

# The Upper Room (John 15)

The second section of John 15 (vv.9-17) does not altogether drop the metaphor of the vine and branches (see v.16). Rather, the emphasis moves to the *character* and *functioning* of the Vine Himself, for this lays down the *pattern* for the functioning of the branches (David Gooding). Thus we read of the Lord's **love** (v.9) and **obedience** (vv.10-11). Likewise, the disciples are to be characterised by **love** (vv.12-13) and **obedience** (vv.14-17).

## The Signs of Genuine Discipleship (vv.9-17)

**vv.9-10:** The love with which the Father loves the Son is the same love (in quality and degree) with which He loves **us**. **Ryle:** *This is a vast, wide, deep, unmeasurable love that passeth knowledge, and can never be fully comprehended by man.* Thus, there is the Father's love for His Son and the Son's love for His disciples which would soon become the nucleus of the church, the bride of Christ. This is well illustrated by the first two mentions of love in the Bible (Genesis 22.2; 24.67). The disciples were to 'continue' or 'abide' in the conscious enjoyment of the Saviour's love (cf. Jude 21). How? By keeping His commandments (v.10). This proves our love for Him (14.15) and maintains our enjoyment of His love to us. It is not, of course, that His love for us fluctuates, but our appreciation of it does. Any disobedience on our part withdraws us from the enjoyment of that love. The Lord Jesus is the perfect example of obedience. The subject Son was joyfully obedient to His Father's commands without reserve, persevering in them even unto death. Thus He ever walked in the communion of the Father's love. The Lord has only give two commandments during the entire discourse (see 14.1; 15.4). Are we obedient to them?

**v.11:** These instructions (to abide in Christ and His love) were given to the disciples in order that *His* joy might become *their* joy. The peculiar joy of the Lord Jesus was that of unbroken communion with the Father through full obedience to His will (cf. Luke 10.21; Hebrews 12.2). We can experience the same joy through obedience to, and fellowship with Christ. Remember, joy is not happiness. Happiness is largely dependent on circumstances, but the Christian can rejoice *above* the circumstances. Joy is a deep and abiding inner rejoicing which is the result of knowing Christ as Saviour and enjoying His daily fellowship. This joy is so deep that no sorrow can get beneath it! **John Phillips:** *Joy is like a rainbow shining above our tears.* Sin can disturb the joy of our salvation (Psalm 51.12), but a child of God 'can only be miserable when he is away from Christ'.

**vv.12-13:** If the Lord (True Vine) is characterised by love, then so must the disciples (branches). The **example** of love is the Lord Jesus (v.12); the **extent** of His love is unto death (v.13). We can only appreciate *agape* love as it has been revealed in Him. **1 John 3.16:** *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.* **v.13:** The greatest possible expression of love between friends is the giving of one's life for the other. This is what Christ did for us. We should be willing to do the same for our brethren. **MacDonald:** *Some lay down their lives in a literal sense; others spend their whole lives in untiring service for the people of God. The Lord Jesus is the Example. He laid down His life for His friends.* Remember, we may profess that we would be willing to die for one another, but if we see a brother with a lesser temporal or material need and yet are not prepared to sacrifice to meet that need, then our profession is false (1 John 3.17).

**vv.14-15:** The Lord Jesus now explains the intimacy they can enjoy with Him as those called 'friends'. Friends are those who share each other's company and confidence. **Barclay:** *The friends of the king was a custom practiced at the courts of Roman emperors. At all times, they had access to the king; they even had the right to come to his bedchamber at the beginning of the day. He talked to them before he talked to his generals, his rulers and his statesmen. The friends of the king were those who had the closest and the most intimate connection with him. They were therefore privy to his secrets, but were still subject to him.* **v.15:** The Lord no longer calls the disciples 'servants' but 'friends'. This is a contrast between the relationship in which they *once* stood (law) and *now* stand (grace). Under the law, they were slaves blindly obeying the commandments; now, in the family, they were friends. All the secrets of the Father's heart and mind had been made communicated to them by the Lord Jesus. Only Abraham and Moses are ever referred to as friends of God in the OT, and therefore enjoyed extraordinary revelation from Him (Exodus 33.11; Isaiah 41.8; James 2.23, cf. Genesis 18.17). Again, the enjoyment of this relationship as friends is consequent upon obedience. Each of us is as close to God as we choose to be. Note. He deigns to call us 'brethren' and 'friends' but this does not give us the right to refer to Him as such! **CH Bright:** *When a man who has attained the highest position in society notices a man of the labouring class and calls him his friend, it is a condescension, exalting that unknown man to his own level. For the opposite to occur is presumption.*

**vv.16-17:** Returning to the metaphor of the vine and branches, the Lord reminds them that their privileged position as disciples (and friends) to whom has been revealed the very heart of God was all of **grace**. It was unmerited and unearned. The Lord Jesus had *selected* them to apostleship (cf. 6.70; 13.18) and *appointed* (ordained) them to communicate to others the spiritual life which they possessed through vital connection to the Vine. The choice here is not to salvation, but service, specifically to carry on His work and ministry after His departure to the Father. This fruit would 'remain', 'abide' or 'endure', speaking of its *quality*. This surely denotes the eternal significance and impact of the gospel they were to carry to all nations. **Pink:** *Fruit that abides is that which alone satisfies God. How much that looks well has not that quality in it which ensures permanence.* But, let us not forget, no fruit that is abiding in its quality can be achieved in our own strength. We must demonstrate prayerful dependence upon God, knowing that all the spiritual resources we need are freely available to us when requested in the name of the Lord Jesus. **v.17:** In summary, the Lord outlines the singular reason for His teaching and commandments (given in 14.1 and 15.4). **RV:** *That ye may love one another.* The end purpose is to bind the disciples together in love one to another.

#### The Suffering of Genuine Discipleship (vv.18-25)

These verses contrast the world of *love and joy* in the family of God (vv.9-17) with the world of *hatred and persecution*. **Leckie:** *You have to make your choice. Will you enjoy the friendship and intimacies Christ's joy and love revealed to us (vv.9-17) and consequently the hatred of the world? Or else, will you settle down in this world, experience little of its hatred and persecution but never enjoy the intimacies of the Father's heart and joy of Christ?*

**v.18:** 'If the world hate you' is not a statement of doubt; it's a certainty. The 'world' (*kosmos*) is a word which can refer to the *material* world of creation (1.10) or the world of *humanity* (3.16). However, here it is used in a *moral* sense of the world system ordered and arranged by the devil to dispense with God. It is society apart from and opposed to God. **Wiersbe:** *'The world' from a Christian point of view involves all the people, plans, organizations, activities, philosophies and values that belong to society without God.* **MacDonald:** *The 'world' is the system which man has built up in an effort to make himself happy without Christ. It includes the social, sports, entertainment, celebrity, fashion, academic, business, and even the religious worlds – in short, any sphere in which the Lord Jesus is not loved and welcomed. We must be careful not to love (1 John 2.15-17) or be *conformed* to the world (Romans 12.1-2). The world hated (and still hates) Christ because He was not of the world and testified that its deeds were evil (7.7). So it will also hate those who are *associated* with or *resemble* Him. Let us not think that the more kind, gentle and Christlike we are, the better we will be treated by unbelievers. The opposite is true!*

**v.19:** The Lord further expands the reason for the world's hatred. The disciples no longer *belonged* to the world. The believer has been born from above and now belongs to heaven. We are aliens, pilgrims and strangers here. Thus, we cannot speak to the world about football, TV programmes or politics because we are not of this world! Since the world's love is selfish, it loves only its own, therefore those who show themselves to belong to another King must be rejected. Those who refuse to be conformed will be shunned. **Wiersbe:** *A dark world does not want light and a decaying world does not want salt! In other words, the believer is not just 'out of step'; he is out of place!* **AT Robertson:** Does the world hate us? If not, why not? Has the world become more Christian or Christians more worldly?

**vv.20-21:** The Lord refers to His words in 13.16. The disciples, as servants, were not greater than their Lord. Since He was persistently persecuted, then they must also expect the same. If we are living like Him, we cannot expect better treatment than He experienced. *Real, vital Christianity will always bring with it a cross.* On a partially positive note, there were some in the gospels who obeyed the teaching of the Lord Jesus, and so all was not lost. Although there would be a *general* rejection of the word of God, some would listen to the preaching of the apostles. **v.21:** The hatred and persecution of the disciples was because of their identification with the name and Person of the Lord Jesus. **Acts 5.41:** *And they (apostles) departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.* The fundamental, root cause of all the hatred is that the world does not know the Father. Had they known Him, they would have recognised His Son and those sent as His ambassadors (apostles). **JN Darby,** speaking of the Jews says: *To make their boast of **Jehovah**, as their God, suited them very well. They would have received the Messiah on that footing. To know the **Father**, revealed in His true character by the Son, was quite a different thing.*