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# Loving while Hated

John 15:1-25

*Russ Kennedy*

The paths and porches in Romania draped in grape vines and laden with clusters of deep purple and rich green grapes...



Jesus' teaching is both simple and deep. The way John presents it is like a fractal – simple truths spun out in ever complex statements creating a gloriously rich fabric of truth.

## Our Necessary Connection

(v.1-11)

Abiding in Christ is not a location, it is a connection and a center.

<sup>1</sup> “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. <sup>2</sup> Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup> Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. <sup>9</sup> As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. <sup>10</sup> If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. <sup>11</sup> These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

## A Comparison

The comparison is to that of a vineyard. Yes, this is drawn from the vineyards common in the day. But the analogy is rooted in the Old Testament. It was a common analogy for the covenant people of God. They were often compared to a vine and a vineyard. So how does Jesus work this picture out for us?

Jesus is the vine... Israel had been the vine in the Old Testament. In view of the death and resurrection, now Jesus is the fulfillment of even this metaphor. He is true vine to which the Old Testament vine of Israel points. Listen to Psalm 80:7-8, 14-17:

<sup>7</sup> Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved!

<sup>8</sup> You brought **a vine out of Egypt**; you drove out the nations and planted it.

<sup>14</sup> Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this **vine**, <sup>15</sup> the **stock** that your right hand planted, and for the **son** whom you made strong for yourself.

<sup>16</sup> They have burned it with fire; they have cut it down; may they perish at the rebuke of your face! <sup>17</sup> But let your hand be on the man of your right hand, the **Son of Man** whom you have made strong for yourself!

The clear progression in this Psalm is from Israel, the vine out of Egypt, to the vine stock, the son who is the Son of Man. So, Jesus is now the vine in the New Covenant analogies.

The Father is the gardener, the vine dresser. He is the one who owns the vineyard and is taking care for the vineyard. He is the one who is overseeing and working in the vineyard to bring forth the fruit, the harvest that He has planned and purposed. He is doing the pruning work to cause the branches to be more fruitful.

We are the branches on the vine. Through this analogy we are like living branches attached to and dependent on the vine.

## A Connection

Through this analogy, Jesus tells us that we have a vital connection to the vine. We are utterly dependent on the vine for the sustenance needed for life and fruitfulness. Anyone (or for that matter, any church, ministry, etc) that loses its connection to, its dependence on Christ as the central focus will begin a process of withering and unfruitfulness.

This vital connection is established and maintained through the Word. In the same way that the life-giving, fruit producing fluids flow from the vine to the branches, the truth of the Scriptures flows through us by the Spirit because of our union with Christ. The end effect of that flow is to reproduce Christ's personal and practical holiness in us as fruit.

## A Condition

This connection to Christ is maintained and validated as we abide in Christ. In verse 4 we are commanded to abide in Christ. In the other verses abiding is a manifestation of being connected. So, we continue connected because we maintain the connection. And we maintain the connection because God secures it. Those whose connection is genuine and real produce fruit. The character and conduct of Christ will be manifested in the life of true, abiding branches.

[This is why Israel as a nation is neither the vine nor the branch. Only those who are a part of God's spiritual covenant people are true branches. Jesus came to His own nation and His own people did not receive Him. Only a few were truly connected to the vine and were living branches that produced genuine fruit. Even at this point, there is one walking along listening to this conversation who is not a true branch. His name? Judas Iscariot. ]

As we abide in Christ, we abide in His love. How are you going to remain in God's love? By keeping His commands (v.10). Do intentionally and repeatedly disobey Christ is to choose to be not pleasing to Him and evidences that you do not genuinely love God.

Can you lose your salvation? No, that is not the point here. Can you leave your first love? Yes, through not wanting to please Him and thus begin to disobey Him. What should you do? Repent. Acknowledge, confess, be forgiven, confess to others where required and then begin to obey. If you do this, then you are abiding in Christ, abiding in His love and producing fruit. Remember, conviction and guilt are graces from God. Repentance is as well. People who are repenting of sin are bearing good fruit.

## A Consequence

The result of connection and continuing is that you will bear much fruit (don't under read the expectation). As you abide in Christ and in His love, as you draw spiritual nourishment from the Word and as you walk in obedience, you are producing abiding fruit.

Some will be pruned as profitless (don't over read the description). There is a larger allusion here to the nation of Israel. But we must not downplay that He is here talking to these men. They must abide and produce fruit. If not, the initial pruning will be to produce fruitfulness. If no fruit is produced, the sharp shears that prune are wisely wielded by the Father. And the Judases will kiss, deny, betray, sell their Savior and their souls will burn in eternal punishment forever.

This whole teaching is designed by Jesus to fill you with joy. It is aimed at your joy in Christ and a glad love that delights in pleasing Him through obedience. May God be pleased to produce that in us today.

## Our Simple Command

(v.12-17)

From this connection, Jesus highlights a simple, but important command.

<sup>12</sup> “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup> No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. <sup>16</sup> You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. <sup>17</sup> These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

This command is to love God and Christians in a new way...

### Our Relationship with the Family

Christian love is no longer measured by “love your neighbor as you love yourself.” We have a much greater example and higher standard now. Love one another as Christ has loved us and has given Himself for us. His sacrificial, self-giving love is how we to love each other. Our love for Christ is measured by our willingness to obey Him. Our love for others is measured by our willingness to die for them. Now, what is the use of being willing to die for someone if you also are not willing to talk to them, to share with them, to share in their sorrows and joys. This laying down our lives in love for our spouses, our Christian family does not begin at the end of a persecutor’s gun. It begins at the end of a remote, a sport, a hobby, a job, an evening together.

### Our Relationship with the Christ

Our love for one another is not grounded in our willingness to die for our \_\_\_\_\_. Jesus grounds this in our relationship with Christ. He has redefined our relationship with Him. He is now treating us as friends, close friends, companions. He is sharing with us here on earth the conversations He has with His Father in heaven. This relationship with Christ, this wonderful friendship is possible because He did lay down His life. He did die for us. His love is such that He made it possible for us to be His friends and hear the glorious intimacies of heaven because He was willing to give up His life on the cross. We are to sacrificially love one another because Jesus has sacrificially loved us.

### Our Responsibility in the Fruit

But there is even more than that. Our relationship with Christ does not rest on our choosing to agree to all this. The immediate application is to the disciples. But it is not limited to them. Just as the disciples were chosen by Christ to bear fruit (and one was going to be pruned) so we have also been chosen as the ones to be connected to the vine and to bear fruit. One of the fruit this union produces is praying as John has talked about in the context. We will pray aligned with what Jesus is doing aiming for the glory of God alone.

The first paragraph we studied today is intended for us to bring forth fruit with joy. This paragraph is aimed at our loving one another sacrificially.

## Our Difficult Challenge

(v.18-25)

What a glorious picture. We are fruitful vines thriving in God's vineyard under the loving care and cultivation of the Father. We are entwined on the cross of Jesus in such a way that we love one another with small and possibly even the ultimate sacrifices. But, in all of this we now hear an ominous note – we are faced with a difficult challenge.

<sup>18</sup> "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. <sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. <sup>20</sup> Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. <sup>21</sup> But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. <sup>22</sup> If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. <sup>23</sup> Whoever hates me hates my Father also. <sup>24</sup> If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. <sup>25</sup> But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.'

We are called to love while being hated. At the center of this is being willing to respond well when we are sinned against.

### To Expect Hatred

We love to think of all the ways that we are to be like Christ. But here is one that is surprising. We simply ought to expect to be hated by the world. It hated Him. It persecuted Him. It executed Him. So we can expect the same. We are not better than Jesus to expect anything different.

Why do we spend so much time, and effort and money and spiritual capital trying to be accepted, approved, endorsed by the world? Invariably we will give up something critical to faith or practice. Inevitably we lose God's approval. Let the world hate as long as God is approving.

Now, we are not advocating provoking the world's hatred by being unkind, caustic, triumphalistic – all the sad and sorry ways Christians have been that rightly earned the loathing of the world and the chastening of the Father. But we should not be surprised that our very love for Christ that looks like joyful obedience and our sacrificial love for one another invoke the hatred of the world.

### To Experience Suffering

Well being hated would be doable if that emotion weren't expressed in deeds. But it often is. So, we must learn to experience suffering. People are going to sin against us. They may do so just because they are sinning. That is a lesser and should be an easier form of suffering to bear. Yet, I find my counseling often is trying to get people to respond well to this. Our lack of teaching and our love for ease and comfort ill equips us to accept being sinned against. We have a whole culture that parades before us either a victimization or retaliation mindset. Both are sinful and unbiblical. We are called to exhibit the humble, wise, meekness of Christ when we are called to suffer.

If we cannot bear the simple verbal abuse of a difficult boss, an angry spouse, what will we do in the loss of family, friends, wealth, homes? What will we do when handcuffed and carried away to prisons or (more likely) psych wards? My dear friends, the Bible tells us that this is all going to get much worse as time goes on. Are you prepared to love one another as Christ has loved us even while being hated and persecuted by the world?

So a Biblical theology of suffering will have at least these affirmations in it:

We will suffer because Christ did. We are not above or better than He.

We will be hated and persecuted because the world hates our Father God.

We are not to pursue suffering; it will find us.

We are to respond as Christ did and does when sinned against.

Being sinned against is one the truest test of our walk with God and our brother and sisters.

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## Reflect and Respond

May God cause us to bear much fruit as we abide in Christ, His Word and His love.

You, brothers and sisters, must bear much fruit while abiding in Christ, His Word and His love.

Are you abiding in Christ today?

May we love one another:

Because Christ has loved us all the way to death, and;

According to the standard He has set in being willing to die for us.

Are you loving one another today?

May we be pleasing to God while being sinned against, being hated, being persecuted.

Because Christ pleased his Father while being hated and put to death.

Are you pleasing God when others sin against you and do you wrong?