

Friends (John 15:9–16)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (June 12, 2022)

Introduction

John 15 introduces the second section of Jesus' farewell address to His disciples before His arrest and crucifixion. This section has three parts: a metaphor in which Jesus reveals that He is the true vine (John 15:1–8), the explanation of the metaphor (John 15:9–16), and a warning that believers will be hated by the world (John 15:17–26). This message covers the explanation of the metaphor, but first we will take a look at Psalm 80 and its connection to Jesus as the true Vine.

I. The Psalm 80 Connection

1. Jesus' declaration that He was the true vine demonstrates the fulfillment of Psalm 80. The psalmist appealed to the Shepherd of Israel, Jesus, the Man of Yahweh's right hand (v. 17), "*the good shepherd*" (John 10:11) came to answer that prayer.

The psalmist pled for God to turn away His anger from the people of God and to restore them to the place where His face—His gracious favor—would again shine upon them that they might be delivered from their calamity (Psalm 80:8). God took them from Egypt and planted them as a vine (v. 9). But Israel failed in the purpose for which God planted them.

2. This failure posed a dilemma as expressed in the question, "*Why then have you broken down its walls?*" (v. 12). The psalm assumes God's displeasure as shown by His destruction of the vineyard. However, He does not reveal the reason for His anger. The prophet Isaiah also declared, "*Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against his people, and he stretched out his hand against them and struck them*" (Isaiah 5:25).

3. Psalm 80 is actually a prayer for *revival* in the midst of divine judgment. The psalmist cried out, "*Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved!*" (Psalm 80:3, repeated in verse 7 and 19). Two things grab our attention.

a. First, the plea is for God to *repent* of His anger towards His people (vv. 14, 15). It is an appeal for God to change His mind and actions toward them. What must be understood is that the prayer is not that God would change, for He cannot. In order for God to change, His people must be changed and so eliminate the cause of His displeasure. This was the concern of Solomon (2 Chronicles 6: 49), and God answered Him (2 Chronicles 7:13, 14).

b. Second, note the differences in these three pleas. The first appeals simply to *God*, as distinguished from His creation. As God, be merciful to your creatures who cannot exist without you. The second appeal is to God as *God of hosts* or armies. In this appeal, the psalmist recognizes that God is using Israel's enemies to punish them (vv. 4–7). The third adds *Yahweh* (His covenant Name), *Yahweh, God of hosts*, bringing it home to the people of God.

Restore is a plea that God stop His attack on the vine and restore it to its original condition. The One whom God will use in this restoration is "*the man of [His] right hand, the son of man, made strong for Himself*"—Jesus Christ, the true Vine. The psalm records the results of His mercy: "*Then we shall not turn back from you; give us life, and we will call upon your name!*" (v. 18). These are found in John 15:1–8: (1) His people will not turn back, the negative way of saying that they should *abide* or *remain* in Him; (2) they will live because they are in Christ, who is their life; and (3) if they remain in Him and His word remains in them, they will call upon God's name in prayer, and He will grant them their request (John 15:7).

II. The Principles of Abiding

1. The foundation of the principle of abiding is *love*. The paradigm for the believer's love is that of the relationship of the Father and the Son. The Father's love for Christ serves as the standard by which Christ loves His own (v. 9).
2. Because of this covenant love, Christ pressed the *responsibility* of His loved ones to remain in that love. As has already been shown, remaining involves *obedience* (v. 10). Jesus commands His own to remain in His love (14:15, 21, 23; see also 1 John 5:13).
3. A word of caution is due in this matter. Beware of reading Christ's command for loving obedience as pressing an absolute alternative. Jesus is not arguing that it is either perfect obedience or apostasy. He did, however, establish the ultimate standard. Until that ultimate standard is fully realized, His people will constantly struggle with obedience (Hebrews 12:14). Divine discipline also enters the picture (Hebrews 12:10).
4. The saints can be assured that they are doing right in their imperfect walk because of the *joy* they will experience (v. 11). Joy is the evidence of divine pleasure in saints' obedience (Psalm 16:11; Nehemiah 8:10). Jesus previously promised *peace* (14:27), the understanding that all is right with God. Trials and difficulties must be viewed in light of the fact that Jesus has completely reconciled His people to God (Romans 8:1; Psalm 119:165; Philippians 4:7; Colossians 3:15, 16).
5. The Lord defined the content of His command: "*That you love one another as I have loved you*" (v. 12). Again, this command is based on the example of Christ (v. 13; see also 1 John 3:16). Obviously, no one but Christ can pay the sin-debt of another, but the saints are called upon to live and maybe die for others (1 John 3:18, 19). Selfish pursuit of one's own interests can lead only to disappointment, uncertainty, and unhappiness (Proverbs 1:29–31).
6. Finally, Jesus closed this section with two powerful and comforting truths. First, Jesus elevated His people's status to that of *friends* (v. 13). He immediately defined a friend: "*You are my friends if you do what I command you*" (v. 14). What distinguishes His disciple-friends from servants is that they are insiders: "*All that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you*" (v. 15).
Second, lest the disciples get big heads, He reminded them of His sovereignty in their salvation: "*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit*" (v. 16).

Jesus' mission to gather a people for Himself from every tribe, kindred, and nation—lasting fruit—must be the reason for our love for God and others, our selfless service in a bond of unity, and our obediently remaining in Him. That is why we exist as a church.