

John 15:9-17

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Preacher: Julian Gutierrez

[0 : 00] Hello. Thank you very much for the opportunity again for sharing with you God's Word. It is a privilege for me to have this opportunity and I come before you in fear and trembling before our holy God. I must confess however that I try to hide the microphone so I had I will have an excuse for my preaching tonight but Pastor David he found it and so I don't have any excuse anymore. Let's go to our preaching for tonight. One of the particularities of holy scripture is its intrinsic ability to speak to us in different ways at different circumstances and even when we read the scripture in the same passage time after time. As such it is not exceptional to find that the Holy Spirit the one who conveys witness by and with the Word in our hearts as the Westminster Confession says normally uses passages or one passage in scripture in particular to meet our different needs and to deliver diverse information to us. This is not to say however that I am advocating some form of pluralistic or relativistic way of interpreting scripture. What I'm saying however is that a particular passage in scripture may and normally does carry in itself multiple uses or multiple applications but that's that's the spirit work is not my work so that's that's my way of introducing what I'm going to do tonight. So in preparing for this sermon I took in consideration the multi-form ways by which God communicates his message in scripture and the ways that he applies the spirit applies his word in us in our lives. And therefore I decided to continue from where I left the last time that I preached.

For those of you who were it was like a two or three months ago I preached from John chapter 15 and I preached from verse 1 to uh we preach and we we uh study what the metaphor that we call Jesus as the through vine but before we enter into passages and into the verses that we are going to study tonight which are verses 9 through 17 uh allow me to give you a brief summary very quickly a brief summary of what I said before about this section. in the first place, I The section, chapter 15, belongs to what is called the Father World Discourse.

It's the last time that Jesus' teaching is recorded, at least according to the Gospel of John. Jesus claimed, this is the second point, Jesus claimed himself, he refers himself, he identifies himself as the true vine.

Jesus is the true vine, which by itself implies a displacement of Israel. If you remember, we study and we discuss that most of the instances, if not all the instances in the Old Testament, when the metaphor of the vine is mentioned in relation to Israel, it always carries a negative connotation. Israel failed constantly to be the vine of the Lord. But now Jesus embodies in himself the perfection of the true vine, so he is the true vine.

[4 : 24] We also said that by virtue of us, the branches, being in Christ, by virtue of this mystical union that we share in Christ, it is impossible to have so-called fruitless Christian.

There is no such thing as fruitless Christian. To claim that we are Christians without showing any evidence whatsoever of spiritual fruit in our lives, is to question Jesus Christ as the true vine. Because the true vine only produces through branches, fruitless, sorry, fruitful branches. We talk also about the mutual indwelling between the true vine, which is Christ, and his branches, his disciples, his church.

We said that to remain in Christ necessarily implies that he remains in us. We must remain in Christ because he actively remains in us.

And finally, as a summary for the first eight verses, I said that bearing fruit that brings glory to the vine dresser, who is the father in the metaphor, is the unquestionable evidence that we are Jesus' disciples.

[5 : 54] This is the mark that says that we belong to the true vine. So let's just introduce the section that we are going to discuss.

That is in verses 9 through 17 from John chapter 15. I have decided to divide this chunk of material in four main sections.

In each section, I want you to pay attention to some key words that I will point to you in advance, and also to some questions in some sections.

Some of the sections, I will conclude the section by asking you, by formulating to you some questions for you to ponder about. So please pay attention to these key words that I'm going to mention.

The way that I have structured these eight or nine paragraph, verses, are just according to my own subjective structure.

[7 : 00] So if you can follow me and pay attention, it will be really, really beneficial for the exposition of God's word. First, let's concentrate on verse 9 and 10.

The key words for this section is just one expression. Abide in His love. Remain in His love.

Verse 9, let me read it again. It says, As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Now remain in my love.

Verse 10, If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in His love.

What I notice in this section is that there is a causal relationship between the love of the Father towards Christ and the love of Christ towards His church.

[8 : 00] In other words, it seems that this verse indicates that Christ's love for His church is in concurrence with the love that the Father has for His Son.

So there is a concurrence between these two expressions of love. The way that the Father expresses His love for His Son and the way that His Son expresses His love for His church.

The way that the Greek structure, these two verses is indicative of what I'm saying is correct. The conjunction that is being used is the conjunction *kathos*, which means just as or as.

So if you look at verse 9, the first word that is translated in the NIV is the preposition *as*. And then on verse 10, you have on the second part of the verse 10, you have the just as.

It is the same word in Greek, which implies some relationality between these two sections. We must not forget the imperative character, the imperative nature of the word remain.

[9 : 24] Remain in this section is not an option for us, for the disciples in the context that John is narrating Jesus' words.

It's not an option. It's mandatory. We must remain in Him. And there is also a mutual indwelling. We must remain in Him so that He remain in us. So when I was reading this, especially the first time, I noticed that there is a certain form of circularity here.

But then I read a theological commentary written by a very fine piece of work, theological work, written by the Dutch theologian, biblical theologian, Herman Riederbos.

And let me quote very quickly what he said about this mutual indwelling. He said, quote, we must remain in Him, in Christ, because He actively remains in us, nurturing us by His word and Spirit.

[10 : 33] And this is a really fine way to put it, to put this type of relationality between remaining Him as He, or so that He remains in us.

And again, the Apostle John tells us by way of analogy, this analogy is being inferred by the use of this conjunction that I mentioned before of comparison, that we will remain in Jesus' love just as Jesus remains in the Father's love.

But how? How is this? How this works? How this works? By obediently observing Jesus' commands. That's the key. According to this context is we remain in Him by obeying His command. And what is His command? To remain, to abide in His love. And then the final part is that there is another comparison here is that just as Jesus obeys the commands of His Father in the fulfillment of His Father in the fulfillment of His mission in the world.

So Jesus became the archetypal example, the primary example in obedience. So we obey Jesus as Jesus obeyed His Father.

[11 : 57] So in obedience to Jesus, as Jesus being the perfect example of obedience, we comply with this command. And notice something important in these two verses.

Notice how they remain in me of verse 1 through 8. If you remember the reading that Pastor David, when he read it just a few minutes ago, the words remain in my love are not there.

We have in those verses remain in me. So the remain in me has become now remain in my love.

So there is an equation between these two expressions.

So to remain in Christ is to remain in His love. The mandatory admonition of being in Christ describes in verses 1 through 8 is now specifically framed in terms of a fellowship of love. This is about a fellowship of love between God the Father, His Son, of course the Spirit, and us, the disciples, as His church.

[13:17] But what is the nature of this remaining in Jesus' love? What is the nature of this? Is to remain in Jesus' love a meritorious action by which we earn our place in Christ?

It's something that we do by our own efforts. I want to remain working at this company so that I'm going to make my best efforts.

And as such, my boss is going to pay attention to my superb skills and I will be able to remain in my job. Is that the type of comparison that is applicable here?

Do we obey God's commands because we possess in our nature the ability to comply with God's moral demands? Some people have interpreted these passages in this way.

But in our tradition we have a different confession. And this is interesting. Let me respond to these questions, the questions that I just have presented before you.

[14:22] By quoting someone that you perhaps, it will be unexpected for you, I'm going to quote Thomas Aquinas. Thomas Aquinas is one of these theologians that is kind of intuitively rejected among Protestant evangelical reform circles because of his connection with the Roman Catholic Church of his time.

But ironically, Aquinas, in explaining this passage in John, cannot be more in line on this point at least with what our Reformed Confessions have historically said.

Let me quote Aquinas on this. He says, quote, He, Jesus, says that the fact that we abide in Christ is due to his grace.

And this grace is the effect of his love. It is clear from this that all our good works are ours due to the benefit of divine love, divine love only.

For they would not be ours unless faith acted through love, and we would not love unless we were first loved.

[15:48] And so he reminds them on this benefit by saying, As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.

And compare these words with John Calvin's words in, in, in, in, in, uh, exposit in this section. He says, the conclusion, Calvin, this is Calvin, the conclusion which some draw from these words remain in my love, that there is no efficacy in the grace of God unless it be assisted by our determination is silly, says Calvin.

For I do not admit that the Spirit demands from us no more, no more than what it is in our, in our own power.

But he chose us that we ought to do, that if our strength be deficient, we may seek it from some other place.

In like manner, when Christ exhorts us in this passage to perseverance, we must not rely on our own strength and industry, but we ought to pray to him who commands us that he would confirm us in his love.

[17:08] What Aquinas and Calvin are saying here is, by grace alone, by faith alone, in Christ alone. That's exactly the point of concurrence between these two magnificent theologians from different traditions.

Let's go into the second section, which is just one verse, verse 11. The key words now here are genuine love, genuine love.

Let me read for you verse 11. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

Jesus establishes a direct relation between what he just said before, what we just read before, being in him, remaining in his love, with sharing his joy.

Now the connection is between remaining in my love is also connected with my willingness to share my joy in you. So I think it's safe to infer from Jesus' words that in line with previous comparisons in this passage, that the joy that Jesus possesses rests in being loved by his Father, which is the result of his obedience.

[18:34] So the joy that Jesus is talking about is the joy that he possesses by virtue of his perfect obedience to the Father.

Keeping God's commandments, I'm sorry, keeping God's commandments, that is obeying God's word, do not have to be a burden to us as Christians.

Many times Christians are portrayed as sad, dark, gloomy people, judgmental, legalistic, and so on and so forth.

The assumption behind this assessment is that religious people, we religious people, we are, by definition, people deprived of any form of happiness.

Why? Because we live our life in frame in a moralistic and legalistic lifestyle. I'm pretty sure that you have encountered that kind of objection time after time.

[19 : 42] We must be honest. We must grant it that we Christians, unfortunately, too often we give that impression, that we're dark and gloomy and sad and sometimes even depressed.

However, we must acknowledge that it is not an intrinsic fault of the teaching, the historical teaching that is in Scripture, but it's our fault.

biblical Christianity, though serious about morality, is not moralistic. Though concern about God's law is not legalistic.

In fact, and this is, please take this in your mind and keep this in your hearts. we must remain ourselves that the Bible condemns any lifestyle where religious morality or religious law are being pursued for their own sake.

We call that idolatry. No matter how pious, no matter how virtuous seems to others that we indulge ourselves in spiritual disciplines, if we are doing it just for the sake of those disciplines, that's idolatrous.

[21 : 12] That's a violation of the first commandment. We Christians ought not to worship holiness or piety, but rather, we must worship God and God alone as He is the perfect law giver and as He is perfectly holy.

So, contrary to popular belief, obedience to Jesus' commands is the ground for joy and delight. Joy and delight is part, it should be part of a Christian life.

But not any type of joy, but one that completes us as human beings. If you just go back very quickly to the last section in verse 11, it says, and that your joy may be complete, complete.

So, it's not, we're not talking about any type of joy. We're talking about a particular type of joy that completes us. So, contrary to what modern culture, media, television, newspaper, even, or societies and government desperately wants to communicate, we can confidently claim that the only fulfilling joy is the one that flows from obeying Jesus' commands, which, incidentally, means that the world's pleasures would never be able to satisfy our deepest need for genuine joy.

I cannot help at this point by recall this morning's admonition about the futility of relying on material richness. This morning, we talk about this, the church, the passage was in the book of Revelation and Mike was telling us about the church of, in Laodicea.

[23 : 41] And they claim to be rich and they boast about their riches and how futile is to claim that we rely on those material things.

No treasure in earth, no power that we can hold in our hands, no indulgence in whatever is in which we delight can compare to the joy that flows from God through Jesus Christ, His Son.

So, there is a question for you just to conclude this section. Do you or do we really enjoy ourselves in Christ? Do we really enjoy the fact that we are Christians, that we cherish, we are, we cherish His joy, that we are participants of Jesus, God the Son, the second person of the Trinity?

Are we enjoying the fact that we by virtue of Jesus' sacrifice, we are, we have access to the joy that the Father has deposited on Christ?

Let me just continue with the third section. That's a question for you to ponder about. The third section is on verses 12 and 13 and the key words now are eternal or sacrificial love, eternal love or sacrificial love.

[25 : 31] And this is the longest section that I structure. It comprises verses 12, 13, 14, and 15. Verse 12 says, my command is this, love each other as I have loved you.

Greater love, verse 13, has no one than this, that he laid down his life for his friends. You, says Jesus, are my friends if you do what I command.

I no longer call you servants, I no longer call you slaves, because a servant does not know his master's business.

Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my father, everything that I have learned from my father, I have made none to you.

Those are extremely powerful words that we have here in this narrative that the apostle John is telling us. In verse 12 in particular, the words love each other, explains the content of Jesus' commands in verse 10.

[26 : 50] If you remember, in verse 10 Jesus says, if you obey my commands, you will remain in me, just as I have obeyed my father's command and remain in his love.

But the content of this command is not explained until now. What is the content? content? Well, the content is that we must love each other as Jesus has loved us.

so the command that Jesus is presenting to us is to love one another and this love presupposes love for the father and love for his son.

The structure in these verses indicates, at least to me, a sequential movement. There is a kind of a logical sequence here. an unbreakable chain, an unbreakable chain of love in this fellowship that I referred to a few minutes ago.

And how this sequential movement goes in this way, according to my interpretation here, is that we have heard the love for the father.

[28 : 06] I'm talking about genuine love for the father. I'm not talking about a kind of uncertain believers. I'm talking about here, about believers. So, the first presupposition is that there is a genuine love for the father.

And according to this text, this genuine love for the father ensures, assures for us, love for Jesus Christ, love for his son.

And this love for his son, immediately or sequentially, ensures also obedience to his command. man. So, if we love the father, we necessarily are going to love his son.

But if we love his son, we must love what he commands. And how do we know that this is true? Well, according to the text, this is being tested in a very particular way by obedience to the new commandment.

The new commandment is to love one another. What a challenge. But that's the commandment that Jesus is talking about in this verse. The you that is implied in the verb love, love each other, we don't have the, in Greek, you have the verb, it is included in the word, so we don't have the personal pronoun you, but it is implied in the imperative love, indicates that Jesus has in mind only those who are in him, that is, believers.

[29 : 55] The call, and this could sound a little bit raw for you, but the call here is not to love everyone, but particularly to love one another, the members of his church, his disciples, and by extension, of course, us, we must express this communal love.

The point I just made is supported by the fact that Jesus has effectively given his life as the Lamb of God only for the ones who he calls his friends, that is, for the ones he eternally love.

But at this point, someone may object, and legally may object something like this, well, it's not greater for anyone to lay down his or her life for his or her enemies.

I mean, in the end, I mean, to express love for my friend is not as difficult as expressing love for my enemies. enemies. But in response to that particular objection, we can say that that is not the point that Jesus is making here.

Jesus is not trying to make a comparison between the love that we have for our friends versus or in contrast to the moral obligation that we have in expressing love for our enemies.

[31 : 29] of course, we must love our enemies. That's what Matthew chapter 5 verse 44 says, love your enemy. But Jesus is not talking about this, he's not making a comparison, he's very specific about this fellowship of love, which involves the true mind.

Remember, everything is about context. One of the key rules for proper interpretation in scripture is context. Remember the context, we are talking about the metaphor of the true vine in which only through branches, the branches that bear fruit, are the ones who are enjoying the communion of the vine dresser and the mystical union in the true vine.

So the context in this passage is clear that Jesus is referring to the love for his church and the mutual love, the members of his church must display one another.

But there is also a theological problem, you know, that I am studying my theology, my PhD in theology, so I had to deal with some theological issue.

But, of course, the whole scripture is theological. Don't be confused. From Genesis to Revelation, everything is about theology. theology.

[32 : 56] But here we have a very particular theological conundrum, particular issue. And it's about the logical location of our friendship with Jesus in relation with his sacrificial death and our sinful nature.

Let me put it in this way. If by nature we were enemies of God, as the Bible says that we were, how should we understand that Jesus has given up his life for his friends?

In other words, do we have to become Christ's friends first so that his sacrifice is applicable to us?

That could be an interpretation.

But again, the answer lies in the operation of the gracious love of Christ, which has been eternally determined for the reconciliation of his church.

And again, please allow me to quote John Calvin on this. He's crystal clear on this. He says, quote, for sins God necessarily hates sin.

[34 : 14] Sorry. I don't want to spoil John Calvin's idea. Again, for since God necessarily hates sin, how shall we believe that we are loved by him until atonement has been made for those sins on account of which he is justly offended at us?

And he answers, thus, the love of Christ must intervene for the purpose of reconciling God to us before we have any experience of his fatherly kindness.

Christ must intervene first before we experience any fatherly kindness. But as we were, sorry, but as we are first informed that God because he loved us gave his son to die for us, so it is immediately added that it is Christ alone on whom strictly speaking faith ought to look.

Faith alone, grace alone, in Christ alone. That's the essence of our identity as Protestant, evangelical, and reformed.

And this is the essence of this comment here. And I think that's the essence of this chapter in John 15. So, Jesus' friends are those who love one another, which is what he commands.

[36 : 01] However, and this is something important for us to keep in mind, obedience by itself does not make anyone friend of Jesus. It's not by virtue of the act of obedience that we are Jesus' friends, but rather obedience characterizes the one who is Jesus' friend.

In other words, mutual love, the expression of mutual love among us, brothers and sisters in Christ, is the external way by which we are recognized that we are Jesus' friends.

So, by virtue of this new status, friendship with God through Jesus, we now enjoy a more intimate relation with our Father.

Of course, to be called friends does not imply that our subordination to Christ is abolished. Don't forget that this is not a friendship, this is not a relationship among equals.

It is a relation between us as creatures and Him as Creator. He is the one who, and in another way of expressing His love, condescends and descends from His holiness in one sense to us in the form of Christ.

[37 : 38] But don't forget that we are not talking about the relation among peers. We are creatures. He is the Creator. So, let me ask you, this is the question for this section.

Do we realize that if we are believers, believers, we have been eternally elected to be in a relation of friendship with God?

Can you imagine, just think about for a moment, have you ever pondered that if you are a genuine believer, you have been elected eternally for being in a permanent, unbreakable friendship with the Son?

That's incredible. But if so, final question here, do we display to others the mark, the true mark of being God's friends?

Section four, this is the last section, verses 16 and 17, key words, appointed service and permanent fruit.

[38 : 52] Appointed service and permanent fruit. Verse 16, you did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.

Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Verse 17, this is my command, love each other. That's how the whole section ends.

Very quickly, just to conclude, the first thing here is that just as the disciples were the object of God's election for salvation, they are also the object of God's election for their commission.

Jesus, this section has been interpreted wrongly, in my opinion, as if here, Jesus' words are talking about election for salvation.

it is implied, of course, but here Jesus is talking about election for service, election for commission. He chose the disciple and by extension us for bearing fruit, and fruit that remains.

[40 : 06] Second, what is exactly this fruit? What is the fruit that Jesus is talking about here? Well, according to the immediate context, it seems that this fruit, refers to the expression of genuine love among us.

He chose the disciples and by, I'm sorry, okay, this fruit, I'm sorry, I got confused here, this fruit could also refer, it's not only, the fruit that Jesus is talking about here is not only referring to communal love, but it's also about the proclamation of his gospel to the unbeliever, the missionary activity, which of course, are both expressions of God's love.

And thirdly, this is what Christ ordered his disciples to do, and this is what Christ is commanding his church today, bon accord today, to love one another.

The first 17 verses of chapter 15 in the gospel of John is called the Magna Carta, the great letter of the Christian love.

And this is not coincidental for us. therefore, we must ponder if we have discerned the commission to which we have been appointed.

[41 : 47] Have you, have I discerned the commission that God has appointed for us? If not, what about if we start by expressing genuine love for one another?

Let me finish with this. This is the Apostle John summarizing. When I was trying to make this sermon, one of the challenges that I face is proper summary of this because there is so much richness in this, but then I found that the Apostle Paul did it better, of course.

And in Galatians chapter 5 verse 14 he says, just one sentence, the entire law is summed up in a single command.

Love your neighbor as yourself. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the word spoken through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank you, Father, for your spirit as he sustains us in the true mind by communicating your message through word and sacrament.

[43 : 01] Thank you for our congregation, our pastor, our elders, and thank you for this place where you have decided to locate us for our personal grow and to help others in their own growing.

The place that you have determined for us to be challenged and to challenge others, to receive mercy and to extend mercy to others.

Heavenly Father, let us ponder about the challenge of remaining in your love by loving one another. Give us grace and courage to express genuine love to our brothers and sisters in Christ, even in the midst of our limitations of character.

In Christ we pray. Amen. Let us conclude our service this evening by singing Psalm 98.

That's on page... 360?

[44 : 29] No? Sorry. Sorry. Okay. I'm sorry. It's on the same Psalms page 98, page...

Psalm 98, I'm sorry, page 129, Psalm 98. We are going to sing the whole Psalm and it's, O sing a new song to the Lord for wonders He has done.

His right hand and His holy arm the victory have won. Let's stand for singing. We are going to sing this song in the tune of Peter Shamm. O sing and use of good the Lord for wonders He has done.

His right hand and His holy arm the victory The Lord declared His saving word and made it to be known To all the nations of the world His righteousness is shown With steadfast love and faithfulness He has remembered well The covenant He made with them The house of Israel And all the nations of the earth Have saved what God has done

Our God who brings deliverance By His right hand alone And lift the Lord, O all the earth Shall loudly and rejoice Make music and be jubilant To Him lift up your voice With our re-music to the Lord With all His praises sing With trumpet and with form rejoice Before the Lord the King Let earth, the sea, and all in them Rejoice triumphantly

[47 : 27] Let streams, the plums, and mountains sing Together joyfully Now let them sing before the Lord Who comes to judge the earth He'll judge the world in righteousness The peoples in His truth May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ And the love of God the Father And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit Be with you today and always Amen Amen