

## **Gospel of John Study**

### **Session 30**

In our last session, Jesus gave the metaphor of the vine to His disciples during His farewell discourse to them. Through this metaphor, Jesus revealed to His disciples that their central relationship was to be to Him. Then through their vital relationship to Him, they would bear fruit and glorify God. For us today, we could say that this passage dealing with the vine, branches and the gardener describes the normal Christian life or what the life of faith in Christ is supposed to be like. As the branches (the disciples) are to remain in the vine (Jesus) they will be filled with His life and bear spiritual fruit for the kingdom of God.

If you recall, in the introduction of chapter 15 in the last session, we noted that, as a whole, chapter 15 describes the three relationships of the life of a disciple of Christ. The vine metaphor described the relationship of the disciple to Jesus. Now in this session, Jesus is going to describe the relationship of the disciple to one another (building on the vine metaphor) and then this session (and chapter 15) ends with Jesus explaining the disciple's relationship to the world.

#### 1. The transition

#### **[John 15:9-11]**

This is a transition between the vine metaphor of how a follower of Jesus is to relate to Jesus and how that relationship is beyond just fruit bearing but will also manifest itself in love for Jesus and love for the other followers of Christ.

Q: According to this passage, where does love originate? (*v.9 - The Father. He loved Jesus and now with that love Jesus loves His disciples.*)

#### **[I John 4:7-10]**

Q: Why is it important to realize that God loved us before we loved Him? (*God's love gave the pattern and ability for us to love anyone, including Him, in the love He has for the world. Without knowing God's love, one is incapable to loving God or others in that manner. Because He loved us first, we can know what genuine love is and how it shapes our thoughts and attitudes and behaviors.*)

Q: Why does Jesus want His disciples to keep His commandments? (*v.10 - It shows that we are abiding in His love for us.*)

Notice the Jesus changes the wording here. The agricultural metaphor of the vine was limited. It could not express the unfathomable love that sets the disciples into a new intimacy with God. The word "loved" in v.9 is aorist with the emphasis on the love being a completed action. What's interesting is that Jesus had the cross in mind but the cross is still future in time, it won't happen until the next day. Yet from God's perspective, His love is complete. At this point the only analogy that works to describe His love for His disciples is the love between

Himself and His Heavenly Father. That's a tremendous love in action to consider ours from Jesus.

Q: What does the word "if" signify in v.10? *(It shows that while God's love for us is gracious and undeserved, some of our experiencing of that love, i.e. - enjoying that love, is dependent upon our response to His love.)*

Q: Why did Jesus say He spoke these words to them? *(v.11 - So that they could come to possess Jesus' joy and that their joy would be made full.)*

Joy is the outcome of a life surrendered to Jesus. This is because it is a life filled with the Father's love and with fruit for the kingdom. Jesus desired His disciples' lives to be spontaneous and joyous. It was never designed to be predictable, burdensome or boring. To truly get what Jesus is saying to the disciples, we need to understand joy. Joy is not an emotion. It is a state of being where the joyous person is deeply contented and satisfied. It often displays itself as happiness and gladness but those feelings are merely the result of one's deep satisfaction.

### **[Hebrews 12:2]**

Notice that Jesus, when contemplating the agony and pain of the cross, considered it joy. His (or anyone's emotions) would not be happiness at experiencing a cruel and horrifically painful death. Yet, Jesus was deeply satisfied as it signified the completion of His mission to earth to redeem sinners that His Father had sent Him to accomplish.

This is why joy is such a huge part of the believer's life. As we abide in Jesus' love and follow His commandments, we will come to understand and experience that we are fulfilling the will of God. This then leads to joy. Human joy in a fallen world will be shallow and incomplete until that human existence is overtaken by the experience of the love of God in Christ. This is the very love for which mankind was created.

### **[I Thessalonians 1:6-7]**

Paul was reminding the Thessalonian believers that they came to know Jesus through great tribulation and through this belief they received the joy that the Holy Spirit brings, too. As we saw in the vine metaphor last week, it is the Spirit who empowers us to hear God's voice and obey His word and thus bear fruit. By bearing this fruit, the believers in Thessalonica were experiencing joy despite their tribulations. V.7 then describes the fruit from this joy being a good reputation throughout the area where the church was located. They had a good witness for Jesus.

In v.11, Jesus' first use of the word joy speaks of "My joy". In chapter 14 Jesus promised the disciples to experience "My peace" (14:27) then in the previous verse Jesus promised that the disciples would experience "My love" (15:10). Now He promises "My joy". His joy is what was described in the Hebrews passage we just read. It is the joy based upon His complete and total obedience to His Father. He does not give it in a cavalier fashion but shares it to the degree that the disciples share in His obedience which is an obedience which willingly faces death of the self-interest of the flesh.

## **[II Corinthians 10:3-5]**

Q: According to v.5 in the II Corinthians passage, whose obedience are we to mirror in order to take our thoughts captive? (*Christ's*)

Jesus' joy was to fully obey His Father while our joy is to fully obey Jesus. As mentioned before, this isn't some legalistic, static, grey obedience. It is a Spirit-initiated, Spirit-empowered, Spirit-filled life that sees God's will being done through the circumstances of life whether they are pleasant or not. Notice that "our joy" in v.11 is in the passive tense. It is not something we do or accomplish. (It's like producing fruit, we cannot do it by ourselves.) When we abide in Jesus, His joy becomes our joy. The Spirit brings this joy with Him to us as we take our thoughts captive to the level of obedience Christ had with His Father.

Joy is often overlooked ally of the Christian life.

## **[Nehemiah 8:9-12]**

The people had just rebuilt the wall around Jerusalem and Ezra had read the Law to them and the people began to weep. They understood that they and their ancestors had transgressed the Law of the covenant and been unfaithful to God. They also understood just how far a gap there was between them and God after hearing God's holy requirements of the Law. However, Nehemiah would not let them weep because they had heard the Law read for the first time in Jerusalem in over 70 years. They now knew the Word of God and understood it. For this reason, they could now enjoy God instead of be at enmity with Him. Nehemiah rightly told them that this was a time to celebrate due to their new knowledge of God and His covenant with them. It was the joy that came about from understanding the Law that was their strength. They would persevere and be able to live rightly as the joy of now knowing God's will and carrying it out was now something they could do. The Lord would enable them to live in the covenant and thus bring them joy.

For the Christian, joy is our weapon against this world - not giddiness but rather a gladness of heart bourn from a heart of understanding God and His will and taking satisfaction in that relationship of dependence upon Him. This joy strengthens our faith in Christ and keeps us moving forward in our mission with God in this world. You will never possess or retain any joy unless you learn to view your circumstances through God's eyes. However, once you begin to see how God sees things and modify your life to His life within you (abiding in His love) then joy is inevitable. It's the fruit of that life.

## **2. The disciples' relationship with each other**

In this next passage, Jesus further explains and deepens the metaphor of the vine. The main application that the Lord makes is that it also explains the disciples' relationship with each other.

## **[John 15:12-17]**

Q: **V.12** is a repeat of Jesus' "new command" given in **John 13:34-35**, which He just gave earlier that evening. Why do you think it was important for Jesus to repeat this command? *(Jesus knew the importance of the work they were being called to do for God's kingdom. Their future success depended upon their attitude and behavior towards one another. Only the love of Jesus being shown to one another could produce God's fruit. Can you imagine the disciples attempting to spread the gospel apart from one another due to their not loving one another - not much of a testimony to share there.)*

Q: What had been the disciples attitude towards one another previously? *(It had been one of rivalry and competition.)*

Jesus knew that the measure of their love for one another had to be that of His love for them. Anything less would jeopardize God's work in the world. What is interesting is that Jesus gives all the commands to obey Him in one, single package - that is to love one another. Our love for God is an unbreakable chain that is verified by our love for others. "Just as I have loved you" ties them to this new commandment which is the only commandment given to them.

Q: Going back to John the Baptist, how did he refer to Jesus on at least two occasions? *(As the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.)*

Q: What was the mechanism or action that allowed a lamb to be used to cover the sins? *(It was sacrificed, killed)*

Q: According to Jesus, what is the greatest love one can have for another person? *(v.13 - That one lay down his life for a friend)*

On the very next day, Jesus is going to lay down His life for not only His disciples but also for the entire world as the Lamb of God. This action on the cross does so much more than just fulfill the redemptive purpose of God for mankind. In dying on the cross, Jesus is setting the pattern of loving behavior that the disciples are to have for one another after He is gone.

### **[I John 3:16]**

Q: According to Jesus, what should the relationship of His disciples be towards one another? *(love, as Jesus loved them; laying down their lives for one another)*

While there is a certain heroic thought that comes from thinking about laying down one's physical life for another (and that has been the case for many Christians throughout history) there is also a sense when laying down one's life for another begins as laying down one's attitude of being above another person. It is seeing the other as being worthy of re-setting our agendas and use of time and resources for others. There is a death to our flesh, our pre-salvation programming and foundational grid of how we operated while lost, that must happen to be able to love others as Jesus loved us. If then called upon to give up our physical lives, we are then in a position to do that. Some have thought that it would be easier to give up one's life physically once than to live moment by moment surrender to Christ and humility beneath others for a

lifetime. The truth is that the latter is our calling as Christians and we have been empowered to live that way while the former is always a possibility of living for Christ in this world.

### **[Philippians 2:1-11]**

Q: According to Jesus, what is the difference between a friend and a slave? *(a friend knows the plans and mind of his friend while a slave merely knows what he is told to do)*

Again, Jesus defines His friendship with His disciples in terms of obedience. Yet, again, this isn't rote, blind obedience. Jesus isn't just dying for the world. He is also dying for His friends, His disciples. Christian friendship is more than just casual acquaintance but rather a deep partnership of mutual esteem and affection. In these verses Jesus elevated His disciples above the level of being mere tools to be used by His Father in His work. The disciples are able to obey Jesus because they are His friends and obedience characterizes this friendship.

Q: What is a slave never given? *(v.15 - a reason for the work assigned to him)*

Q: By giving knowledge of God's purposes, what is Jesus really giving to His disciples? *(Jesus is giving them a new level of intimacy and the ability to adopt God's plans as their own. This knowledge of God's plan gives a new level of hope and purpose to the disciples beyond mere religious activity.)*

Jesus' friends are true objects of His love. If loving obedience is the key that separates friends from slaves then divine revelation is the distinguishing feature of a friend. Jesus' friends are informed of His thinking and reasoning. Thus, they enjoy His confidence and learn to obey Jesus with the same sense of privilege and joy as He obeyed His Father.

Once again we see John use replacement terminology in this passage. Our relationship to the Father was once that like slaves but through Christ that relationship has been replaced with that of friends. In the past we were not informed of God's thinking. The Spirit was not freely and permanently given to people. Yet in this new covenant, that will be the norm. Even though there was much the disciples did not understand, Jesus had given them everything the Father had given Him to give them. The Spirit would now complete that revelation with understanding as they walked with Him and each other.

### **[I Corinthians 2:11-16]**

As we have seen elsewhere in John, anytime Jesus says anything that could be taken to puff up the disciples in their own minds, He immediately brings them back to reality. He had just told them about being His friends and what a privilege that was. Now He reminds them that they were not receiving these greater and more intimate revelations due to anything on their own part or merit. It was merely that they had been chosen by God, apart from their own merit, that they would be brought into this intimacy.

Q: What were the disciples' chosen to do? *(v.16 - to go and bear fruit)*

Q: What was the nature of this fruit to be? (*v.16 - it was to be fruit that remained*)

In the weeds of grammar, v.16 the word “choose” is in the aorist. It happened in the past and is still in force to this moment and will remain so. Jesus invited them to be His disciples after a night of prayer and then they accepted this invitation. However, the three verbs that follow are all in the present tense (go, bear, ask) which signifies continuance. Due to Jesus’ choice (His Father’s choice) of disciples, we are to continue to go and bear fruit and continue asking for our needs in Jesus’ name. In other words the fruit will not be grown in one mere spurt but rather it will be a lifelong characteristic of a believer. Just as believers are to abide in Jesus as the vine, His fruit will abide in us as the branches. Those blessed with this new revelation Jesus is giving the disciples now would be shared with others so that they too could become fruit and then be fruitful. In this, it is important that the disciples’ lives do not become a “holy huddle”, a comfortable circle that shares this love of God only among themselves. This love for Jesus and each other was to transform them into loving all other people. This would be put to the test in the early days of the church when the Lord would lead Philip to share the gospel with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8) and Peter being led to share the gospel with Cornelius and His family (Acts 10) and Paul the entire world of Gentiles.

Q: According to Jesus, what is the source of the disciple’s fruitfulness going to be? (*v.16 - asking things in prayer in Jesus’ name*)

Q: Why is it important that we ask things in Jesus’ name? (*Because that means that we are asking what He’d be asking for - something in perfect harmony and purpose with the Father’s will. Thus we know that God is going to be providing what is needed for His will to be accomplished.*)

V.17 is a transition statement. It reiterates Jesus’ one command to His disciples and reinforces the centrality of loving one another (again). But Jesus is also setting up a contrast between this love He has had for them and that they are to have with one another with the hatred they are going to experience from the world.

### 3. The relationship of the disciples to the world

Jesus’ purpose in this passage is to remove the “surprise factor” when persecution breaks out against them. The union of believers make up a community of love and this love will stand against the world. As we will see, this passage sets up a personal decision on the part of every believer which is of great importance. Following Jesus costs something - your relationship with the world and possibly your life. Yet, not following Jesus will lead to hostility to Jesus. Jesus is using this passage also to dissuade casual or spurious or superficial conversions. He wants genuine conversions and people need to understand the cost of following Jesus so it gets laid out here.

#### **[John 15:18-27]**

In John, the term “world” has several meanings. It is used to speak of the universe or the

created order. It can mean the materialistic order that allures men from God. It can mean mankind in general as the object of God's love. Yet, here in this passage it refers to the multitude of unbelievers who are either indifferent or hostile to God and His people. It refers to the created moral order that is in active opposition and rebellion against God. Despite Jesus coming on an errand of love, the world largely hated Him.

Q: Why should the disciples not be surprised when the world hates them? (*v.18 - because the world hated Him first and they are firmly associated with Him*)

The ultimate reason that the world hates Jesus is because He testifies that their deeds are evil.

Q: What does Jesus say would be the world's reaction to the disciples if they were of the world? (*v. 19 - the world would love them*)

Q: What are the characteristics of a disciple that will lead the world to hate them? (*righteousness, love and devotion to Jesus and other disciples, unity to the church body, obedience to Christ over man-made and worldly wisdom and conventions, etc.*)

True disciples of Christ will appear alien to the world. The world is a society of rebels and cannot tolerate those who are in joyful allegiance to Jesus, the King, to whom all allegiance is due. While disciples are former rebels, we have received grace now. We belong to the King and have been drawn out of the world by the Father's love and this ruins any chances of being part of the popular crowd in this world. However, Jesus' choice ensures that our lives have permanent value to the King. Yet, this guarantee does not grant us immunity from the attacks from the world. That's what Jesus received and thus His disciples should expect no less.

V.20 reminds of another example of what Jesus was referring to back in John 13 when He washed His disciples feet. There Jesus told them that humility and mutual service was to be sought rather than the pathetic scramble for the positions of honor and prestige that ignored the lowly help to their peers. Now Jesus words of them receiving the same persecution He received applies that same principle. If He experienced persecution to live in conformity to His Father's life and will, they will experience persecution for conforming to living out His life for their Father's will.

The statements of v.20 could go something like this: If they persecuted Me (and they did), they will persecute you. If they obeyed My teaching (and some of them did), there will be some who will obey your teaching too. Here humans divide themselves along the lines of Jesus' followers and His message.

Q: According to vv. 21-22, what are the two reasons for the obstinate attitude the world holds against Jesus' disciples? (*v.21 - ignorance - they don't know the Father who sent Jesus into the world. Thus they have no concept of who God truly is. Thus they cannot accurately evaluate God's messenger (Jesus). This ignorance is spiritual and intellectual in nature. v.22 - resentment of Jesus' claims and standards. Both the life and teachings of Jesus rebuke and condemn human sin. He uncovers inner corruption and hypocrisy and the world reacts violently to having this inner filth uncovered. He strips away all excuses and exposes the world's*

*selfishness and rebellion against God.)*

**[Hebrews 4:12]**

**[Romans 1:18-20]**

In this Jesus presupposes that the world does not know God or who Jesus is. If they would have known God, they would have recognized Him as the revelation of God. The world has a lot less knowledge of God than they claim. Rejecting Jesus is truly the worst sin possible as it rejects God's grace and shows a decisive preference for darkness rather than light. Rejecting Jesus is rejecting the clearest and fullest revelation of God thus will be incur the strongest wrath from God.

**[II Timothy 3:10-13]**

To hate Jesus is to hate God as Jesus narrates God on the human plane of existence. To accept Jesus is to accept the Father. This leads to Jesus' statement that no one has an excuse due to His teachings and miracles which clearly linked Him to the Father. The word "excuse" needs to be one step stronger in English. A better translation should be pretext or pretense. Whatever pretense the world has cooked up to justify their evil before the coming of Christ was lost now that God has come in human flesh into the world. This explains the meaning of Jesus statement in v.22 that "if He had not come, they would not have sin..." They were not sinless before His arrival but Jesus coming reveals their sins and hatred of God clearly. The specific sin Jesus is referring to is hating God and Himself, even though they profess otherwise. This is the true hypocrisy.

Q: What is the result of hating Jesus? (*v.23 - the person hates the Father also*)

We see the connection between Jesus and His Father is so complete that neither can be accepted or rejected without the other.

Q: What affect did Jesus say His works (miracles) had on those who witnessed them? (*v.24 - the exposing of the world's sin*)

Q: What were some of the specific works of Jesus that no one else did (miraculous works)? (*many answers here, raising people from the dead, healing all the people who came to Him, turning water into wine, feeding multitudes, walking on water, calming a storm, etc.*)

These were all works of God's love in actions. The sin of Jesus' enemies was then both deliberate and inexcusable as they have condemned the very love of God and His light. Jesus enemies in the world when He walked the earth heard His teachings and saw His miracles and thus ignorance could not be used as an excuse. Yet, the world, by its hatred of the exposure of their sin Jesus brought, continues to deny their own sin and thus their need for a remedy for their sin (which is Jesus Christ alone).

Q: Considering the world's hatred for Jesus and His disciples, should that be seen as a jeopardizing factor in God's plan to bring redemption to the world? (*v.25 - no - it was foreseen by God in the beginning. It was predicted in the Old Testament*)

**[Psalm 69:4]**

If David could be hated for no reason so could the Messiah and His followers. This use of the Old Testament by Jesus shows that those Jews who hated Jesus in His lifetime were condemned out of their own Scripture. Jesus brings this ironic thought to mind for His disciples. Those who were the supposed champions of the Law were fulfilling the prophecies concerning the enemies of God's servant.

Q: If Jesus is leaving the world, why would the world continue to hate Jesus' disciples? (*v.26 - The Holy Spirit will come to them.*)

Q: What is it about the Holy Spirit that will lead the world to hate Jesus' disciples? (*v.26-7 - He will lead Jesus' followers to continue to testify about Jesus to the world. He will unite believers in Jesus' love and prove Jesus' identity as God's Son.*)

Note that Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as "He" in v.26. The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force but rather God the Spirit, part of the Trinity (Godhead). He proceeds from the Father to those who are united with Him through Jesus. Jesus calls Him the "Spirit of truth". As Jesus is the "way, truth, and life (John 14:6), His Spirit is the essence of truth. He will speak the truth. Again, we see the replacement motif. The Father is replacing Jesus, in a way, with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will now be the One present with Jesus' disciples. Due to the Spirit's presence, the witness, love and grace of Christ will continue. Of course, this will be the occasion for the world's hatred of the disciples.

Q: Who will the Holy Spirit testify about? (*v.26 - Jesus. This is the Holy Spirit's role.*)

Q: Who will the Holy Spirit lead the disciples to testify about? (*v.27 - Jesus*)

The word "testify" is an imperative. While this part of Jesus' farewell discourse is a heads up on the treatment they will get from the world and why, it is also instructional for the new ministry they will be leading. "From the beginning" refers to those who were with Jesus from the beginning of His earthly ministry.

**[Acts 1:21-22]**

This gives the criteria for a replacement for Judas. They looked for a man who had been with them from the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

Q: Why do you think this was a criteria the early disciples looked for in a replacement for Judas? (*This is because they wanted someone who had complete experiential knowledge of who Jesus was and what He taught and the works He did.*)

The apostles were responsible for the transmission of the gospel message and since they were not creating fiction or legend, they wanted someone who knew the facts firsthand. This firsthand knowledge and experience (of all the disciples) coupled with the power and truth of the Holy Spirit's presence in their lives would be proof of their relationship with God. This testimony would be powerful and effective in overcoming the hatred of the world.

Q: According to this passage, even though we have not seen Jesus physically, what is our calling from Jesus? (*v. 27 - to testify through the power of the Spirit to the change Jesus has brought about in our lives.*)

**[Acts 1:8]** - A witness is one who has experienced some fact. We are to be witnesses of the fact that we have encountered Jesus and that we have been changed by that encounter.

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?