

## Study Notes for [John 15:9-17](#)

### THE FRUIT OF LOVE AND JOY

*Gerald Neufeld*

#### **Setting:**

This passage is a continuation of Jesus' private teaching to his disciples (The Upper Room Discourse) begun in Chapter 13 with Jesus washing their feet and the Last Supper. Jesus had completed his public ministry and was now giving his twelve disciples their final instructions and teaching. Our passage for this week follows immediately after Jesus' teaching that he alone is the "true vine" and that only those who abide or remain in Jesus as a branch remains in the vine will bear fruit<sup>1</sup>. Jesus is the only source of life; without him there is no life. This is true whether the 'branch' knows it or not (unbeliever). Such a life 'in Christ' glorifies the Father. But it is not all comfort; Jesus clearly states those that are not fruitful will be removed by the Father, while those branches that are fruitful are pruned. Both processes are painful (Hannaman, 1).

Recall as well that in the OT, Israel viewed herself as the vine (Ps 80:8-16; Isa 5:1-7; Jer 2:21; Ezek 19:10; Hos 10:1). However in these passages Israel is regarded as faithless and fruitless. Jesus takes on this image as the "true" vine, viewing himself as and taking on the role of "true" Israel. In the New Covenant then, the way one becomes part of "true" Israel is by being united with Christ.

#### **Abiding in Love (15:9-11)**

In the previous verse (v. 8), Jesus has told them that they are to "bear much fruit" and as a result show that they are "my disciples." In these verses, Jesus adds 'my love' and 'my joy' to 'my peace' (14:27) to the disciples who are just beginning to understand that Jesus will be taken away from them. Jesus is assuring them of his eternal love and joy (Bruce, 311). We are to imitate Christ. He kept his Father's commands and so remained in his love; in the same way we must keep Christ's command and so remain in the love of Christ.

- 15:9 After the directive to produce fruit Jesus tells them of his love for them. He first tells them that in the same way the Father loved him (3:35; 5:20; 17:23-24), he loves them. This is an amazing statement: Jesus' love for his disciples was as great and wonderful as the Father's love for his Son within the Trinity. He then tells them to continue in his love for them implying that it is possible to break that union.
- 15:10 Abiding in Jesus' love is not some mystical thing. Jesus makes it clear what it means to abide in his love: it is to keep his commands. Jesus again appeals to his relationship with his Father; in the same way he obeyed the Father they are to obey him. Obedience does not define the love – otherwise it would be a painful duty – but is the result of love (Bruce, 310). The love Jesus and the Father enjoyed resulted in Jesus always doing the things that pleased the Father (8:29; but see also 4:34; 6:38; 10:17-18; 14:31).

---

<sup>1</sup> Many people think of the "fruit" as good works but that is only a byproduct. "fruit" is to be 'in Christ.' To bear more fruit is to become more Christ-like.

There are three love relationships described here: the love of the Father and Son, the love of the Son and the disciples and the love of the Father and the disciples (16:27) where in a sense Jesus is the mediator of the love between Father and disciples (Hannaman, 1).

- 15:11 Jesus wants the joy that he had experienced in living a complete and fruitful life for his disciples as well (Morris, 598). This is the same joy the disciples will experience when they obey Jesus' commands. This joy must be a wonderful joy since it is Jesus' own joy. This theme of "joy" is new in John's gospel but now as the pain, sacrifice and sorrow of the Cross looms, joy becomes more evident. Jesus uses the word "joy" seven times in Chapters 15 to 17. Strachan states that this "joy" is quite different from our concept of "pleasure." "The *joy* of Jesus is the joy that arises from the sense of a finished work. It is creative joy, like the joy of an artist. It produces a sense of unexhausted power for fresh creation. This joy in the heart of Jesus is both the joy of victory (xv. 11), and the sense of having brought His Church into being." (Strachan quoted in Morris, 598). Joy then is also at the heart of the Christian life of faithful obedience.

### **A New Command (15:12-17)**

This paragraph begins and ends with the commandment that the disciples are to love one another. They are to love as Jesus loved them. Love and obedience are so intertwined that one cannot be understood without the other.

- 15:12 Jesus now gives the one new command (v. 13:34) that subsumes all commands. It is this command that permits his disciples to abide in him and in which they will find divine joy. The command is stated simply enough: The disciples are to love each other as Jesus has loved them.
- 15:13 Now Jesus defines what he means by the kind of love the disciples are to have for each other. It is to be the highest of all love, a love that puts the object of their love higher than their own life. This is the greatest love and its supreme test (Morris, 598). It is clear that Jesus is referring to his own love for the disciples – his friends – in that he will very soon give up his life for them on the cross.
- 15:14 Jesus now defines who his friends are: the test Jesus uses to determine if someone is his friend is if they obey his command. And that command, as we have already seen, is to love one another. Obedience is again stated as the test of discipleship and friendship.
- 15:15 Jesus calls his disciples friends. Jesus has not called them slaves before (although see 13:13,16) nor is it implied when he states "no longer" (Bruce, 311). The specific attribute of slavery that Jesus brings out is that of knowing the master's business. A slave is treated as a tool to achieve an end. A slave has no need to know more than what is required to accomplish his task. He is not brought into the confidence or enjoys fellowship with the master. This type of relationship is in contrast to that of friends who do enjoy each others confidence and fellowship. Jesus had a unique understanding of the

Father as a result of his special relationship with him. Jesus tell them here that he has not hidden any of this knowledge from them but has revealed it to them precisely because they are his friends. Of course it is also true that there is much that Jesus knows that the disciples are not able to understand (16:12) but as Bruce points out, “the limitation lies with their capacity for comprehension, not with his willingness to impart the full truth” (Bruce, 312).

By describing his relationship to his disciples as friends, Jesus defines the basis of the Christian Faith in community and relationship and not in an abstract set of principles to be memorized and followed by rote. It is love and not knowledge that has the highest value.

- 15:16 The initiative of who is a friend and disciple of Christ is Christ’s alone. This was very different from other rabbis of the time. Students then (as now) would look around for the best person they wanted to learn from and then apprentice with them. This was not the case with Jesus’ disciples. They were not looking for him but he chose them nonetheless with his command to “Follow me!” He not only choose them to be with him for the last three years but he also gives them tasks to accomplish when he is gone. Although the disciples were given much knowledge that no one else had they could never claim that they received this knowledge because of their wisdom, insight, capability or any other personal attribute. The reason they received this most precious knowledge first is simply this: because Jesus chose them. There is no other reason (Carson, 523).

The are to bear much fruit; not of the temporal kind but fruit that lasts. This could refer to many things but certainly proclaiming the Gospel would have been at the heart of it. The fruit will be lasting because it comes from branches attached to the vine which is Christ himself; in this sense it is Christ’s own fruit.

Jesus also knew that when he did send them out they would suffer great opposition from the world. He therefore adds that all they ask from the Father, in Jesus name, would be granted. All that they needed to bear fruit would be provided to them. (cf. 14:13-14 and 16:23).

To pray “in the name of Jesus” means to pray as Jesus himself would pray. It is not a magical phrase to get the Father to do our requests. Instead it is saying that as the Father, who would of course answer his Son’s prayer, would also delight in answering ours. However, this can only be done with integrity when our prayers are like Jesus’ own prayers. When we pray in Jesus name we are praying as his ambassadors – praying as he would have prayed. If we were to ask “how would Jesus have prayed” and then pray in that manner, we too, as the disciples are taught, pray in his name.

- 15:17 Jesus emphasizes again what all the commands (plural) really are. The summation of all the commands is this: the disciples must love one another. Division in the early church as it has been over the centuries is always divisive. It is through mutual love and understanding that others will know Christ’s love.

## References

John Hannaman, *Notes on John 15:9-17*, Private Communication, September, 2007.

Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, Revised, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishers, 1995.

F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishers, 1983.

Ray C. Stedman with James D. Denney, *God's Loving Word, Exploring the Gospel of John*, Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 1993.

D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991.