

Sunday, November 21, 2021

This is the eleventh in a series of sermons on John 13-17 (“The Farewell Discourse”).

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As you’ll recall, The Farewell Discourse takes place on Christ’s Crucifixion week just before Jesus is arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. On a parallel track, Tim has been doing a lengthy series of sermons about the Olivet Discourse entitled “Signs of the Coming of Christ and of the End of the World.” You may not have connected the dots, but these two events happen within days of each other. Jesus makes his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Sunday, He speaks to His disciples on the mount of Olives about His return on Tuesday, He institutes the Lord’s Supper and begins the Farewell Discourse on Thursday, He is crucified on Friday, and He is resurrected on Sunday. In very broad strokes, His words on Mt. Olive have to do with what’s going to happen, and His words in the Farewell Discourse have to do with the meantime – from the time that He leaves (13:36) to the time that He returns (14:3). Today’s passage has a lot of important things that we’re supposed to be doing during the meantime, while we patiently wait for our Savior’s return:

**“This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. These things I command you, that ye love one another.” (John 15:12-17)**

Let us break this into three pieces: “Love One Another,” “Friends of Christ,” and “Love One Another.” (Yes, I have two headings with the same name on purpose).

## Love One Another

**“This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:12-13)**

Previously, He had been talking about our duty to obey His commandments in general (and thereby abide in His love). And now He zeroes in on some specificity, which is for us to love one another. In his exposition of Galatians 6:10 in 386 AD, Jerome said this: *“The blessed John the Evangelist lived in Ephesus until extreme old age. His disciples could barely carry him to church and he could not muster the voice to speak many words. During individual gatherings he usually said nothing but, ‘Little children, love one another.’ The disciples and brothers in attendance, annoyed because they always heard the same words, finally said, ‘Teacher, why do you always say this?’ He replied with a line worthy of John: ‘Because it is the Lord’s commandment and if it alone is kept, it is sufficient.’ He said this because of the Apostle’s present mandate: ‘Let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the household of faith.’”* I don’t know if that’s true or just a good story, but he’s on to something there. If we love one another as Christ loved us, and the reason for that is that we love Him and desire to show our love by keeping His commandments, then everything else will fall into place.

This isn’t the first time that we’ve heard from Jesus that we need to love one another, either. He said it back in chapter 13 as well:

**“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” (John 13:34-35)**

I’m not going to repeat everything I said when I went over this passage previously, but I spent a large part of my December 6, 2020, sermon entitled [“Christ’s Glory and How We Are To Live in His Temporary Absence”](#) on the topic of loving one another, and I’d encourage everyone to review that. Brent also did a sermon just a few weeks ago called [“Let Love Be Without Dissimulation.”](#) I do want to say that this love is a love of action (not merely emotion), and it is a habitual love (i.e., you can’t just do it once and say you’ve fulfilled the commandment). It is mutual – we are to love “one another.” You have to be willing to love your brother, and you have to be willing to accept love from your brother without entitlement or abusing their kindness. Why do you think He uses the metaphor of the vine and the branches earlier in the chapter? It isn’t just you and Jesus – this isn’t an individualistic religion. This is not a life you can live alone. There is one vine and many branches, and the branches abide in the vine by loving Him and loving one another. It’s the same reason why we see Paul using the “body”

metaphor later on. This commandment to love one another is of utmost importance to Jesus, and it is impossible for you to obey it if you are not an active part of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, if you love God, get to His church!

This love for one another is required to be “as I have loved you.” We are to use Jesus as our example. And the choice example He gives of such love is this: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” The greatest thing a man could ever give up for a friend is his own life. We see a version of this even in the heathen world. How often have you seen a headline like “*Man Dies Saving Baby From House Fire.*” Or “*Soldier Falls On Grenade To Save Fellow Soldiers.*” But the context isn’t about the heathen world, so let’s be careful about applying it to the heathen world (as people often do, particularly on Memorial Day). As Gill sagely points out: “*His love in dying for His people, is greater than any instance of love among men...among men, when one man has laid down his life for others, either they have been very deserving, or he has been forced to it, or it has been done with the view of popular applause and vain glory.*” The context is about the death of Christ for His friends and how we’re supposed to follow this example for one another, with the underlying motivation being love for God. So, this is how we should apply the passage – not applying it willy-nilly to every Tom, Dick and Harry on the planet who happens to look like he might have performed a selfless act.

**“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” (1 John 3:16-17).**

Jesus was unique in that He died to atone for our sins. We can’t do that for one another. Only He can do that. But we can love one another to the degree that we would be willing to die for one another. Even if we aren’t called to lay down our lives for one another (which would be an uncommon situation), we should at least be willing to give things up for one another. The example given in 1 John 3 is when you see a brother who is in need. We’re called to give things up in our own lives to help our brothers – to put our own lives aside for the good of our brother. That’s hard because humans are naturally selfish creatures. But if you’re not willing to do it, it’s time for you to rearrange your priorities.

And one more point on this is that we read elsewhere that Jesus died for the unjust and for His enemies (see 1 Peter 3:18 and Romans 5:10). What does He mean here when He says He died for His friends? How do we reconcile that? Well, He died for us even while we were unjust and sinners and enemies, in order to make us His friends. What amazing love! He’s always considered us to be His friends, even from eternity past. He chose us to be His friends. Gill

says, *“He laid down his life for his enemies, without any sinister selfish views, and that freely and voluntarily.”* If He’s going to do that for us while we were His enemies, how much ought we to love our brothers and sisters in Christ? We have a common bond with one another. Christ loves us, and we love Him. We are His friends. So, we ought to love one another.

### **Friends of Christ**

**“Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.” (John 15:14-16)**

Here He defines who His friends are. Before Jesus said these words, it was a rather rare thing in the Bible for an individual person to be called a friend of God. We see it regarding Moses – “The Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend” (Exodus 33:11). We see it regarding Abraham, who was “called the Friend of God” (2 Chronicles 20:7, Isaiah 41:8, James 2:23). But here Jesus applies the term to His apostles, and by extension, to all His elect (remember that this entire discourse is for all of God’s people, not just the eleven sitting there – see John 17:20). The people whom He chose and for whom He died are His friends. You are His friends and should consider yourselves such...“if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” (1 Peter 2:3). But let’s be careful – when you hear the word “friends” you might think of two parties who are on the same level. You might think of “chums” or “pals” or “buddies” who might have some reciprocal relationship with one another. But this is not a relationship of equivalence in this passage. You are His friend, not His equal. You are attached to the vine, but you are not the vine. He’s still our Lord and Master, and we’re still bound to obey Him. If there’s any sense in which the Lord can be called our friend, it’s not in the same sense in which we’re His friends. Beloved – you’re either a friend of Christ, or a friend of the world. You don’t want to be a friend of the world, because a friend of the world is the enemy of God (James 4:4). So, I think we should be keenly interested in how Jesus defines His friends. Let’s look at a few characteristics:

1. **His friends do whatsoever He commands them.** Our obedience defines the friendship – in other words, if our lives are characterized by obedience to Him, we can make the claim that we are His friends. But if we’re living lives of disobedience, we don’t have any right to make that claim. If you connect this to what He’s been saying about keeping His commandments, His friends are those who love Him and abide in His love (see John 14:15, 15:10). It’s a mutual love between us and God – He shows His love for His friends

by dying for them, and His friends show their love for Him by obeying His commands (notably, the commandment to love one another).

2. **His friends have the mind of the Father revealed to them.** He says He won't call us servants anymore, because the servant doesn't know what his lord does; instead, He will call us friends, because He's made known to us everything that He's heard from the Father. This needs some explaining on a few fronts. First, Jesus does call them "servants" again just a few verses later (15:20), and it's very common for the apostles to refer to themselves as "servants of Jesus Christ." What does He mean when He says, "henceforth I call you not servants?" I think it simply means that we're not going to be known MERELY as servants, but rather as friends. Think of it as "friends who serve." A servant with a slavish attitude will do as he's commanded out of fear of punishment, or out of a sense of begrudging duty. A servant who is a friend will willingly and cheerfully serve out of love and understanding. Spurgeon explains it well with a little anecdote: *"The servant works in a building, and it is enough for him that he is laying part of a line of brick or stone. Perhaps he has never seen the design of the structure or had a wish to do so. But you and I have the great architect constantly coming to us to tell us what the building is to be and to explain to us his plans, and so we work with greater pleasure and joy than a mere laborer might."*

Second, what does He mean that He's made known to us all things that He's heard of His Father? First off, as hard as it sometimes is to accept, remember that there are some things that are simply none of your business. God isn't obliged to reveal His secret will to you. He isn't there to satiate your curiosity or accommodate your prying into things that aren't for you to know. He makes known all things that are necessary to be made known to us. Here are a couple relevant verses on that:

***"The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law."***  
(Deuteronomy 29:29)

***"When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power."***  
(Acts 1:6-7)

Nevertheless, He has revealed things to us. He hasn't revealed everything that exists in the mind of the omniscient God, but He's given us the Bible, which has everything we need to know. He's given us light about the Bible. He's given us understanding. He's

made us to understand the Father's business, and the significance of His words and commands. He's given us cause to believe that His promises are for us. In this particular context, He's revealing some amazing things about the plan of redemption that had not heretofore been revealed. He has given us everything that the Father has seen fit for us to have, and He has done this sovereignly at whatever time and in whatever measure He's deemed appropriate. He tends to reveal things in a progressive manner – that is, He doesn't dump everything on us at once. It would be too much for us to bear. (The Bible itself was revealed progressively).

**“But the path of the just *is* as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” (Proverbs 4:18)**

Mark that HE does this – we don't do it. HE makes things known to us. You can toil over some piece of scripture for years, but until God is pleased to make it known to you, it won't be known to you. And mark this also - He makes these things known not to everyone, but only to His friends. Abraham was the friend of God, “And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do...?” (Genesis 18:17). He's not going to hide from us things that we need to know, when we need to know them. Meanwhile, His enemies, who have access to the same book that we have, are blind as bats and stagger around as drunken men. They certainly can understand at least parts of it intellectually, but to have any kind of legitimate saving knowledge and trust in it – that is reserved for His friends. Everyone else either rejects it outright, or they reject it in doctrine and practice.

**“In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.”  
(Luke 10:21)**

3. **His friends are chosen by Him**. This is nothing less than the doctrine of unconditional election. A lot of people say, “What He's talking about here is choosing them to be apostles.” He certainly did choose them to be apostles, but that's not what He's talking about. Read the context. He's chosen us to go out and produce abiding fruit. He's chosen us to be fruitful branches in the vine. Look at Judas – He chose Judas to be an apostle, but He certainly did not choose Judas to go out and bear abiding fruit (otherwise, Judas wouldn't have been cut off as a fruitless branch). We're talking about salvation here. He did the choosing – not us! In the original language, the pronouns are emphatic – **YOU** have not chosen me, but **I** have chosen you; **YOU** didn't do this, but **I** did. If you ever come across a person saying, “I made a decision for Christ” or “I chose

to allow Christ into my heart,” run! That kind of person actually thinks he’s done God a favor – heaven wouldn’t be the same without him, so God’s lucky he made his choice. Listen – the question is not about you choosing Christ; the question is if He chose you. Before I was even around to make a choice, He made a choice. He made a decree, and the decree was not contingent on me choosing Him. The decree was “to the praise of the glory of His grace.” (Ephesians 1:6). Jesus is saying the same thing here that Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2:13 – “God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation.” You might object and say, “Yeah, but I was willing – I wanted to serve God – I wanted to get baptized – I wanted to be in the church – I love the Lord – I believe that Jesus died for me!” And I say to you, “Who do you think made you willing? Where do you think your faith came from? It was God’s choice, not yours – left to yourself, you’d be like every other worldling.”

Now why is this here? It seems like He just kind of stuck this in the middle of everything. He tends to remind of us of the doctrine of election at the most opportune times. I can think of a couple reasons why He would tell them this right now.

- a. To provide encouragement lest they despair. A person might think, “How can I love someone as He has loved me? It’s impossible. I can’t do it!” So, He reminds them, “I’m the one orchestrating all this. Salvation is of the Lord. You’ll never be perfect in this life (which is why you need pruning) but it’s only in me that you can do any of it - I’m the one who has chosen and ordained you to produce the fruit in the first place. You don’t have to (and indeed you CAN’T) do it on your own.”
- b. Lest they allow spiritual pride and self-sufficient arrogance to creep in. A person might think, “All I have to do is connect myself to Christ and then I can do all this stuff. I just need to take the first step.” Jesus reminds them that HE took the first step AND He’s doing the rest - without Him you can do nothing.

4. **His friends are ordained by Him to go and bring forth fruit that remains.** He is continuing the fruit metaphor from the previous section about the true vine. As you read through from the beginning of the chapter, you see fruit (v. 2), then more fruit (v. 2), then much fruit (v. 5), and now remaining fruit (v. 16). When He says, “that your fruit should remain,” it’s the exact same word that was previously translated as “abide” or “continue.” It means that this fruit is lasting. It is continual. It has eternal consequences. It’s not something that we do once and then call it good – it’s a way of life. And He is the one who ordained it! He set it in place. He attached us to the vine. He did it! This is what it means when He says, “for without me ye can do nothing” (v. 5). This is the perseverance of the saints. He started it in eternity past with His election of us, He preserves us along the way by ordaining us to go and bring forth fruit, and He will

make sure it continues into eternity future with our glorification.

Now, what is this fruit? Last time, I very broadly defined it as this: “any good thing that is produced as a result of God working in us.” And I think I’m going to stick with that definition. The examples given by Jesus in this chapter include effectual prayer in accordance with the word of God (v. 7), loving God (v. 9), obedience to God’s commandments (v. 10), joy (v. 11), and loving one another (v. 12). When we get to this verse, though, almost every commentator adds another fruit to the list, and that is “winning souls to Jesus.” The argument is that saints in one generation make disciples out of the next generation, and this is how the church remains (“your fruit should remain”) from generation to generation. I think this deserves some attention, because there might be a little bit of confusion here. Personally, I have a physical reaction to the phrase “winning souls to Jesus” because I know that most people who use that phrase believe that they can convert a person with their amazing powers of persuasion or their neatly crafted intellectual or emotional appeals. They are willing to lie, misrepresent, add, delete, “improve,” capitulate, blaspheme, and otherwise handle the word of God deceitfully in order to add another name to their list of souls whom they have supposedly “won to Jesus.” “Yeah, I know the Bible says that God hates people, but you can’t say that, because if you do, you won’t win them to Jesus.” “Yeah, I know that Jesus said that divorce and remarriage is adultery, but if we enforce that, we’re turning people away from Jesus.” Their attitude is “look what I did – look how many people I’ve converted” rather than taking the attitude of Paul who said, “I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me.” (Romans 15:18). And at what cost? Now the churches are full of people who have been “won to Jesus” who despise the biblical Jesus. Of course, the phrase originates in Proverbs 11:30 – “The fruit of the righteous *is* a tree of life; and he that winneth souls *is* wise.” I love the language, but I hate how it’s been twisted and misused - if you’re going to use the terminology, make sure you mean what the Bible means by it.

The Lord uses the preaching of His people to call His saints. Paul said, “it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1 Corinthians 1:21) and Paul endured “all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” (2 Timothy 2:10). Sometimes God uses the preaching of His people to add 3,000 souls to the church in one day (Acts 2:41). Sometimes God uses the preaching of His people to save 0 souls over the course of 120 years (think Noah – they started with 8, and they ended with the same 8). Sometimes God silently reserves people to Himself that we don’t even know about – “I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.” (Romans 11:4). In every case, it’s God doing the saving, or not doing the saving, either by many

or by few (1 Samuel 14:6, Acts 2:47). So, if God uses us to produce the fruit of a saved soul, that's wonderful and is cause for rejoicing.

But the "fruit" that Jesus is talking about here is so much more – it is every good thing that He has wrought in and by us. Election always results in sanctification – it always results in fruits that can be observed and inspected. That is one of the great ends to which we were elected – not to be lazy, idle, useless. Ephesians 2:10 tells us that we are "created in Christ Jesus unto good works." And Titus 2:14 tells us that He gave Himself for us to "purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

5. **His friends are given the gift of effectual prayer in His name.** This is another thing that He has chosen and ordained His people to do. This is the fourth time now that we've come across the topic of prayer in the Farewell Discourse (see John 14:13, 14 & 15:7), and it isn't the last time. It must be important. If you haven't been tending to prayer, you better make it a priority. I addressed this in previous sermons ([Seeing God – 5/9/2021](#) and [Abiding in Christ, the True Vine – 10/3/2021](#)) and reminded everyone that prayer in the name of Christ is not a blank check to get whatever you want. Rather, it is praying consistent with His character, His will, His commandments, His glory, His purpose, and His Word; it is to pray knowing that He is our Mediator; it is to pray pleading His merit and intercession on our behalf. And it is powerful and effectual – that is, it has an intended effect. The Lord gives His ear to His friends, and He gives them what they ask for. It is intimately tied here with the production of fruit. Prayer itself is a fruit (v. 7). Prayer produces more fruit (i.e., when you pray for fruit, God gives you fruit!). And bearing fruit results in effectual prayer (i.e., you have no right to expect that God is going to listen to your prayers when you are living a disobedient, unfruitful life, but a person who abides in Christ and has His words abiding in him can expect to have his prayers answered – God's word for it! And He cannot lie!).

## **Love One Another**

**"These things I command you, that ye love one another." (John 15:17)**

This section ends like it began – with Christ telling us to love one another. He says, "these things I command you." What things? Everything He's been commanding so far. It's all been designed to encourage us to obey this great commandment: love one another. This is the fifth time now we've seen this commandment. Like prayer, it must be important. He keeps repeating Himself – it's a thing that is weighing very heavily on His heart here in this place. We can't speak too often about it, attach too much weight to it, or work too hard at it. Like prayer, it is easy to neglect – we need to be reminded of it early and often. He knows us. He

knows our deceptive hearts. He knows how easily and quickly we can slip away from this commandment. He knows that we're liable to carry around contempt and bitterness and grudges in our hearts. He knows how averse we are to following this command. He knows that we're going into a hostile world and are at danger of turning in on one another and contending with one another. Trapp says: "*If we clash, we break.*" But the love must be a Biblical love – hence the qualification in John 13 and 15: "as I have loved you." The world has created a counterfeit concept of "love" that rejoices in iniquity instead of the truth, and our Lord knows how easily we might be impacted or deceived by this counterfeit, unbiblical love.

To love one another is no easy feat and we often fail at it. It takes work. It takes sacrifice. And sometimes we don't make it easy for people to love us – sometimes we create situations like Paul experienced with the Corinthians: "And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved." (2 Corinthians 12:15). We can get on each others' nerves. We can make each other angry. But the command is not optional. You can try all kinds of different things to avoid and dodge and stiff-arm it, but the time will come when you're going to have to come face to face with it. Do you love your brothers and sisters in Christ, or not? We share a common Savior, a common Beloved, a common cause, a common eternity. We're all adopted children in the same family. And we ought to love one another all the more knowing that the world hates us (which, Lord willing, will be the topic of the next sermon in this series). I don't know of a better way to help with this than to tell you to cast your eye upon Jesus – Hebrews 12:2 says: "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith." The word translated "looking" there is a unique word – it means "stop looking at other things and look at this." Cast your eye on the Lord Jesus and consider how He's loved you. And if that doesn't help you, then consider this: "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 18:10). Or this: "Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door." (James 5:9).

So, to wrap up, it all begins with Christ. He's chosen us. He's ordained us to bring forth fruit. He loves us. He helps us. By His power, we love Him back, and we demonstrate that love by obeying Him, primarily by obeying His command to love one another. When we obey Him, we abide in Him. When we abide in Him, we produce more fruit. We read the Bible, His words abide in us, we pray, and we produce still more fruit. The more fruit we produce, the more we abide in Him. It's a continuous cycle of abiding and increasing fruit as God works in His friends.

**"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen." (Hebrews 13:20-21)**