

LESSON 10

Date: November 8, 2020

Unit III: Godly Love among Believers

The Love Connection

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 80:7-19

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: John 15:4-17

PRINT PASSAGE: Same

Key Verse: I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. (John 15:5, KJV)

I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:5, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

1. To comprehend how the metaphor of the vine and the branches applies to Jesus and those who follow him.
2. To yearn for a more intimate, life-giving relationship with Jesus.
3. To commit to keeping Christ's commandments and so abide in his love.

Key Terms

Introduction

“Without God, I can do nothing. Without Him my life would fail. Without Him my life would be rugged, like a ship without a sail” (Beatrice Brown, 1959). These lyrics capture the essence and importance of a relationship with God. The relationship that exists between God and believers is depicted in several ways in the Bible. For example, He is the Head and believers are the body (Colossians 1:18). He is the Creator and they are His creation (Psalm 24:1). He is the Shepherd and they are His sheep (Psalm 103). These and other analogies of this relationship substantiate the importance of an intimate relationship with God. It is not God who needs the believer in terms of support and sustenance, but it is the believer who needs Him for a fruitful and abundant life spiritually and physically. This is why it is absolutely essential for every

believer to be intentionally engaged in a lifelong process of spiritual growth. Failure to daily present oneself as a living sacrifice is to weaken this relationship. When an electric lamp's cord is pulled from its source of power, no light will be produced. Similarly, when the believer "disconnects" from God through failure to study and apply His Word, and unproductive and joyless life is the result. In John 15, Jesus used another familiar analogy to stress this principle to His disciples during His farewell instructions to them, a branch and its relationship to its vine. The branch (the believer) cannot survive and bear fruit without remaining connected to the vine (Jesus Christ).

The Biblical Context

Last week's lesson was the launching point for Jesus' "Farewell Discourse" to His disciples on the eve of His crucifixion and death on the cross at Calvary. After instituting the New Covenant and teaching the importance of loving, humble service and unconditional love for one another, He sought to encourage and comfort them (John 13). His desire was to prepare them for life after His return to His Father. He assured them that another like Him would come to reside in them and teach and guide their lives and ministry (John 14). They left the Upper Room and headed toward Gethsemane. Possibly passing by a vineyard, Jesus may have used it as the foundation of His teaching the necessity of their maintaining an intimate connection to Him like a branch to its vine (John 15).

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Abiding in Christ Produces Fruit (John 15:4-8)

KJV

⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. ⁶ If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned. ⁷ If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. ⁸ Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

NIV

⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

John 15:1 is the last “I Am” statement spoken by Jesus. In it, He declared that He was the only source of spiritual nourishment and fruitfulness. The Father, the vinedresser removes unfruitful branches and prunes those that produce no fruit so that they can bear more. Jesus taught that the key to being productive disciples was to remain in Him and to allow Him to remain in them (**verse 4**). Remaining in Jesus is a metaphor for continuing obedient fellowship with Him. His remaining had a present and a future meaning. He remained in them presently through His physical presence, support, and comfort. Futuristically, and after His Ascension, He would remain in them in the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit. These two requirements are foundational for bearing spiritual fruit. Fruit in this passage has been identified as the believer’s entire life and ministry. Only as the believer obeys Christ’s commands and submits to the leadership of the Holy Spirit is the production of spiritual fruit possible (**verse 5**). Jesus emphatically stated that unless these conditions were met there would be no fruit. It should be noted that no true believer will be fruitless. If the Holy Spirit is present in one’s life it is possible to fail to produce fruit during a “dry season”, but that condition cannot last if the salvation experience is genuine.

There are serious consequences for failing to continually abide in Christ (**verse 6**). For the believer there is the loss of fellowship, the loss of spiritual vitality, and the loss of reward. For unbelievers, “false branches”, there is condemnation in the eternal lake of fire. Conversely, there is the promise of answered prayer for those who maintain intimate fellowship with Him (**verse 7**). This promise is conditional, however and depends on prayers being offered to God that are in His will. The ultimate purpose for continuously abiding in Christ and bearing abundant fruit is for God’s glory and being identified as His disciples (**verse 8**). Daily walking in obedient fellowship is the condition for a productive life of spiritual ministry and is also the visible evidence of a genuine connection to Him as Lord and Savior.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

In view of this section of today’s lesson, what steps are necessary for the Community of Faith to emphasize building a relationship with Christ rather than “church membership”?

Love Perfected (John 15:9-13)

KJV

⁹ As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. ¹⁰ If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love.¹¹ These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and *that* your joy might be full. ¹² This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

NIV

⁹“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.

Jesus returned to His theme of encouraging His disciples as they contemplated the reality of His imminent physical separation from them. He assured that just as He was the recipient of the Father’s love, they were the recipients of His (**verse 9**). What an assurance to know that Jesus loves us with a love like that the Father demonstrated for Him. This love would find its ultimate realization when He gave His life for them. There was a condition to be met if they were to continue to experience His love. They would have to follow His example and maintain obedient fellowship with Him as He did with His Father (**verse 10**). It is essential that this condition of obedience be kept before the people of God. Yes, Jesus loves us. Yes, He has unlimited blessings to bestow, but to receive them the life of every believer must be characterized by unconditional obedience to His Word. Loving Jesus equates to obeying Him. Jesus again, points them to the benefit of obedient commitment to Him, that of inner joy (**verse 11**). Jesus’ joy during His earthly ministry was obeying His Father’s will. Likewise, those who continuously abide in His love will experience joy in obeying His commands and produce much fruit. Perhaps the reason so many Christians are joyless and barren is because they are not consistently obedient.

For the second time Jesus commanded the disciples to love one another as He loved them. Love is the fulfillment or the perfection of all He had previously commanded (**verse 12**). Only as we abide in Him can we demonstrate His sacrificial and unconditional love. The tangible proof of His great love was only hours away as He faced death on the cross (**verse 13**). Willingly, He was going to lay down His life for them and expected them to express this same kind of self-sacrificing love for one another.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What are some visible examples of self-sacrificing love you have observed?

The Basis of Friendship (John 15:14-17)

KJV

¹⁴ Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ These things I command you, that ye love one another.

NIV

¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.

Abraham and Moses were identified as friends God. Now, Jesus explicitly and conditionally identified His disciples as His friends. The condition Jesus set was obedience to His commands (**verse 14**). He shared a mutual friendship with them that was characterized by sharing confidences, in this context laying down His life (**verse 15**). All that Jesus had received from the Father, He had shared with His disciples. All who are obedient to Christ are His friends and have the privilege of knowing all the Father has commanded through the study and application of His Word. Amazingly, Jesus' friendship with His disciples and us was not of our choosing. He made the choice for the purpose of engaging us in the divinely-appointed task of continually bearing fruit (**verse 16**). Jesus had chosen and trained His disciples for the purpose of proclaiming the gospel to produce other disciples to be transformed into His image. For those who go and bear fruit, Jesus repeated the promise that the Father would grant what they asked in His name. Jesus “connected the dots” in this section on the vine and the branches by returning to their loving each other as the foundation for bearing fruit and friendship with Him (**verse 17**). As “branches” of the “vine” our fruitfulness depends on our obedience to His commands, praying within God's and will and in His name, and loving each other as He loves us.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What are the responsibilities and privileges of being the friend of God?

A Closing Thought

The privilege of abiding in Christ carries with it non-negotiable responsibilities. Obedience and love for others must characterize the life of every “branch” of the “vine”. Our challenge is to consistently strengthen our personal relationship with God through prayer, study, and the unconditional application of His Word.

Your Life

Realizing that we are friends of Jesus by His choice is a source of joy and assurance. However, we must remain vigilantly aware of His primary condition, “The Love Connection.” We must purposefully maintain an obedient fellowship with Him and love each other unselfishly, sacrificially, and unconditionally.

Your World

Believers cannot expect to bear the fruit of the unsaved coming to Christ if they are not visibly demonstrating obedience to His commands and failing to show love for each other. The world needs what He has chosen us to offer, but it will not be received if our lives demonstrate that we are not being obedient to His command to love others as He loves us.

Closing Prayer

Loving Father, thank You for loving the Son and giving Him to share Your love with us. Thank You for choosing us for the task of sharing the good news of the Gospel to bear the fruit of saved souls. We commit ourselves to faithfully abiding in Your love so that we will continuously “bear much fruit” for Your glory. Amen

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week’s Lesson)

Next week we continue the focus on loving others in John’s first epistle. Read 1 John 3:11-24 as you prepare for this study.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(This will be provided by the Sunday School Publishing Board)