



Disciplers Bible Studies

JOHN
LESSON 16

Upper Room Discourses John 15:1-27

Introduction

A. Review of Chapters 13 and 14

In our study of John 13 and 14, we have learned so far that Jesus' Upper Room discourses were profound in content and explicit in application. Jesus knew that this intimate, upper-room time with the disciples was His last opportunity to emphasize the following:

- a. True servanthood (foot washing)
- b. Judas' betrayal (Satanic)
- c. Glorification (Father and Son)
- d. The new commandment (Love one another)
- e. Promise of heaven (His Father's house)
- f. The only way to God (Jesus)
- g. Obedience (God's Word and Jesus' commandments))
- i. Coming of the Holy Spirit
- j. Peace of Jesus (that surpasses comprehension)

B. Setting

Jesus continues this rich and meaningful teaching in Chapter 15. To better understand the significance of this chapter, we need to keep in mind that He had warned His disciples not to be like Judas, who manifested the works of Satan. Instead, He wanted them to maintain a vital relationship with God through their identification and union with Him and the Holy Spirit. Thus, He began with the excellent allegory of the vine and the branches.

Outline of John 15:1-27

- I. The Vine and Branches (15:1-11)
- II. Love One Another (15:12-17)
- III. Warning of Persecution (15:18-25)
- IV. The Coming Helper (15:26-27)

I. Vine and Branches (John 15:1-11)

A. Old Testament Background

Jesus used the vine and branches as an allegoric method of teaching in this passage. An allegory is a generalization about human existence using sym-

bolic figures and actions of truth to get the message across. The disciples, because of their familiarity with the Old Testament, would readily have understood this symbolic teaching. Many times God, through the prophets, described His people Israel as a vine or vineyard (Psalm 80:8-16; Isaiah 5:1-7; Hosea 10:1, 2.)

B. The Teaching Allegory

Jesus' teaching allegory gave the disciples and all true believers meaningful representation of what an intimate relationship with Him means.

Jesus said that He was the true vine and that His Father was the vinedresser. He also described the difference between non-fruit bearing branches and fruit bearing branches. The figurative meaning of each of these words is:

- The Vine is Jesus the Son of God.
- The Vinedresser is God the Father.
- The non- fruit bearing Branches are counterfeit believers
- The fruit bearing Branches are genuine believers

C. The Vinedresser

God the Father is the absolute and highest ruler in the universe. He is the owner, planter and keeper of the vineyard. Symbolically, in the Old Testament, He was preeminent in the providential event of establishing Israel as His chosen people and called them His vineyard. Later, in the New Testament, He established Christ's church as the new vineyard. In the Old Testament, God desired fruit from Israel that displayed loving obedience, righteousness and justice.

The Vinedresser took away the unfruitful branches of the vine and pruned the fruitful branches to bring forth more fruit. Symbolically, God's pruning is the disciplining process to purify character and conduct and make His people more spiritually productive (Numbers 14:22-24.)

D. The Vine

In another of His great “*I AM*” statements, Jesus began the comparison of His relationship with believers to the relationship between a vine and its branches. The root and trunk of the vine contain the body fluid (sap) that circulates through the plant’s vascular system to give it life, health and vigor. Similarly, Jesus is the essential source of life, sustenance, growth and vitality for all true believers. Like the vine and the branches, Jesus and His followers are inseparable because they share one life with Him for living and productivity. William Hendriksen writes, “To be sure, the unity which an earthly vine imparts to the branches is very close and organic. But the oneness of believers with one another and with Christ is far more glorious.”

E. The Non-fruit Bearing Branches

Jesus told the disciples that every branch in Him that does not bear fruit His Father would take away. Jesus was referring to superficial believers who never truly experienced the inner transforming work of the Holy Spirit. Since they do not have the divine life feeding and sustaining them, they will never bear any fruit. Note that Jesus was not speaking of newly born again believers because they will bear demonstrative fruit in the future as they mature and grow stronger (evangelism for example.) God provides special care to genuine believers so that they will bear fruit in the future.

F. The Fruit Bearing Branches

These are the true disciples of Christ and all true believers. Jesus told the disciples that they were already clean, meaning that they possessed eternal life. The granting of eternal life is followed by God’s care and discipline. Jesus did not want them to conclude that the absence of fruit or the presence of difficulties in their lives indicated the loss of salvation.

G. Meaning of Abide in Me

The central message of this entire passage is, “*Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.*” Obedience is the key to abiding. The best interpretation of this teaching is that believers should make a deliberate effort to cultivate and maintain a personal, intimate connection with Jesus Christ. This obedience results in mutual indwelling of believers with Jesus (John 6:37-40, 10:28-29). The emphasis is primarily on the believer’s responsibility to submit completely to

Christ and cultivate a loving, obedient, intimate relationship with Him.

H. Fruitfulness

Fruitfulness is the tangible result of godly motives, desires, attitudes, dispositions, spiritual virtues and action (Matthew 7:16-20; Ephesians 5:9; James 3:18.) It expresses itself in leading unbelievers to Christ and helping others grow and mature in the Lord. Fruitfulness emanates from:

- Loving God completely, loving yourself correctly, and loving others compassionately
- Abiding in the Lord Jesus Christ
- Studying God’s Word and praying regularly
- Serving God and manifesting the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Christ in every place

I. The Extent of Fruitfulness

The extent of a believer’s fruitfulness is in direct proportion to his or her faith, intimacy and healthy spiritual connection to Jesus. Since Jesus, the vine, conditions and controls a believer’s mind, He is the One who brings glory to the Father through the prayers and fruitfulness of His abiding disciples. It is a privilege for believers to share this same joy which characterized Jesus. Note that the cause of fruitfulness is loving obedience and the result is joy.

II. Love One Another (15:12-17)

A. God’s Attributes

God has both incommunicable and communicable attributes. His incommunicable attributes are omnipresence (everywhere present), omniscience (all knowing), omnipotence (all powerful) and immutability (unchangeable). They cannot be communicated to or shared by mankind. On the other hand, His communicable attributes can, to a degree, be communicated to or shared with mankind. These include holiness, truth, love, mercy, righteousness, goodness, grace, service and patience.

B. Love Commandment

In vs. 12 and 17, Jesus repeated His great commandment of John 13:34, “*Love one another as I have loved you.*” As the eternal source of never-ending love, God is the divine perfection of unconditional, forgiving, gracious unrestrained, immeasurable love (1 John 4:7-20.) Believers would have the potential to overcome their flesh with the

strength and enabling of the Holy Spirit and apply God's communicable love.

C. Sacrificial Love

Jesus followed His *"love one another"* command with, *"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."* Paul describes the characteristics and virtues of human love in 1 Corinthians 13 and concludes with, *"And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."* The sacrifice of one's life for his friend(s) is the supreme mark of love. Keep in mind that Jesus was speaking to friends for whom He was about to give up His own life. The full impact of His words would come home to them as they grasped the reality of His passion and death in the next few hours.

D. Friends

Jesus called His disciples His friends in these verses. By explaining that He no longer called them servants, He did not mean that he had actually called them servants, nor that He had treated them as slaves. The idea is that he was taking them into the full confidence of His ministry and impending sacrifice. As friends, Jesus had shared with them all things that He had heard from the Father. He chose them that they might share His ministry of going forth and being the branches that bore the fruit of the Gospel.

Application:

The significance God puts on love comes through loudly and clearly in these verses. Without the love of God for one another and without the deepest of love for God, we are nothing. Mark Bailey, President of Dallas Theological Seminary, states it well: There are five characteristics of genuine love in John 15:13-16. True love is sacrificial; it is demonstrated in obedience in Christ; it always communicates truth; it takes the initiative in meeting the legitimate needs of others; and it will always bear fruit" (*The New Testament Explorer*.) Take a few moments to meditate deeply on these five descriptions of love as the greatest of virtues.

III, Warning of Persecution (15:18- 25)

A. Preparations

After this meaningful discourse on the vine, branches and love, Jesus started preparing the disciples for the difficulties and hardships that were ahead for them. He told them that the world's rejection of them had its true basis in the hatred and rejection

of Jesus Himself. (See page 2 Lesson 8, I C for a description of the world.) This world, as opposed to the world of natural creation and the world of humanity, is the godless world organized in opposition to God and therefore opposed to God's people.

B. Their Future

In a few hours, as Jesus would become the victim of the world's hostility, the disciples would see the full impact of these words. His faithful friends would incur the same hatred as he Himself had experienced. As abiding followers of Christ, they would draw hatred from the masses of unbelievers in the world because they associated themselves with Him and His teachings. They would encounter worldly resistance.

IV. The Coming Helper (15:26-27)

Again Jesus spoke of the Helper, the Holy Spirit, who would take up Christ's ministry of witness and carry it on. When the Christian who is abiding in Christ runs into hatred, opposition, ignorance, unbelief and even slander, Jesus and His Father would send the Holy Spirit to comfort, strengthen and guide in all situations (Acts 5:32.) His power to witness for Christ to all classes of people is unstoppable. Keep in mind that the Holy Spirit's work in the church age began at Pentecost when He came from the Father as promised by Jesus. His overall mission was to initiate and complete the building of the Body of Christ.

Application:

When you are criticized, belittled or even persecuted for defending Christ with your words or lifestyle, do you recognize that the indwelling Holy Spirit is your strength, power and enablement? Remember to draw upon this Divine resource. He is dwelling in you, waiting for you to yield to Him.