

Comments on John 15

This chapter is an expansion on the theme of 14:23-24 and presents requirements of being an apostle and the relationships which follow the calling. They are to be united with Christ and with each other (v. 1-16), and are to minister to the world by bearing witness of Christ, which will bring mixed results (v. 17-27).

The relationship with Christ and other believers (v. 1-16) is first presented as a parable (v. 1-6) and then plainly (v. 7-16). The parable focuses mainly on the necessity of unity with Christ, and the plainer explanation focuses on the necessity of following Jesus' example in charitably loving each other. The relationship with the world (v. 17-27) is presented as largely antagonistic, with the rejection of Christ and their witness of Christ as being a rejection of the Father.

1 I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. 2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every [branch] that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. 3 Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. 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.

v1-6 Jesus presents a parable using a common agricultural theme which emphasizes the necessity of being united with Christ (v. 3-5). Jesus is the grapevine and the disciples are branches grafted into the vine (v. 1). The Father keeps the vineyard by carefully pruning the productive branches (v. 2) and removing the unproductive branches and is casting them into the fire (v. 6).

Parables using vineyards are common in the OT prophets, cf. Ps. 80, Isa. 5:1-7, ct. Deut. 32:32, cp. 1 Ne. 15:15, Alma 16:17. Similar to parables about olive trees, vineyards were common to the contemporary Jews and therefore became a subject of parables.

Just as it makes sense for the owner of a vineyard to prune it to keep it productive, so does it make sense for the Father to bring in and remove people from the Church depending on whether or not they follow Jesus' example.

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. 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. 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.

v7-16 Following the parable, Jesus speaks more plainly to the necessity of the apostles following his example. Unity and love between the Father, Son, and the apostles is achieved by the apostles living what Jesus taught, even as Jesus did. The Father taught Jesus what he should do (v. 7-10), and so Jesus teaches the apostles what to do (v. 14-16). If they do what he teaches, then they will all be united and filled with selfless love, and great joy (v. 11-13).

These verses can be arranged into an inverted parallel, as follows:

A - 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.

B - 8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

C - 9 As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.

D - 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.

E - 11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and [that] your joy might be full.

F - 12 This is my commandment, That ye love one another,

F - as I have loved you.

E - 13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

D - 14 Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I

command you.

C - 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.

B - 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:

A - that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

The parallelism is plain in its presentation of the necessity of the unity between the Father, Son, and apostles by doing the works which the Father taught Jesus. The ascending portion of the parallel presents Jesus' example (v. 7-12), and the descending portion is the apostle's requirement to follow the example (v. 12-16).

The one interesting parallel that would not necessarily be obvious is that of v. 11 and v. 13, which places the selflessness of laying down one's life in parallel with a fulness of joy. This suggests that while Jesus' tone in the last hours of his life were somber, he did recognize the fulness of joy he would be experiencing shortly. And, it also indicates the expectation that the apostles keep Jesus' commandments and emulate the life of Jesus requires at least the spiritual equivalent of laying their lives down for their friends.

For similar expressions of joy, cf. 15:10-11, 16:20-24.

v8 "so shall ye be my disciples", this is one of the few Scriptural definitions of what a disciple is (cp. 8:31, 13:35). Jesus makes it plain his disciples are those who united with him by doing his works.

This is effectively the Scriptural definition of a Christian as well. In Acts 11:26 we are informed it is Jesus' disciples who are called Christians. The Biblical definition of a Christian is the same as Jesus' definition of a disciple, which is one who does Jesus' works. Thus, all of the contentious debates over who is and who is not a Christian based upon creedal statements and doctrinal differences are ignoring the one authoritative definition.

v16 Jesus chose and ordained the apostles with a specific calling and ordination, cf. Mark 3:14-15. Passages like these are blatantly sacerdotalist, but their relative infrequency in the NT results in Christianity in general not grasping the importance of Priesthood authority in the manner we do.

17 These things I command you, that ye love one another. 18 If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before [it hated] you. 19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. 20 Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. 21 But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.

22 If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin. 23 He that hateth me hateth my Father also. 24 If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. 25 But [this cometh to pass], that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause. 26 But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, [even] the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: 27 And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.

v17-27 Jesus warns the apostles that while he is commanding them to love one another (v. 17), worldly people will hate them just as they hate him (v. 18-21). Why do they hate him? Because he reveals their sin to them (v. 22-24), and thus they are judged (v. 25). As such, the apostles too will act as judges when the Holy Spirit comes to testify (v. 26) and also impels them to testify of Christ (v. 27).

Here Jesus presents three witnesses against sin: himself, the Holy Spirit, and the Apostles. They are to be filled with selfless love, but the message they bear is a witness against those who reject it in favor of sin. The result is the world hates them.

This is simply a common sense warning to the apostles on the even of Jesus' departure. Just as Jesus was hated by the hypocritical Pharisees, so too will they hate the apostles once Jesus is gone. They are to resume leadership of the Church after Jesus' demise, and when they do the hatred focused primarily at Jesus will now be aimed at them. Jesus tells them they must be filled with love even though the world will hate them, even as he is filled with love.

v19 When Jesus speaks of the world, he is clearly speaking of worldly people who love sin, those over whom the adversary rules, cf. 14:30.

v22 Had Jesus not spoken the truth to them and revealed such mighty works to them, then those who are steeped in hypocrisy could not be judged quite so plainly. This judgment theme is

common to John's account, cp. 3:19-21, 8:45, 9:39, 12:40. While Jesus is primarily come to gather the lost sheep of Israel, he is also come to separate the sheep from the goats.

v25 Jesus is quoting Ps. 35:19, and invoking the general theme of that psalm, which is the complaint of a righteous man who is unjustly persecuted.

"in their law", strictly speaking the Psalms are not part of the Law of Moses proper, but they were part of the Scriptural cannon at that time, and are therefore part of the more general Jewish Law.

v26 "but when the Comforter is come", the Holy Spirit has not yet come as part of the new dispensation. See the comments on ch. 16 for a more complete discussion of the subject.

The Greek word translated to "Comforter" is "paracletos", and a modern translation would be "consoler" or "helper". When the Greek root is used as a verb instead of a noun it is translated most commonly in the KJV to "comfort", "entreat", "exhort" and "console". Jesus is giving the Holy Spirit a descriptive name-title which explains what the Spirit does.

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