

CCF Study Notes
Tuesday 7 AM Study
18 April 2006
John Chapter 15

Before beginning to read from John Chapter 15 let's spend some time in prayer, considering our ongoing life in Christ. Let's ask God that we might:

1. Always **abide** in Christ;
2. Be **fruitful** in all things in Christ;
3. Have **fullness of joy**, abiding in Christ's love;
4. **Love** one another with His sacrificial love;
5. **Obey and live** as friends of Christ;
6. **Rejoice** even when hated by the world, and
7. **Be witnesses** by the help of God's Spirit of truth.

Chapter 15 continues the private ministry of Christ where chapter 14 left off. The foundation for life – Jesus Christ – is set out in chapter 14. Having started by faith in Christ we must now continue by faith in Christ. This is the mistake of many believers. They start by faith in Christ but try to continue in the flesh. What does it mean “to walk by faith in Jesus Christ”?

First, we must abide in Christ. Christ is the source of nourishment and strength. When we try to do things on our own (as Peter would do during Jesus' trial) we inevitably fail miserably. When we abide in Christ we should expect to see fruit in our lives – the fruit of righteousness and love. And we can expect “pruning” or “cleaning” to take place when we are bearing fruit. What would it mean for our lives to bear fruit in Christ? What might this “pruning” or “cleaning” look like? Often believers who are bearing much fruit become bitter or discouraged when God removes them from a particular ministry. Rather, this should be cause for encouragement: God prunes fruitful branches so that they will bear more fruit. (Verses 1-2, 4)

The word of God plays an important role in the pruning process. In particular, the word and commands serve in this pruning process. If we are not in God's word regularly, we will neither be nourished to produce fruit, nor pruned to produce greater fruitfulness. We stand in danger of being pruned right off the vine! How do we avoid becoming “useless servants”? But there is another important reason to be staying close to the word of God. If we are abiding in His word, so that it shapes our desires, He will give us whatever we ask. This explains much unanswered prayer. When we aren't in tune with God's will we can't expect our wishes to be granted. When we are in tune, God is glorified in everything we ask and do. (Verses 3-7)

When we recognize and abide in the love of Christ our joy is complete. Jesus isn't creating some new type of legalism. We are saved by grace. We walk in grace. The issue when we are out of fellowship is that we don't recognize or experience God's love for us – or for others around us. (Verses 9-11) Is our joy complete? How could we experience more of His joy?

Christians are not to be lone rangers. If we are to be fruitful in ministry we must be in loving fellowship with other believers. And our love must be the kind of love that is ready to sacrifice all for the sake of another. This is a very important aspect of who we are as believers. We are in a family, a body of believers. (Verses 13-14) This love is motivated by the knowledge that Jesus calls us friends – not slaves. Each of us has friends in the highest place of all. Therefore we should treat each other with great respect. And Jesus doesn't pick losers. He picks winners, so that we are all winners and there are no losers in God's family. (Verses 12-17) How does our behavior need to change?

There is also the issue of how the world treats us. Many tie their image of themselves to the way other people treat them. But Jesus himself was treated with the utmost contempt by those in the world. We should expect no less. We should be honored to share in the sufferings of Christ. We should also understand that where we are accepted in Jesus' name it is because Jesus is also accepted. Sometimes we forget who our friends are and who our enemies are. The result is that we mistreat brothers and sisters in Christ, or present a bad witness to the world. We need to understand that those who hate us for Jesus' sake are really expressing their hatred for God. (Verses 18-25) These people have no cause for hating us, just as they have no cause for hating God. What should we do when we are treated with contempt?

We need help to live this Christian life! We need a helper who is with us always – like Jesus was with His Apostles. Jesus has sent such a Helper from the Father – The Holy Spirit. One important help coming from the “Spirit of truth” is the testimony concerning Jesus Christ. How often do we need to be reminded about Jesus, who He is, and what He does? The witness of the Holy Spirit within us enables us to be good witnesses in word and deed. As we abide in Christ our words and deeds bear witness to Christ in this world. We cannot do this on our own. We must constantly be filled with His Spirit. When we are filled with the Spirit the fruit of the Spirit (Love, with...) is evident in our lives. This is what it means to bear much fruit! And God's desire is that our lives bear much fruit for His kingdom. (Verses 26-27). How is the fruit of the Spirit evident in our lives?

P.S. MP3s of recordings of these studies in John and copies of these notes are now posted at <http://www.apu.edu/~jstoker>. The MP3s are not streamed, and are 13-14 Megabytes in size. These will easily download via DSL connections but not via dialup connections. These studies are now available via podcast as well, for the really trendy folk among us.