedience to the Word of God.

And the third way that you can identify a friend of God is given to us in verse 15.

**15:15** A true friend of God is capable of understanding the Word of God. In the last part of this verse we read, “For all things that I have heard of my Father [or, from my Father] I have made known to you.” The disciples were also “servants,” meaning “bondservants,” but they also had been drawn into an even closer relationship with God and Christ, as friends, and one distinction that could be made in that day, was that servants were obligated to do what their master wanted them to do, but this didn’t always know what the their lord or master was doing. But the Lord said, “all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.”

When we get into John 17 where we have that great prayer of our Lord, we see from verses 7 and 8 what the Lord said to His Father in heaven along this line. Listen as I read to you John 17:7-8

7 Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee.

8 For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have

known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.

January 29, 2008

Look back at 14:24 and you will see that the Lord said this to His disciples:

24 He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.

In studying the Gospels we often pay more attention to the things which the disciples did not understand than we do to what they did understand. In these verses we see two things:

- 1) That the Lord had been faithful in giving them the Word which the Father had given Him to give to them.
- 2) That they had understood much of what the Lord Jesus had told them. And that the Lord had been faithful in giving His disciples, whom He called "friends" even that which they had not yet fully understood.

Even in Amos 3:7 we read, "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth His secret unto His servants, the prophets."

What a wonderful thing it is that God has revealed His Word to His people. The fact that He has, and the added fact that they (and we) understood anything that He said is evidence of the close relationship which exists between God (and the Lord) and His people. We as the Lord's people, His friends, have accept to truth in the Word of God which is a closed book to them. In fact, the people of the world consider as foolishness the things that we understand from the Word of God. Often when I listen to our politicians who think that they know so much, I am amazed at the simple truths of Scripture which they do not know, and cannot know, because their minds are blinded to the truth. The most brilliant mind, if that person is unregenerate, cannot understand the truth of God, truth which a child who knows the Lord, does understand. We need to remember what Paul wrote to the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 2:12-14:

12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.

13 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

When any person receives and believes and understands the truth of God's Word, it is evidence, not of that person's brilliance, but of a special work of the Spirit of God which has given that person the understanding that he has.

This is a major truth that ought to make us give thanks to the Lord every time we read our Bibles, and every time we sit and listen as someone teaches us anything from God's Word. Jeremiah said, and we have His words recorded in Jeremiah 15:16,

16 Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts.

Every word of that verse is worthy of our close attention.

In all of the OT there is only one person who is actually called, "the friend of God." That person is Abraham, and the reference is Isaiah 41:8: "But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend." And we have evidence that he was the friend of God from Genesis 18:17. Abraham had been visited by the Lord and two angels who appeared to him as three men, and this is what we read that God said:

17 And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do;

18 Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth

shall be blessed in him?

19 For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him (Gen. 18:17-20).

So we see that a true friend of God, which now includes all of us, is capable of understanding the Word of God. We may not understand all of it, but as we continue to walk with the Lord with hearts that are open to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we will be enabled to understand more and more of it.

Let me take this opportunity to say that this means that the most important part of a Christian's life is the time, or are the times, that he takes for the private reading of the Word of God and prayer. Many people claim to be Christians who do not take that time, and so it brings into question the claim that they make that they know the Lord. A true Christian loves the Word, and he, or she, cannot neglect the Word of God for even a day. I have known of pastors who do not take the time for the reading of the Word of God for their own souls; they just use the Bible to find texts upon which they can speak to the people in their churches.

But let us go on in our text to a fourth way that you can identify one who is a friend of God.

**15:16** The Lord states a very wonderful truth here which we should believe with all of our hearts. It is that we are the Lord's, not because we have chosen Him, but because He has chosen us. As we read in the Gospels about how the apostles became apostles, it was not because initially they had sought the Lord, and chose to follow Him, but because the Lord called them, and then they followed.

But before the Lord called them, there was a work of God that took place in eternity past that was made known during their lives upon the earth. Paul expressed this in Ephesians 1:4. He said that we all, who know the Lord, were "chosen in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world." Paul expressed this great truth in another way in Galatians 1 where he wrote these words after speaking of what the Lord had done in his heart to bring him to salvation. Here are his words which we find in Galatians 1:13-16:

13 For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it:

14 And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace,

16 To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood

Now we all have a similar testimony. We didn't choose the Lord, but He chose us. Christ died for us. The Holy Spirit sought each one of us, convicted us of our sins, saved us, and "ordained" us. What does this word mean in the original? Well, literally it means that he *placed* us, appointed us, assigned us, to this twofold purpose:

1) "That ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain" – and here we have this all-important word *abide*, or *continue*. The Lord had started out in this chapter talking about "fruit." And I hope that we understand that "fruit" has to do both with what the Lord does *in* us as well as what He does *through* us.

But then there is another fruit that identifies a friend of God:

2) "That whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My Name, He may give it you." This, of course, speaks of answered prayer. It doesn't mean that God answers our prayers immediately. Nor does it mean that He answers all of our prayers. "In My Name" is a very important condition leading to answered prayer. But it can



be said that the only prayer that avails with the Father is prayer that is offered in the Name of the Lord Jesus, the kind of a prayer that our Lord would pray.

I love that verse found in Solomon's book of Ecclesiastes which tells us:

14 I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him (Ecc. 3:14).

Those who have expounded the Word of God throughout the history of the Church, have differed as to the extent of the Lord's choice of us, whether to the particular work that the Lord has given us to do, as He had called those eleven disciples to be apostles, or whether it has to do with salvation. I think that it probably has to do with both. The person who understands what salvation is, is quick to give God the glory for it all. We are chosen for salvation, and we are chosen for the particular way in which God is pleased to use us.

So we have here two more ways in which a friend of God may be identified. He gives the Lord the glory for the place that he has in salvation, and the ministry to which he has been assigned, and he is one who is continually expressing His dependence upon God in prayer.

The Lord used the Greek word *ἵνα*, *that*, or *in order that*, three times in verses 16 and 17, so we could translate these verses like this:

16 Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, or ordained you, in order that ye should go and bring fruit, and *that* [inserted by the translators] your fruit should remain, in order that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My Name, He may give it you."

God always has a purpose, or purposes in all that He does. And He also has purposes in which He asks us to do in obedience to His will. And this is brought out also in verse 17.

**15:17** In this verse we have *ἵνα* again, so that we could translate this verse like this: "These things I command you, *in order that* ye [may] love one another." In other words, the Lord had been teaching them the characteristics of a friend of God in order that they might be delivered from any idea of competition or jealousy among themselves, which always are obstacles that stand in the way of true love for each other.

So the Lord has been speaking to them about "love" in three aspects:

- 1) The love that the Father and the Son have for each other.
- 2) The love that the Father and the Son have for every child of God.
- 3) The love that we as the friends of God are to have for each other.

All three are the same love. The love that we have for each other is the same love that the Members of the Godhead have for every believer, and this in turn is the love that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit have for each other.

It is going to take time and prayer for all of us to realize the truth, and the depth of these truths, that the Lord Jesus had been teaching His apostles. And it is essential for the apostles to have these truths in their hearts before the Lord would go on to speak to them about their relationship with the world. This the Lord did in John 15:18-16:6.