

## John 15:1-17

A Real Estate Agent once told me something very important when it comes to buying a house. What he said was really quite simple. He repeated the same word three times, “Location, location, location.” Where you buy a house can make all the difference in the world. It can effect the resale value of the house later on. It can effect the health and safety of your family. It can effect the church you attend for worship. Location is extremely important when considering to buy a house.

Similarly, there is a word that we must always keep in mind when reading the Bible. This word will save us from arriving at wrong conclusions and strange beliefs regarding the truth of Scripture. It is context, context, context!

We must always keep the context in mind whenever we read the Bible. What was the historical context in John 15? Where were Christ and his disciples at this time? The answers to these question will shed light on the message and truth of the passage.

In John 15, The Lord and his disciples had just eaten the last supper. On the table was the "fruit of the vine," and the Lord had said he would never drink it again upon the earth [Mt 26:29; Mr 14:25; Lu 22:18]. Christ uses the fresh imagery of the vine to teach his apostles important spiritual truths.

Matthew Henry writes in his commentary, "It is generally agreed that Christ's discourse in this and the next chapter was at the close of the last supper, the night in which he was betrayed, and it is a continued discourse, not interrupted as that in the foregoing chapter was; and what he chooses to discourse of is very pertinent to the present sad occasion of a farewell sermon."

Now that he was about to leave them, the disciples would be tempted to leave him, and return to Moses again; and therefore he tells them how necessary it was that they should by faith adhere to him and abide in him.

Furthermore, the apostles would be tempted to grow strange from one another; and therefore Christ presses it upon them to love one another, and to keep close communion together when he was gone.

Another temptation for the apostles would be to shrink from their calling when they met with hardships; and therefore Christ prepared them to bear the shock of the world's ill will.

When Jesus says he is the true vine, some commentators believe Christ is contrasting Himself, the true vine to Israel the strange vine. We read in Jeremiah 2:21, “Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me.”

Isaiah, David, and Jeremiah refer to the vine as a type of Israel, planted and tended by God as the husbandman [See Isaiah 5:1; Ps 80:8-16; Jeremiah 2:21]. Israel, however, had proved a wild, false, and fruitless vine. Instead of it, therefore, Christ had now been planted by the Father as the True Vine.

The word *true*, here, is used in the sense of real, and genuine. Christ really and truly gives what is symbolically represented by a vine.

Albert Barnes observes, “The meaning of the figure of the vine is this: A vine yields proper juice and nourishment to all the branches, whether these are large or small. All the nourishment of each branch passes through the vine, that springs from the earth. So Jesus is the source of all real strength and grace to his disciples. He is their leader and teacher, and imparts to them, as they need, grace and strength to bear the fruits of holiness.”

Who could express the nature of the union that exists between Christ and his people more beautifully than Christ did in the parable of the vine and the branches? Who could lay bare before our eyes in all its parts the innermost basis of this union as comprehensively as Christ did in the words:

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman” (John 15: 1).

“I am the vine, ye are the branches” (John 15: 5).

If the branch could feel, how joyfully it would look at the husbandman who tends it, who carefully frees it from weeds and binds it firmly to the vine from which it draws the nourishment and sap to form more beautiful blossoms.

In union with Christ, therefore, we turn above all our loving eyes to God, feel the most ardent thankfulness towards Him, sink joyfully on our knees before Him.

The illustration of the vine and the branches in John 15 describes just how vital, intimate, and strong our union with Christ really is. There is no doctrine that encourages and thrills the hearts of God's people more than our union in Christ.

The title of my message is simply, *Christ's Farewell Sermon: Union in Christ.* There are many positive effects that flow from our union in Christ. I would like to consider only two of them this morning.

- 1) Union in Christ produces fruit in the life.**
- 2) Union in Christ defines the true meaning of love.**

## **1. Union in Christ produces fruit in the life (1-8).**

### **Read verse 2.**

The word for *branch* comes from a word which means to break. The meaning of the word is common in the LXX for offshoots of the vine. Some scholars define the word as tender and easily broken parts. How fitting that Christ would describe our feeble and fragile frames as tender branches.

Notice in verse 2, there are two kinds of connections to Christ as the vine.

First, the merely nominal Christian who is not in union with Christ and which bears no fruit in their life. Christ teaches that as the vine-dresser will remove every unfruitful branch from the vine, so will my Father remove every unfruitful member from my mystical body-such as Judas, the unbelieving Jews, the apostatizing disciples, and all false professors, who live not in his life and Spirit, and bring forth no fruit to the glory of God. All these he takes away.

Secondly, we read about another group of branches which bear fruit because they are connected to the true vine, symbolical for our union in Christ. The

Lord purgeth the branch which bears not fruit, the husbandman takes it away; but the branch that bears fruit, he takes away FROM it things that would stunt its growth.

The Father, as our husbandman, prunes away, and removes every thing that might hinder our increasing in fruitfulness.

*I take away*, signifies ordinarily to cleanse, purge, purify, but is certainly to be taken in the sense of pruning, or cutting off. God's pruning in our life can feel painful and uncomfortable at times but it is necessary for us to grow closer to Christ.

Listen to the words of a wise old man, "He who brings forth fruit to God's glory, according to his light and power, will have the hindrances taken away from his heart; for his very thoughts shall be cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost."

**Read verse 4.**

*Abide in me*. Christ teaches to remain united to me by a living faith. Live a life of dependence on me, and obey my doctrines, imitate my example, and constantly exercise faith in me.

*And I in you.* That is, if you remain attached to me, I will remain with you, and will teach, guide, and comfort you. Christ proceeds to illustrate by a reference to the vine. If the branch should be cut off in an instant, it would die and be fruitless.

The vine imparts its juices, and furnishes a constant circulation of sap adapted to the growth and fruitfulness of the branch. We know all too well from our own personal experiences that when we take our eyes off of Christ our faith withers and droops.

While we are united to him by a living faith, from the example of the vine, strength flows from Christ to us, and we receive help as we need it. Our lives bear fruit for the Lord and this is manifested in good works, in love, and putting to death self.

**Read verse 8.**

**Bear much fruit.** True Christians are fruitful in good works; they are faithful, zealous, humble, devoted, always abounding in the work of the Lord. This honors God, because it shows the power of his gospel, and of that grace which can overcome the evil desires of the heart.



The Christian is restored to the divine image, and it shows how excellent is the character after which they are formed. They imitate God, and the world sees that the whole tendency of the divine administration and character is to make man holy; to produce in us that which is lovely, and true, and honest, and of good report (Mt 7:20; Php 4:8).

In verse 8 we read the words *shall ye be my disciples*. This is a true test of character. It is not by profession, but it is by a holy life, that the character is tried. This is a test which it is easy to apply, and one which decides the case. It is important to note that the Saviour says that those who bear MUCH fruit are they who are his disciples.

The design and tendency of Christ is to excite men to do much good, and to call forth all their strength, and time, and talents in the work for which the Saviour laid down his life. Nor should anyone take comfort in the belief that he is a Christian who does not aim to do much good, and who does not devote to God all that he has in an honest effort to glorify his name, and to benefit a dying world.

The apostles obeyed this command of the Saviour, and went forth preaching the gospel everywhere, and aiming to bring all men to the knowledge of the truth; and it is this spirit only, manifested in a proper manner, which can constitute any certain evidence of a true work of grace in our hearts.

Our union in Christ produces fruit in the life.

## **2. Our union in Christ defines the true meaning of love (9-17).**

### **Read verses 9-17**

What is true love? Many poets and authors down through history have attempted to capture the essence of love in their writing. Love is that human emotion which seems to be so elusive and hard to define.

What is true love?

In his last discourse to his disciples Christ focuses on the importance, nature, and necessity of love. Those who enjoy this blessed union in Christ, realizes the deep, deep love of Jesus. The importance of a man experiencing the love of Christ is the difference between heaven and hell, life and death, peace and misery.

Christ by his life and teaching shows us the true meaning of love for God and sinners. Therefore, loving Christ goes beyond a mere profession of faith. It requires that we obey Him by following his commandments, and loving one another.

### **Read verse 9**

What a comparison! The word for love is a word importing dearness of affection. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: he does not say, As the Father has loved me, so have I loved the Father; but so have I loved you.” Nor does Christ say, “As the Father has loved me, so will I love you; but, so have I loved you.”

This shows the priority of Christ's love, that he loved us first, and also denotes as one theologian writes, “the invincible constancy of his love, and the certainty of it.”

Christ says, “Follow me from heaven to earth, and from earth to heaven again, and you will find that every step I have taken hath been in love for my Father and for my people.”

We learn regarding love that the Lord Jesus Christ has given full and ample demonstration of his great and wonderful love unto his people in his incarnation, in his life, and in his crucifixion.

Furthermore, it is the duty, and should be the single care, of every Christian, to preserve the sweet sense and inward diffusions of Christ's love in their own souls as Christ urges us to continue ye in his love.

**Read verse 10.**

A Bible commentator observes, "Love is, as it were, the sap which passes back and forth between the Vine and branch, and that love is kept active and vital by the most practical of means--obedience to commandments, a means which the Lord himself does not hesitate to describe as efficient between himself and the Father, only claiming for himself the love of the Father because of a like obedience to that which he prescribed."

Christ abode in the love of the Father by a life of perfect obedience. Therefore, we learn that it is impossible to retain a sense of God's pardoning love, without continuing in the obedience of faith.

We read in 1 John 5:3-4, “ For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”

### **Read verse 12**

Our Lord had often in this farewell sermon of his to his dear disciples, pressed upon them the duty of loving one another, John chapters 13 and 14. And yet here he enforces it from his own example: As I have loved you, so love you one another; that is, as truly and as sincerely for the manner, though not in the same proportion and degree.

We learn that for the disciples of Christ to love one another upon such grounds, and in such a way as he loved them, is that which his heart greatly desires, and is very much set upon.

We read in I John 4:20-21, “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.”

## **Read verse 13**

Verse 13. Life is the most valuable object we possess; and when a man is willing to lay that down for his friends or his country, it shows the utmost extent of love. Even this love for friends has been rarely witnessed.

It greatly enhances the love of Christ, that while the instances of those who have been willing to die for friends have been so rare, he was willing to die for enemies--bitter foes, who rejected his reign, persecuted him, reviled him, scorned him, and sought his life.

We read in 1 John 4:10, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

It also shows us the extent of his love that he gave himself up, not to common sufferings, but to the most bitter, painful, and protracted sorrows, not for himself, not for friends, but for a thoughtless and unbelieving world.

## **Read verse 17**

This very night the disciples had been guilty of jealousy and wrangling.

We read in Luke 22:24, “And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.”

Christ commands his apostles to love one another.

Spurgeon writes, “This command comes often, but never too often. We need to hear it again and again.”

Our union in Christ defines the true meaning of love.

In closing, there are two practical effects from our union in Christ: fruit in the life and love for God and his people. May the Lord write his Word upon our hearts as we enjoy our union in Christ. Let us pray!