

# ***FPFWC Christian Development***



## **Godly Love Among Believers**

November 2020

Fall Quarter

**November 7, 2020**

**Lesson #2 – Abiding Love**

SCRIPTURE TEXT – John 15:4-17

**ICE BREAKER –**

1. What is the greatest manifestation of love?
2. In which area of discipleship are Christians weaker: their way of thinking or their way of living? Why?

**Key Verse: 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.—John 15:5**

**LESSON BACKGROUND**

John 15 is at the center of the Farewell Discourse (John 13–17), a series of speeches and a prayer given by Jesus during the last supper. Generally, this section has material unique to John among the Gospels (see lesson 9 Lesson Context). The content makes up about 17 percent of the total text of John.

Jesus builds His case for mutual love by using common observations from the vineyard. The vineyard was a staple of agriculture in the ancient world. In the Bible, Noah is the first recorded grape grower (Genesis 9:20), and human society has prized the fruit of the vine ever since. The fruit thereby produced became a source of sustenance year-round, with many of the harvested grapes being converted into raisins and wine for later consumption (see 2 Samuel 16:1). One of the enticing descriptions of the promised land was its productive vineyards (Deuteronomy 6:10–11; 8:7–10). Indeed, a physical sign brought back by the ill-fated spying expedition into the promised land was a massive cluster of grapes (Numbers 13:23).

Vineyards were a common sight throughout Galilee, Samaria, and Judea in Jesus' day. Besides today's text, He also used vineyard imagery in His parables of the workers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1–16), the two sons (21:28–32), the wicked husbandmen (21:33–39), and the barren fig tree (Luke 13:6–9). Common experiences regarding vineyards are also assumed in 1 Corinthians 9:7.

Grapevines would be pruned severely at a certain time of the year, leaving little more than a leafless, branchless stump that would be propped up with a rock or two. All the old branches would be cut off and carried away, providing valuable fuel for home fires.

After new branches had grown, a second pruning would occur to remove the smaller branches. This allowed the larger branches to produce bigger clusters of larger grapes. Such pruning was part of the process known as dressing the vines (Deuteronomy 28:39).

## LESSON COMMENTARY

**15:3–5.** “Clean” (*katharos*) is a related Greek word to “prune” (*kathairo*) in v. 2. **Because of the word which Jesus had spoken to** them that night, the eleven disciples were “cleansed” or “pruned” for sacrificial service (13:12–17). **Abide in Me** (v. 4) sets the necessary condition for fruit-bearing and the vital union in which Christ lives dynamically in the believer (cf. Eph 3:17). Just as a **branch cannot bear fruit** in and **of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can** believers bear fruit **unless** they **abide in** (remain intimate with) Christ.

**15:5–6.** Christ is **the vine**, the life source, and believers **are the branches**, the place where fruit is produced. Before Christ abides in the believer, the believer must **abide in** Christ. Followers of Jesus are not commanded to bear fruit but to abide. The believer who does not abide is **thrown away as a branch and dries up** (v. 6). According to the first view mentioned above under 15:1–2, the passage is parabolic, involving symbolism (cf. “as a branch”). So **fire** and **burned** are not references to hell. They symbolize (1) the uselessness of these branches (Mt 5:13); and/or (2) divine discipline now and reproof at the future evaluation of believers (1Co 3:13–15; 1Jn 2:28). According to the second view, the fruitless branches represent unbelievers who never abided in Christ, never produced fruit, and who are taken away from the vine and burned (i.e., will face God’s eternal judgment in hell). But this second view is unlikely since in the analogy, there is no such thing as a branch that has never been joined to the vine. “Branches” that have never had life in the vine are non-existent and can never be “burned.”

**15:7–8.** **If ... My words abide in you** adds another qualification for abiding: the need to internalize Christ’s teachings (cf. Col 3:16). Then believers can **ask whatever** they **wish**, and their prayer is answered because they will be praying according to God’s will. Some believers lack fruit (vv. 2, 6) and are not “disciples” in the fullest sense (see comment on 8:31). When believers **bear much fruit** (v. 8), they **prove** to others that they are His **disciples**. Love is this proof (13:34–35; 15:12–13, 17).

**15:9.** **Just as the Father has loved Me** remarkably parallels the Son’s love for the disciples with the Father’s love for the Son. “Abiding in Me” is now defined as abiding **in My love** (cf. Jd 21; Rv 2:4). “Abiding” is a love relationship with Jesus.

**15:10–11.** The construction of this particular conditional statement (a third class condition using *ean*, “if,” plus an aorist subjunctive verb, “keep”) projects the action as hypothetical, as something to consider, without actually making a statement about the reality or degree of likelihood of its fulfillment. The idea is, “When people keep my commandments, they abide in My love.” **My commandments** refers to the new teachings of Christ in the NT, especially the command to love sacrificially (cf. Mt 5:21–48; see comment on 13:34). Believers cannot have Christ abiding in them without having His joy abiding in them as well (v. 11). As they abide, their **joy may be made full**. But as abiding can be lost, so can joy.

**15:12–13.** The command to love requires a supernatural component to fulfill, requires faith, and is more a choice than an emotion (for a definition of “love,” see the comments on 1Co 13:1–3). The priority for believers is to **love one another** first, since every believer is part of the family of God. Love may involve reproof (Gl 6:1–2). No love will ever be **greater** than when someone **lay[s] down his life for**

**his friends.** Jesus was applying this principle foremost to His own death, but secondarily to all His followers (cf. 1Jn 3:16).

**15:14–15. You are My friends** parallels abiding in Christ since both result in intimacy (friendship). This friendship is conditioned on obedience as is demonstrated in the words **if you do what I command you**. Here the conditional statement indicates that if one is obedient to Jesus' commands, it is correct to infer that such a person is Jesus' friend. James informed us that Abraham's works (not merely his faith), flowing out of his righteous standing before God by faith, made him a friend of God (Jms 2:22–23). **No longer** marks a dispensational change from the OT where the believer was treated like a servant (cf. Gl 4:1–5). New revelation (**all things that I have heard from My Father**) disclosed in Christ's farewell teachings **have** now been **made known to** His disciples. See comments on 2:23 and 14:21.

**15:16–17. I chose you** does refer both to election to salvation for the eleven disciples and to Jesus' choice of them to be His apostles (Lk 6:13; Ac 1:2) and carry out the Great Commission (Mt 28:18–20). They were **appointed to go and bear fruit**—a love (cf. v. 17) that brings others to Christ (cf. Ac 2:41–47; 4:32–35). This **fruit would remain** because salvation is a permanent gift. **Whatever you ask** may specify asking for all that is necessary to win people to Christ. For **ask of the Father in my name**, see the comment on 14:13.

**LESSON NUGGET** – Abiding depends on obeying, and obeying depends on loving. Love and joy go together and make it easy for us to obey His will. We should love Him, love His will, and love one another. Note the “fruit of the Spirit”: love, joy, and peace.

**Sources:** *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary*