

September 6, 2015
Sunday Morning Service
Series: John
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from John 15:12-17.

1. How much and, therefore, on what level, does Christ love us?
2. How do we love each other like that?
3. What are some of the characteristic differences between a slave and a friend?
4. When did Jesus choose His followers?
5. To what ends or purposes does Jesus appoint His followers?

A FRIEND'S LOVE John 15:12-17

The events and words recorded in chapters thirteen through sixteen of John's Gospel probably occurred in a matter of a couple of hours. These were among the last recorded words Jesus spoke to His closest followers before the authorities arrested Him. The teaching in this section sounds more like the most intimate burdens of the heart rather than straightforward instruction and warning like we find in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25).

In these last moments Jesus had with the disciples before His trial, He mentioned love twelve times. He expressed His and the Father's reciprocal love, His and the disciples' reciprocal love, and the reciprocal love He expected the disciples to have for each other. We who have read these verses many times have probably found

comfort in them and at the same time are challenged by Jesus' statements. However, we run a real danger of taking the challenge contained in these words lightly.

Try to imagine how the eleven disciples reacted to Jesus telling them over and over that they needed to love each other just like He loved them and God the Father loved Him. Did they try to comprehend the Father's love for the Son? We really cannot grasp the extent, depth, or magnitude of that love. Did they think about how much Jesus loved them? It is doubtful they would even come close to understanding that love. It is doubtful we have the remotest idea of the extent of Christ's love for us.

What we have said in the past bears repeating at this point. If our only understanding of love is the definition or example the world and normal life presents, we are never going to comprehend what Jesus taught here. Try to imagine those eleven guys standing around looking at each other. Did ten of them have a bit of an attitude against Peter because he was always speaking up, always acting like he was in charge, always acting like it was his job to represent their views?

It is likely that nine of the disciples were miffed at James and John. They sure didn't demonstrate warm feelings when they asked permission to call down fire on the Samaritans who shunned Jesus and the guys. They surely did not consider the feelings of the rest of the group when they set their mother up to ask Jesus to give them the prime seats in the cabinet of His coming kingdom.

And then there was the zealous guy named Simon. He had been a member of the zealots, a dangerous, very aggressive political group who planned an uprising in order to overthrow the Roman government and drive them out of Israel. Many of the zealots were just waiting for Messiah to come along and raise up an army to that end. Was Simon still thinking about that? Is that what motivated him to follow Jesus the Messiah? Could he be trusted?

It is easy for us to see that there were not a lot of warm, fuzzy feelings among those guys. They were as human as we are, and often there is not a lot of warm, fuzzy feelings among us. Let's be honest. We do not feel the same way about all the people in this room right now. There are folks here who think like you and interact well with you. You like them. There are folks who are different than you. Sometimes it is hard to get on the same page with them. Then there might even be some individuals here who just agitate you like Peter,

James, John, or Simon. Maybe you are even convinced that someone here is like Judas Iscariot.

How does Jesus expect us to love people we don't even prefer to be around? In this text, Jesus did not give us five principles for developing positive emotions about people who rub us the wrong way. Rather, in a nutshell Jesus told the disciples, "I am commanding you to love each other the same way I love you. The way I love you is to lay down My life for you who I consider to be My friends—which is the extreme expression of love. The reason I consider you to be My friends is because you do what I command you—like loving each other. You know how to do this because I have confided in you, telling you the truth I brought from the Father. That truth is that you will produce fruit (which is love) because you have the resources, because I have chosen you to this end."

Which is to say, if Jesus Christ has really chosen us, we will love Him and we will love others as we reflect His glory.

Christ's Friends Understand Christ's Love (vv.12-15).

The challenge at the outset is easy enough to understand but not easy to do. We are supposed to love like Christ loves (vv.12-14). To that end, Christ commands His people to love each other. He said, "*This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you*" (v.12). There is no doubt from reading these words that Jesus Christ gave a clear rule, a prescribed requirement. It is not an option for those who follow Him. If we truly are Christ's followers, this command will needle us, motivate us, and agitate us whenever we remember it, hear it, and refuse to do it.

The command is to love. As expected, the kind of love is *agapei* kind of love. It is a conscious decision to act in a way that is best for the object of your love even if it requires sacrifice. The verb is present tense and active voice which describes a characteristic of life. As if the principle itself was not demanding, Jesus identified the objects of our love as fellow disciples or fellow-believers. How can we love fellow believers with that kind of love?

It is love that Jesus has already revealed and defined in His relationship with His followers. In the Gospel accounts, we learn how Jesus protected the disciples by calming the storm. He patiently taught them even when it seemed like they would never understand.

He wept for His friend Lazarus. He taught them deep truths that He concealed from others. Yes, that certainly looks like love the way we know it.

Read on in the Gospels and discover that Jesus told the disciples to feed 5,000 in order to test their faith. Putting the disciples to the test wasn't showing love, was it? He told Peter to get out of the boat and when he Peter obeyed, he sank. Is that love? He told Peter that he was being used by Satan and trying to subvert the will of God. He often chided the disciples for their weak faith. Even after He had risen from the tomb, He rebuked them for their unbelief (Mark 16:14). Maybe we are not so sure that actions like that sound like love. That isn't love according to modern Christian opinions.

Oh, but Jesus always acted in a way that was best for the disciples. He always pushed them on toward a right relationship with God. There is no doubt that Jesus revealed that He loved the disciples, and we do well to learn from Him rather than to take counsel from our weak flesh.

Christ demonstrated the extent of true love. He taught, "*Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends*" (v.13). Though the disciples may not have fully grasped Jesus' warnings yet, He had told them repeatedly that He would be killed. Now it is clear that God the Son was intentionally laying down His life for His friends. This was a conscious decision to act in a way that benefits the objects of love. God the Son made this decision in eternity when the plan for redeeming the fallen creation was designed. In the fullness of time, when God the Son laid aside His glory and became one of us, it was simply another step in the expression of love He had already determined to do.

If a person is overpowered and murdered by thugs, that is not an act of love. But if a person is murdered while attempting to protect someone else, that is an expression of love. The fact that God the Son was in complete control of all events, and still He allowed the wicked rulers to do their will, proves the incredible extent of His love for us.

A full understanding of "life" also indicates the extent of His love. The words Jesus chose indicate that He taught He would lay down His soul. Often the Greek word used here (*psuche*) is translated with the English word *soul*. The soul is far more than just the body, the physical, that which is temporary. God the Son laid down His

soul, He submitted His very being to be sacrificed for the objects of His love.

Doesn't it seem like everyone would want to be in the group called "friends"? This is the time of year when Washington, D.C. is as busy as a beehive in the spring. Everyone knows that by this time next year we will be on the verge of electing a new president. Therefore, all the "hangers-on" who want to get an appointment or be in the right place at the right time are jockeying for position with the guy or gal who they think will be elected. Let's just be honest. Being chosen by the right person at the right time in politics can virtually guarantee a life of excitement and importance now and a life of ease in retirement. What if a person chooses to be in the wrong group? What if a person chooses to be friends with the loser?

Christ's friends do what He commands. Jesus told the disciples and us, "You are my friends if you do what I command you" (v.14). In politics, standing for the right platform, marching to the right beat of the right drummer puts a person in the position to receive benefits. That is not the way it works with Christ. Notice that it is not obedience to Christ's commands that make us His friend. Rather, obedience to Christ's commands characterize us as His friends.

In fact, no one chooses to be Christ's friend. This is not a reciprocal friendship thing like the friendships on Facebook. God calls people like Abraham (Jam. 2:23) and like Moses (Ex. 33:11) His friends. But nowhere do we ever read that God is the friend of Abraham or Moses. Lazarus is called Jesus' friend, but Jesus is not referred to as Lazarus's friend (Jn. 11:11). This does not mean that God is unfriendly. It reveals that we who are His friends are not equals with Him.

This non-equality becomes obvious when we know the truth about Christ's love (v.15). Based on what Jesus taught at this point, it would be easy to wonder if we are friends or servants? Jesus said, *No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends (v.15a)*. If obedience is the observable trait of our friendship with Christ, what is the difference between being a friend or a servant? Servants obey, but they are not friends. Friends enjoy special relationship and are often privy to guarded information. We can illustrate like this: The king or dictator expects obedience to his general edicts from his subjects. The king or dictator speaks more specifically to his servants

who he tells what to do. But the king's friends sit down with him to hear his thoughts and purposes and reasons behind his commands or edicts.

Jesus calls us His friends and proves that we are friends by confiding in us the will of the Father. Stop and think of some of the wonderful realities about the future we know because Jesus has revealed the truth to us. Every time we read 1 Corinthians 15 (the promised resurrection) or 1 Thessalonians 4-5 (the Lord's return) or 2 Thessalonians 2 (the man of lawlessness) or the Revelation, we need to remember that we have these writings because we are Jesus' friend. Indeed all of the Bible is God's communication with us because we are His friends.

But does the Bible not indicate clearly and repeatedly that Christ's followers are indeed His servants? It is true that Jesus told these very men, *"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master" (Matthew 10:24)*? He told them, *"If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him" (John 12:26)*. He explained the view we should have of ourselves by teaching, *"So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty'" (Luke 17:10)*.

The Master, God the Son, willingly chooses us to be His friend. But, we must never try to bring Him down to our level. We always view Him as our Master and we as his servants. So the apostles who learned from Jesus prayed, *And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness (Acts 4:29)*. Paul considered himself to be a bond slave of Jesus. *Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God (Romans 1:1)*. He wrote that we are all servants to each other. *I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae (Romans 16:1)*. Our Master assigns us to this position. *What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each (1 Corinthians 3:5)*.

Our comprehending of Christ's love for us does not lower His esteem in our opinion but enhances His majesty as we fully trust that the Creator God consciously acts in sacrifice that we can have what is best which is sharing His glory.

To that end, knowledge of the Father's truth impacts our relationship with the Son. Jesus explained that the disciples were obviously His friends, *for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you (v.15b)*. We know we are Jesus' friends because He has revealed the Father's truth to us. Abraham, the friend of God, enjoyed special communication from God. Moses, the friend of God, received God's messages as God spoke **face to face** (Exo. 33:11; Deut. 34:10).

And God speaks to us. It is difficult for us to comprehend all the information God has given us in the New Testament about which the Old Testament saints could only surmise or speculate. What an incredible privilege we have! How many people in the history of humanity can lay claim to the fact that God has revealed His truth to them as though they are His friends? We must be very wise, very perceptive, very dedicated, right? Can we not pat ourselves on the back for choosing to align ourselves with the right Master? No, because we did not choose. Rather, we are very chosen!

Love Like Chosen People (vv.16-17).

We find three cause and effect statements in these two verses. The first one is implied and the next two are plainly stated as, "this happens so that this happens." They are these:

1. Jesus chose His friends and appointed us **so that** we will bear abiding fruit.
2. Jesus determined that people who are bearing fruit **will experience** answered prayer.
3. Jesus commands His followers **so that** we will love each other.

Consider the first cause and effect statement Jesus taught that He appointed His people to bear fruit. This requires first that Jesus chooses His friends and ordains their work. *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you . . . (v.16a)* Jesus said. This means that you and I are Jesus' friends, and we receive the Father's truth because Jesus chose us. We did not make the choice. If sinners reach out to Jesus and choose to follow Him because they have drawn wise conclusions, they have something in which they can boast.

The fact is that no sinner can make that choice because we are all dead in our sins. Paul explained, *You were dead in the trespasses*

and sins (Ephesians 2:1). In that condition of spiritual deadness, we cannot respond to God's word. *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14)*.

But in His kindness and mercy God draws dead sinners to Christ. It is His choice to draw. Jesus taught, *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day (John 6:44)*. In this act of mercy, God gives us spiritual, eternal life. *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved (Ephesians 2:4-5)*.

When He chose us, Christ set us apart from the way we were to what we should be. He said, *I chose*. This emphasizes the fact to the disciples and us that you did not pick out yourself for Me, but I picked you out for Myself. It is the picture of someone with the authority to do so, to pick out. In a very small way it is like a child who is trying to decide what kind of candy to pick out of the choices in the candy store. However, Christ's choice of the disciples and us is far more important and based on far deeper realities than a kid choosing candy. In sovereign divine wisdom (which humans can neither fathom or comprehend) God chose. This was illustrated in Christ's choice of the disciples and demonstrated in your life and mine.

Furthermore, Jesus taught, *I appointed*. Christ chose us out **and** He placed us in a particular place or situation. The verb used here often means to lay aside or to put apart from other things. Christ chose us to be His friends and put us aside for particular ends or purposes.

In doing this act of sovereign work, Jesus determined at least three things for His friends contained in this statement, *that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide (v.16d)*. First, we should go. This presupposes activity on our part. God did not draw us to Christ, give us life, and set us apart for Him in order to sit by idly waiting for heaven to appear. In fact, the Greek word (*hupago*) presupposes movement toward a goal.

What is the goal for which Christ chose us? That is the second thing. Christ set us apart so that we should bear fruit. Drawing on the

picture our Lord just taught (vv.1-11), the description of the fruit is obvious. Christ expects us to be busy doing works that reflect our connection, our living, in Him.

Third, is the fact that in producing fruit, we should bear continuing fruit. Because Christ chose us, we continually represent Him and His character in order to introduce others to Him. This is simply the fruit of evangelism. We tell the good news, people believe, grow in Christ, and tell others the good news. We do not choose other people, we do not impart eternal life to others, we do not save others. But if we are really Christ's friends, we will be busy bringing as many people as possible face to face with the reality of their sin and the amazing provision God has made in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins.

The second cause and effect statement teaches us that fruit-bearing people enjoy answered prayer. Jesus said, *so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you (v.16b)*. We have the privilege of petitioning God in Jesus' name. Prayer is a duty, a privilege, and a promise. There is nothing else in the world, in eternity, that carries the weight of the promise that we can petition our Creator in the name of our Savior.

Because we are chosen, appointed, and bearing fruit, we experience answered prayer. The promise is motivation to bear fruit. The only way we will ever bear fruit is because God answers prayer. Therefore, pray that God will drive you to tell the good news. Pray that God will give you an open door. Pray that God will graciously show mercy to those who have heard the good news through you.

The third cause and effect statement is that chosen people will love chosen people. *These things I command you, so that you will love one another (v.17)*. Jesus commands all these things which gives us yet another reference to *"these things."* As we concluded previously, "these things" includes everything Jesus taught. But the term especially includes the truths of these three chapters (14-16). In fact, John wrote the phrase "these things" in connection with teaching or sayings or deeds 38 times. It reminds us of the purpose of the writing: *But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:31)*.

The expected result of Jesus' choosing and teaching us is that we will love each other. "Love each other" is a command, something

we are to strive to do. "Love each other" is also an expectation. Jesus chose us to do this. Jesus equips us with the teaching from God to do this. Jesus gives us the resource of the Comforter to do this. Jesus taught us about the endless resource of prayer. Jesus gave us the prime example of how to do this to the extreme (laying down His life). Therefore, how could there be a friend of Jesus, a chosen one, who is not able to love like Jesus loves?