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Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson reinforces the truth that God always is Manifesting God’s Love for us through Jesus. The study’s aim is to understand that God’s love for us should motivate us to love others. The study’s application is to demonstrate God’s sacrificial love to others through loving others ourselves.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: John 15:12

This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Jesus now instructed His disciples on three vital relationships. Disciples are to be rightly related to Jesus (vv. 1-10), to each other (vv. 11-17), and to the world (vv. 18-16:4). Disciples have three respective duties: to remain (abide), to love each other, and to testify.

15:1. I am the true Vine (cf. v. 5). This is the last of the seven great “I am” statements in John (cf. 6:35). Israel was God’s choice vine on which he lavished care and attention (Ps. 80:8; Isa. 5:1-7; Jer. 2:21; 6:9; Ezek. 15; 17:5-10; 19:10-14; Hosea 10:1; 14:8). He longed for fruit, but the vine (Israel) became degenerate and produced rotten fruit. Therefore Jesus, as “the true Vine,” fulfills what God had intended for Israel. The Father is the Gardener who cultivates and protects the Vine.

15:2. He (i.e., the Gardener, the Father) desires fruit, which is mentioned eight times in this chapter (vv. 2 [three], 4 [twice], 5, 8, 16). A progression is seen: fruit (v. 2), more fruitful (v. 2), and “much fruit” (vv. 5, 8). The fruit which God desired from Israel was loving obedience, righteousness, and justice (Isa. 5:1-7). Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He cuts off. The phrase “in Me” does not mean the same thing as Paul’s words “in Christ.” Here it is part of the metaphor of the Vine and seems to mean, “every person who professes to be My disciple (a ‘branch’) is not necessarily a true follower.” A branch that bears no fruit is obviously dead. Therefore, like Judas, it is cut off. (See John 15:6.) Every year in Palestine gardeners prune their vines. They cut off the dead wood which has no life in it and trim the living branches so that their yield will be greater.

15:3. The disciples had been cleansed by Jesus and His message, but one, Judas, was not cleansed (cf. 13:10-11).

15:4. Fruitfulness is the result of the Son’s life being reproduced in a disciple. The disciple’s part is to remain. The word remain, a key word in John’s theology, is menō4 which occurs 11 times in this chapter, 40 times in the entire Gospel, and 27 times in John’s epistles. What does it mean to remain? It can mean, first, to accept Jesus as Savior (cf. 6:54, 56). Second, it can mean to continue or persevere in believing (8:31 [“hold” is remain]; 1 John 2:19, 24). Third, it can also mean believing, loving obedience (John 15:9-10). Without faith, no life of God will come to anyone. Without the life of God, no real fruit can be produced. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me.

15:5-6. A disciple’s continual abiding with Jesus (If a man remains in Me)—and the indwelling of Jesus in a believer (and I in him)—result in abundant fruit (cf. v. 8). But those who do not believe face disaster. A branch without life is dead and cut off (v. 2). It is worthless and therefore is thrown into the fire and burned. What did Jesus mean by these symbolic words about vine branches being burned? These words have been interpreted in at least three ways: (1) The “burned” branches are Christians who have lost their salvation. (But this contradicts many passages, e.g., 3:16, 36; 5:24; 10:28-29; Rom. 8:1.) (2) The “burned” branches represent Christians who will lose rewards but not salvation at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:15). (But Jesus spoke here of dead branches; such a branch is thrown away and withers.) (3) The “burned” branches refer to professing Christians who, like Judas, are not genuinely saved and therefore are
judge. Like a dead branch, a person without Christ is spiritually dead and therefore will be punished in eternal fire (cf. Matt. 25:46). Judas was with Jesus; he seemed like a “branch.” But he did not have God’s life in him; therefore he departed; his destiny was like that of a dead branch.

15:7-8. In contrast with verse 6, the emphasis in these verses is positive: remain with Jesus and bear much fruit. Effective prayer is based on faith in Christ and on His words remaining in believers. Christ’s words condition and control such a believer’s mind so that his prayers conform to the Father’s will. Since his prayer is in accord with God’s will, the results are certain—it will be given you (cf. 1 John 5:14-15). Fulfilled prayers bring glory to the Father because, like Jesus, His disciples are doing the heavenly Father’s will (cf. “Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth” [Matt. 6:10]).

15:9-10. A believer is motivated by the wonder of Jesus’ love, which is patterned after the Father’s love in its quality and extent. Remain in My love might seem to be mystical but Jesus makes it very concrete. Obedience to the Father’s commands is the same for a disciple as it was for the Son (cf. 14:15, 21, 23; 1 John 2:3; 3:22, 24; 5:3). Active dependence and loving obedience are the proper paths for all of God’s children.

15:11. Jesus had great joy in pleasing His Father by living a fruitful life (cf. Heb. 12:2). The purpose of His teaching is to give man an abundant life, not a joyless existence (John 10:10). The commands for His disciples to obey are for their joy (cf. 17:13).

15:12. One primary command was given by Jesus to believers: they must have mutual love (Love each other; this is repeated in v. 17). Christians grow by caring for and nurturing each other. The standard for that love is Christ’s example of humble sacrificial service: as I have loved you.

15:13-14. The most a person can do for his friend is to die for him; such a death is a clear demonstration of love. Jesus demonstrated His love (v. 12b) by dying for His friends, those who obey Him. Abraham was called God’s “friend” (2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8) because he obeyed God. Like close friends, Abraham and God communicated well with each other (cf. Gen. 18:17).

15:15-17. A servant (lit., “slave”) does not have a close relationship with his master, as friends do. Normally, a slave does what he is told without understanding his master’s mind or business. Since Jesus had opened Himself to His disciples, the title “slave” did not fit their relationship. (When Paul spoke of himself as “a servant [lit., slave] of God” [Rom. 1:1], he had a different idea in mind. He meant he willingly and humbly served and obeyed God.) Jesus called His disciples friends because He had disclosed His Father’s revelation to them.

Jesus then reminded them that contrary to the common practice of disciples picking a teacher, Jesus had chosen them (cf. John 15:19). The purpose of His choosing was so that they would produce lasting fruit. He chose them for a mission, and His Father would answer their requests in order to accomplish that mission (whatever you ask in My name; cf. v. 7; cf. “in My name” in 14:13-14; 16:23-24, 26). Friendship with Jesus involves the obligation of brotherly love: Love each other (cf. 15:12).

Commentary from The Bible Expositor and Illuminator

"I am third." I first became aware of this short sentence at one of the camps where I worked. The phrase was etched into the woodwork above the fireplace mantelpiece. It was in a prominent position where anyone could easily notice it. I had read this sentence several times in passing through the lodge. Finally, about two months after I had begun working there, I asked my boss about it. "Simple," Maria responded. "God is first, others are second, and I am third. This is how we remember our priorities." In this week’s lesson, we find our Saviour speaking what would be among His last words to the Eleven before He was arrested and crucified. Facing death, He had important words to share. These last instructions are the things He wanted them to really get. So what did He talk about? Jesus talked about love. And He did not talk about just love in general, either. He gave them guidelines for the standard of love He wanted from His disciples. What was He asking of them? He told them that He expected them to love one another exactly as He had loved them. Wait a minute! This is a very high standard when we remember how far Christ went to prove His love for us. After all, He died a grisly death on a cross, and this He did while we were His enemies (cf. Rom. 5:8). Christ tells us, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). When He said this, He was not inwardly hoping that it would never happen. He knew that He would, in fact, give up His life for His followers, and it would happen soon. He was committed to following through on it. You may be thinking, "That level of love is only for saints. It is not for the ordinary person.” Paul reminds us that every believer is considered a saint (cf. Eph. 2:19). We are
later told that no one can say he loves God and yet have no love for the brethren (1 John 4:21). Christ's command is clear: "These things I command you, that ye love one another" (John 15:17). This is no warm, fuzzy feeling. This is the type of love that led Stephen to pray while being stoned, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7:60). The love that Christ expects of us is that which gives even until the last breath that we have in us. That is what "I am third" really stands for. It means that we place God where He belongs in our lives. If we are obedient servants, we then put others' interests above our own, no matter the cost. We do not place ourselves above anyone else. If we were honest, we would say that there are other believers we might be sorely tempted not to put ourselves in harm's way for. But that goes against what Jesus is telling us to do. We might never face that situation, but are we willing to do it if asked to? We cannot pick and choose to whom we will show God's love.

**Lesson Introduction and Background**

**From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

My brother used to work in a peach orchard. There, he and his fellow workers would climb ladders to remove enough tiny peaches so that the remaining ones were spaced every eight inches or so on the branch. This time-consuming task would eliminate more than half the peaches on some trees. The rationale for this practice recognizes that a peach tree has access to a limited amount of nutrients. If the peaches are not thinned out, they will end up small and hard. If thinned, however, the peaches that remain will be robust and profitable. Today's lesson involves an illustration of a different fruit-bearing flora: the grapevine. Orchard and vineyard are similar in at least one way: as peach trees need to have their produce thinned, grapevines need to be pruned in order to produce optimal fruit. But the pruning of which Jesus spoke has a different basis, as we shall see.

The vineyard was a staple of agriculture in the ancient world. The fruit thereby produced became a source of sustenance year round, with many of the harvested grapes being converted into raisins and wine for later consumption (compare 2 Samuel 16:1). One of the enticing descriptions of the promised land was its productive vineyards (Deuteronomy 6:10, 11; 8:7-10). Indeed, a physical sign brought back by the ill-fated spying expedition into the promised land was a massive cluster of grapes (Numbers 13:23). Vineyards were a common sight throughout Galilee, Samaria, and Judea in Jesus' day. Besides today's text, he also used vineyard imagery in his parables of the workers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16), the two sons (21:28-32), the wicked tenants (21:33-39), and the barren fig tree (Luke 13:6-9). Some students consider today's text also to be a parable, but it's better thought of as an illustrative comparison or an extended metaphor without a plot. Everything depends on the definition of parable. Common experiences regarding vineyards are also assumed in 1 Corinthians 9:7. Grapevines would be pruned severely at a certain time of the year, leaving little more than a leafless, branchless stump that would be propped up with a rock or two. All the old branches would be cut off and carried away, providing valuable fuel for home fires. After new branches had grown, a second pruning would occur to remove the smaller branches. This allowed the larger branches to produce bigger clusters of larger grapes. Such pruning was part of the process known as cultivating the vines (Deuteronomy 28:39).
Major Theme Analysis
(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Love by Being Connected to the Vine (John 15:1-11)

1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.
2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.
3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.
4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.
5 "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.
6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.
7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.
8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.
9 "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.
10 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.
11 These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.

Connected to the Vine for continuous pruning (1-3)

Definition and method of pruning
To prune means to purge or cleanse, especially from filth and impurities. UBS defines pruning as consisting of cutting back individual branches so that the tree will produce better fruit. However, in many parts of the tropics, pruning is employed to reduce the number of branches, and thus give the remaining branches an opportunity to produce better fruit. Barnes comments on this pruning by stating that God removes or prunes in various ways: (1) by the discipline of the church, (2) by suffering them to fall into temptation, (3) by persecution and tribulation, by the deceitfulness of riches, and by the cares of the world (Matt 13:21-22), and (4) by death, for God has power thus at any moment to remove unprofitable branches from the church. God purifies all true Christians so that they may be more useful. He takes away that which hindered their usefulness; teaches them; quickens them; revives them; makes them more pure in motive and in life. This he does by the regular influences of his Spirit in sanctifying them, purifying their motives, teaching them the beauty of holiness, and inducing them to devote themselves more to him.

God prunes by sanctifying us (1 Thess 5:23)

23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God prunes by redeeming and purifying us (Titus 2:13-14)

13 while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

God prunes by disciplining us (Heb 12:10)

10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.

God prunes by rebuking us (Rev 3:19)

19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.
God prunes by grafting us into His vine (Rom 11:17-22)
17 If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, 18 do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. 19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." 20 Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. 22 Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.

God prunes by making us a new creation (Eph 4:22-24)
22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Connected to the Vine to bear fruit (4-8)

The fruit God expects includes the manifestations of the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22-23)
22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

The fruit God expects includes righteousness (Phil 1:9-11)
9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ — to the glory and praise of God.

The fruit God expects includes good works (Col 1:10)
10 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,

The fruit God expects grows and matures (Matt 13:31-33)
31 He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. 32 Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches." 33 He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."

The fruit God expects must be productive (Luke 13:6-9)
6 Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. 7 So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' 8 "Sir," the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. 9 If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"

The fruit God expects comes from His Divine power (2 Peter 1:3-8)
3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. 5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.
**Connected to the Vine through abiding in love (9-11)**

*Abiding in love by being rooted and established in God's love (Eph 3:16-19)*

16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

*Abiding in love through righteousness (Ps 36:10)*

10 Continue your love to those who know you, your righteousness to the upright in heart.

*Abiding in love through the full extent of Jesus' love (John 13:1)*

1 It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.

*Abiding in love through obedience (John 14:21)*

21 Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.

*Abiding in love through the mercy of God (Jude 1:21)*

21 Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

**Love by Being Connected to One Another (John 15:12-17)**

12 This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. 14 You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. 15 No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. 17 These things I command you, that you love one another.

**Connected to one another through love (12-13)**

*Loving one another because it is the commandment of Jesus (John 13:34-35)*

34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

*Loving one another through imitators of God (Eph 5:1-2)*

5:1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

*Loving one another through Jesus making love increase (1 Thess 3:12)*

12 May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.

*Loving one another because it is taught by God to do so (1 Thess 4:9)*

9 Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other.
Loving one another through obedience to the truth of God's word (1 Peter 1:22)

22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

Loving one another to cover sins (1 Peter 4:8)

8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

Connected to one another through friendship (14-15)

Friendship with God first (James 2:23)

23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend.

Friendship that comforts during grief (Gen 38:12)

12 After a long time Judah's wife, the daughter of Shua, died. When Judah had recovered from his grief, he went up to Timnah, to the men who were shearing his sheep, and his friend Hirah the Adullamite went with him.

Friendship that loves at all times (Prov 17:17)

17 A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

Friendship that never forsakes (Prov 27:10)

10 Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father, and do not go to your brother's house when disaster strikes you — better a neighbor nearby than a brother far away.

Friendship that provides earnest counsel (Prov 27:9)

9 Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel.

Friendship that provides strength (Eccl 4:9-12)

9 Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: 10 If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! 11 Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? 12 Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Connected to one another through choice (16-17)

Choice of whom to emulate (Prov 3:31)

31 Do not envy a violent man or choose any of his ways,

Choice of leaders (Acts 15:22)

22 Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers.

Choice of Church workers (Acts 6:3)

3 Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them

Choice of marriage partners (2 Cor 6:14)

14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?

Choice of friends (Prov 22:24)

24 Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered,
Choice of worldly associates (James 4:4)

4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

Choice of whom to approve (1 Cor 16:3)

3 Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

A good teacher employs repetition to clarify and to emphasize his content. In verses 9-17, Jesus reiterates and further explains what He has just said concerning abiding in Him in verses 1-8. He now gives us some specifics as to how we are to abide in Him. He also spells out some of the benefits of abiding in Him. Let me summarize our Lord’s teaching by setting down several principles.

PRINCIPLE ONE: WHEN WE ABIDE IN CHRIST, WE ABIDE IN HIS LOVE. You will remember that John introduces the Upper Room Discourse in chapter 13 with a reference to our Lord’s love for His disciples:

Just before the Passover feast, Jesus knew that his time had come to depart from this world to the Father. He had loved his own who were in the world, and now he loved them to the very end (John 13:1).

Jesus now speaks of abiding in Him as abiding in His love. Our Lord’s love for His disciples is like the Father’s love for Him. As our Lord speaks, He is virtually standing in the shadow of the cross. How can He speak of the Father’s love for Him at a time like this? Usually, we tend to emphasize the Father’s love for us, and that this love prompted Him to send His Son to the cross (see Ephesians 2:4). I believe we must also recognize that the Father sent the Son to Calvary out of His love for the Son, as well as out of His love for lost sinners. How can this be? Dying on the cross of Calvary was indeed an act of humility on our Lord’s part (see Philippians 2:5-8), but it was also intended for His greater exaltation:

9 As a result [of His death on Calvary, as described in the previous verses] God exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue should confess to the glory of God the Father that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:9-11).

18 He is the head of the body, the church, as well as the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead so that he himself may become first in all things. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him 20 and through him to reconcile all things to himself by making peace through the blood of his cross—which things on the earth or things in heaven (Colossians 1:18-20; see also Ephesians 1:18-23).

It is my understanding and conviction that the Father purposed our Lord’s suffering for His own glory, as well as to bring glory to the Son. So, too, God purposes our suffering for His glory, but also for our good. And so it is that our Lord’s love for us includes our suffering (see John 15:18ff.), just as the Father’s love for the Son included His suffering. Abiding in Christ involves “cleansing” or pruning, which is painful for us at the time, but which causes us to cling to the vine, and thus to bear more fruit, and this increased fruit is for His glory, as well as our good.

One more thing should be said about abiding in His love. Abiding in His love is not automatic; it is something which we are commanded to do, and which takes effort and action on our part (albeit, inspired and empowered by God—see Philippians 2:12-13). Abiding in Christ requires the self-discipline that Paul talks about (1 Corinthians 9:24-27) and which the Holy Spirit produces (see 1 Timothy 1:7).

PRINCIPLE TWO: WHEN WE ABIDE IN CHRIST, WE KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS. How, then, do we abide in His love? Jesus is very clear on this matter. We abide in His love when we keep His commandments. We are to keep His commandments just as He has kept His Father’s commandments, thus abiding in His love (verse 10). Just what commandments would these be that our Lord has kept? John certainly indicates what some of these are:

Then Jesus said, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and I do nothing on my own initiative, but I speak just what the Father taught me” (John 8:28).
17 “This is why the Father loves me—because I lay down my life, so that I may take it back again. 18 No one takes it away from me, but I lay it down of my own free will. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have the authority to take it back again. This is the commandment I received from my Father” (John 10:17-18).

49 “For I have not spoken from my own authority, but the Father himself who sent me has commanded me what I should say and what I should speak. 50 And I know that his commandment is eternal life. Thus the things I say, I say just as the Father has told me” (John 12:49-50).

Jesus never acted independently of the Father, even when Satan sought to tempt our Lord to do so in His testing in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-12). He spoke only what the Father gave Him to speak. He even went to the cross of Calvary, in obedience to the commandment He received from the Father. Do you remember the expression, “Your wish is my command?” The Father’s wish (will) was our Lord’s command. That is the way one truly submits.

We often flatter ourselves here, telling ourselves that Jesus died on the cross of Calvary because He loved us so much. There is a certain amount of truth in this, but we often carry it too far. I often cringe when I happen to be listening to a Christian radio station, and I hear these words, “Could it be that He would really rather die than live without us?” Let’s not flatter ourselves. God’s love for the lost did prompt Him to send His precious and sinless Son to the cross of Calvary, but let us not lose sight of the fact that Jesus went to that cross in obedience to the command of the Father.

Our Lord does not say that we abide in His love “if we keep His commandment (singular),” but rather if we “keep His commandments” (plural). Here, Jesus does not say that we abide in His love when we “keep the law.” So long as the term “law” is properly defined, one might say this. Paul said that the “law” was holy, righteous, and good (Romans 7:12). He called the law “spiritual” (Romans 7:14). And in the next chapter of Romans, Paul said that those who walk in the Spirit will “fulfill the requirements of the law” (Romans 8:4). I believe that our Lord avoided the term “law” here and employed the word “commandments” because He did not want to give legalistic Judaisers an occasion to attempt to put the Gentiles under the Old Testament law.

The Judaisers separated the law from love, though they should not have done so:

“Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments” (Deuteronomy 7:9, NKJV, emphasis mine).

Jesus inseparably joins love and commandment keeping. Jesus summed up the whole law by two commandments, both of which were commands to love:

34 Now when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they assembled together. 35 And one of them, an expert in religious law, asked him a question to test him: 36 “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” 37 Jesus said to him, “’Love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 A second is like it, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:34-40).

The Judaisers seemed to be ignorant of the fact that the law was given out of love. God gave Israel the law because of His love for those He had chosen to be His people (Deuteronomy 7:7, 12-13; 10:14-16). He expected His people to obey His law out of their love for Him (Deuteronomy 7:9; 30:16). Whenever we separate God’s love from God’s law, we get ourselves into trouble.

God gave the law out of His great love for His people. What God prohibited, He prohibited for man’s own good. What He required, He required for man’s own good. The law is a manifestation of God’s love for His people. No wonder the psalmists can say these things about God’s law:

1 Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night (Psalm 1:1-2, NKJV).

7 The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; 8 The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes (Psalm 19:7-8, NKJV).

I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your law is within my heart (Psalm 40:8, NKJV).

Open my eyes, that I may see Wondrous things from Your law (Psalm 119:18, NKJV).
Let Your tender mercies come to me, that I may live; For Your law is my delight (Psalm 119:77, NKJV).

Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day (Psalm 119:97, NKJV).

98 You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; For they are ever with me. 99 I have more understanding than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation. 100 I understand more than the ancients, Because I keep Your precepts (Psalm 119:98-100, NKJV).

The law of God should be the delight of every saint because it is a manifestation of God’s love. God gave us His law to keep us from those things which would destroy us and to point us to the only One who can save us—Jesus Christ. Whenever we begin to look upon God’s commands as something other than an expression of God’s love, then we are headed for serious trouble.

For example, consider the account of the fall of man in Genesis 3. When God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden, He gave them a good work to do, and also many good things to eat. The only thing He prohibited was the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16-17). Deceitfully, Satan questioned Eve in such a way as to cause her to question God’s love for her. The serpent convinced Eve that God had not prohibited eating from this tree out of love (which, indeed, He had), but out of some less-than-noble motivation. Satan convinced Eve that God was withholding something good, and that she would have to disobey God’s commandment in order to obtain what was “good” for her. Had she trusted in God and believed that He forbade the illicit fruit for her good, she would not have desired to eat of that fruit.

It is quite easy for us to see the truth as it applies to Adam and Eve, so long ago and so far away. But let us pause for just a moment to consider a present day example.

As in all the churches of the saints, 34 the women should be silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak. Rather, let them be in submission, as in fact the law says. 35 If they want to find out about something, they should ask their husbands at home. 36 Did the word of God begin with you, or did it come to you alone? 37 If anyone considers himself a prophet or spiritual person, he should acknowledge that what I write to you is the Lord’s command. 38 If someone does not recognize this, he is not recognized (1 Corinthians 14:33b-38).

Not just in this passage, but in other New Testament texts as well, Paul calls for men and women to function differently in the church, particularly in its gathering for teaching and worship. Paul instructs the women to be “silent in the churches.” He then indicates that this is part of the submission of women which the law requires. And then he goes so far as to insist that his instruction is the “command” of our Lord. Why is it that a distressingly large number of evangelical Christians cannot accept this prohibition in the same way that Adam and Eve should have accepted the prohibition of the forbidden fruit? Why is there the assumption that a loving God would not, and could not, restrict the public ministry of women? Why is it that students and scholars are rushing back to their texts, trying to find some loophole which will allow them to set this command of our Lord aside? This prohibition is one of our Lord’s commands, and we should look upon it as a manifestation of His love. And if we are to truly abide in His love, then we must keep this command, as well as all the other commandments of our Lord.

18 Then Jesus came up and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20, emphasis mine).

PRINCIPLE THREE: WHEN WE ABIDE IN CHRIST, WE LOVE THE BRETHREN. While the words of our Lord make it clear that we are to keep all of His commandments (verse 9), at this moment Jesus gives His disciples but one commandment: they must love one another, just as He has loved them (verse 12). In some ways, this one command encompasses all other commands in that if one acts in love toward others, he will keep the commandments. This command has already been given by our Lord:

34 “I give you a new commandment—to love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 Everyone will know by this that you are my disciples—if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).

In chapter 13 and in our text in chapter 15, Jesus is commanding His disciples to love each other. The command does not appear to encompass the world at large, but their relationships with one another as His disciples. As the world witnesses this love, they will see that its origin is divine, and that these men really are the disciples of Jesus. Very shortly, Jesus is going to reveal to His disciples that the world will hate them because they love Him. No wonder it is vital for these men to love one another. It is apparent that these men have not always been
of one mind. This very night these men were arguing with one another over which of them was considered the greatest (see Luke 22:24). In our Lord’s absence, the potential for division was increased. The Holy Spirit would give them a supernatural unity in Christ, but they must strive to maintain this unity by living in love.

**PRINCIPLE FOUR: WHEN WE ABIDE IN CHRIST, WE HAVE GREAT JOY** (verse 11). Leon Morris calls our attention to the fact that the word “joy” occurs only once before the Upper Room Discourse, but it will now occur seven times. Obviously, “joy” is a prominent theme in our text, at a time when we might not expect it. Hearts were heavy that evening, for Jesus had told them some very distressing things, which troubled them greatly (13:22; 14:1; 27; 16:6, 22). If His disciples would abide in Him, their sorrows would be dispelled, and they would be replaced by great joy. Not only would His joy be in them, but their joy would be full. Their hearts would overflow with joy. When we read through the Book of Acts, we find joyful believers, very often in the midst of adversity (see Acts 2:28; 8:5-8; 13:52; 15:3; 20:24).

What is it that will give the disciples—and us—great joy? The first thing I would say is that the “joy” one experiences as an unbeliever is very different from the “joy” of the Christian. In fact, the “joy” we experience as Christians is almost the opposite of the joy we once experienced apart from Christ. Unfortunately, Jonah illustrates the wrong kind of joy. He could rejoice in his own personal comfort, thanks to the vine that afforded him some shade (4:6), but he was greatly distressed by the salvation of the people of Nineveh (Jonah 4:1-4).

Our joy is very different …

*First and foremost, our joy is really His joy* (John 15:11; 17:13). As we abide in Him and He in us, we experience great joy from those things that bring Him joy, as we would also be grieved by what grieves Him.

*Second, the disciples had a very special joy.* As they were greatly grieved at the death of their Master, their joy at seeing Him alive, raised from the dead, can hardly be described (see John 16:22; 20:20; 21:7).

*Third, joy is the fruit of the Holy Spirit* (Acts 13:42; Romans 14:17; Galatians 5:22; 1 Thessalonians 1:6).

*Fourth, we have joy when we become born-again Christians by faith in Jesus Christ* (Acts 8:5-8; Romans 15:13).

*Fifth, we rejoice when others come to faith in Christ, as well as when they grow in their faith* (Acts 11:23; 15:13; 2 Corinthians 7:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20; 3:9; Philemon 1:7; Hebrews 13:17; 1 John 1:4).

*Sixth, we have joy in taking part in the plans and purposes of a sovereign God, even when this brings about our own suffering* (Acts 4:23-31).

*Seventh, we find joy in doing that which brings the Father’s approval* (Hebrews 12:2).

*Eighth, we have joy in sacrificial service* (2 Corinthians 8:2).

*Ninth, we have joy in being with other saints and enjoying their fellowship* (Philippians 1:3-4; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 2 Timothy 1:4; 2 John 1:12).

*Tenth, we have joy when we ask God for what He desires and for what we need, and in seeing Him answer our prayers* (John 16:24).

**PRINCIPLE FIVE: WHEN WE ABIDE IN CHRIST, WE ARE HIS FRIENDS.** Jesus tells His disciples that He no longer calls them slaves, but rather friends. Nevertheless, in the Epistles, the apostles call themselves “slaves” of Christ (see Romans 1:1; 2 Corinthians 4:5; Galatians 1:10; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 4:12; Titus 1:1; James 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1:1). They also urge others to think of themselves in this way (Ephesians 6:6; 1 Peter 2:16).

Nevertheless, Jesus speaks of a change which is about to take place in His relationship with His disciples. He will no longer deal with them as His slaves but rather as His intimate friends. A slave is expected to do what his master instructs him to do, whether or not he likes it, and whether or not he understands why he is commanded to do it. The best analogy today would be found in the armed forces. The change would be from the status of a “private” in the army to a “pal” of the sergeant. When new recruits are sent to boot camp, it is to train them to be “slaves.” That is, it is to train these men to obey orders, instantly, and without question. If the sergeant orders a private to dig a hole four feet square, the private is to do it. If the sergeant then orders the private to fill the hole back in again, he is to obey without hesitation. The “private” is virtually the “sergeant’s” slave (at least that’s how it used to be). The private would never think of expecting the sergeant to explain his reasons for giving any order.
Up till now, there was a sense in which the disciples were more like slaves than friends. It was not because Jesus was treating them unkindly, but because they were incapable of being anything else. A “friend” is one with whom you share your thinking, your goals, your motivations, your reasons for doing things. The disciples were simply not able to understand any of these things, even though our Lord communicated many of them to His disciples. But now, with the coming of the Holy Spirit and their abiding in Him, He could openly disclose His plans and purposes, so that they knew not only what He was seeking to do, but how and why He was doing it. No longer were His disciples to be “in the dark”; they were to be fully enlightened as to what He was doing. Abiding in Christ intimately connects us with Christ, so that we not only draw life and strength from Him, but we also come to know His heart and mind.

We see hints of this kind of friendship with God in the Old Testament. God called Abraham “My friend” in Isaiah 41:8. When He was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, He would not keep this from His “friend”:

17 And the LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, 18 since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?” (Genesis 18:17-18, NKJV; see Isaiah 41:8.)

The same kind of intimacy can be seen with Moses:

9 And it came to pass, when Moses entered the tabernacle, that the pillar of cloud descended and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses. 10 All the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the tabernacle door, and all the people rose and worshiped, each man in his tent door. 11 So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. And he would return to the camp, but his servant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tabernacle. 12 Then Moses said to the LORD, “See, You say to me, ‘Bring up this people.’ But You have not let me know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found grace in My sight.’ 13 Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation is Your people.” 14 And He said, “My Presence will go with you and I will give you rest” (Exodus 33:9-14, NKJV, emphasis mine).

I would ask you to take note of the fact that both Abraham and Moses are called the friend of God. In both cases, God reveals things to His “friend” that He does not reveal to others. And in both cases, on the basis of what God did reveal to His “friend,” this “friend” petitioned God on behalf of others, and the petition was granted.

Throughout the Gospels, we are told that the disciples did not know or did not understand much of what Jesus was here to do. They misunderstood and misapplied much of what He did tell them. But after His death and resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit, things became clear to the disciples. And since the apostles wrote the New Testament Gospels and Epistles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have passed on to us what they learned. And so from the time of Pentecost onward, any saint can be an informed “friend” of our Lord, knowing what He is doing, and why, through His Word.

Think of someone you know of who is powerful and influential, and who is sought after by many. Can you imagine what it would be like to know that person intimately, to spend time with this one, and to be able to speak freely about the most confidential matters? This is the relationship which our Lord not only makes possible for us, it is a relationship He urges us to enter into, and in which we are to abide.

(Adapted from URL:https://bible.org/seriespage/abiding-christ-john-151-17)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

A common theme in advice about relationships is the need to set boundaries. Ministers, for whom demands on their time seem endless, are advised to learn how to say “no.” Having been to Burnout Land more than once in my four decades of ministry, I realize the dangers of overwork. But a friend recently advised me to learn how to say “yes.” Find ways to help; don’t be quick to limit your willingness to lend a hand. This will work only if motivated by love. We must not serve others out of obligation or expectation, but out of love. This is particularly difficult for ministers who feel they are being paid to serve the members. In such cases, ministry becomes something like paying a plumber to fix a leaking pipe. But when love becomes our motive in serving, we may notice others following our example. Their love-motivated service will make our own burden of service lighter.
**Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary**

1. Of all the connections that a person will make in this life, a relationship with Christ is most critical (John 15:1)
2. Trust God's discipline. He removes those things that hinder our effectiveness and relationship with Him (vss. 2-3)
3. Close fellowship with God requires spending time with Him and committing to follow Him daily (vss. 4-6)
4. Believers who abide in Christ trust God's Word to shape their prayer lives and guide their decisions (vss. 7-13)
5. God chooses friendship with us, freeing us to obey Him out of love for Him, not out of fear (vss. 14-17)