

EXEGESIS OF JOHN 15:9-17

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**Block Diagram of
John 15:9-17**

- 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.
- 17 These things I command you,
 that
 ye love one another.

INTRODUCTION

In many respects, the Gospel of John is the most unique book in the New Testament. Some have equated the Gospel of John with a body of water: it is like a pool in which a child can wade without fear of drowning, and an ocean in which a theologian can swim without fear of touching bottom. The depth of John's Gospel can be observed immediately in the prologue (John 1:1-18) where John provides a summation of his Gospel. No where else in the New Testament is the deity of Jesus Christ and His relationship to the Father revealed so forcefully. Unique to the prologue is the use of the term $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ to communicate the deity of Jesus Christ. John describes Jesus as the "Word" ($\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$) personified throughout the remainder of his Gospel.¹

The shallow end of John's Gospel can be observed in John 3:16, quite possibly the most popular verse in the world. This verse contains the gospel of grace in its most compact form. Children and adults alike have benefited eternally by this simple sentence recorded only by John. Other passages on the shallow end include John 5:24; 6:40; 47; 11:25-26.

John stands noticeably apart from Matthew, Mark, and Luke (the Synoptic Gospels) in that John presents Jesus' life and ministry in a vivid yet different light. John's Gospel is climactic to the Synoptics.² Without John's account, our understanding of Jesus' message would be severely lacking, especially with respect to the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17). In this discourse Jesus reveals His innermost thoughts to His disciples. Last words are usually important words. In the Upper Room, John alone records Jesus' last words to His disciples prior to His crucifixion. The modern day disciple would do well to carefully observe the manifold truths contained in this Gospel, especially those conveyed in the upper room.

AUTHOR

The author is the Apostle John, one of Jesus' twelve disciples. Internal and external evidence attests to this conclusion.³ It appears John penned his Gospel after the other Synoptics. Most conservative scholars have postulated the time of writing between 70-90 AD.⁴ It cannot be conclusively determined,⁵ but this date seems appropriate. Certainly, the situation was near the end of the apostolic era.

John refers to himself in the Gospel as the disciple whom Jesus loved. Some would argue John was Jesus' most favored disciple.⁶ He certainly was among the favored three (Peter, James, and John) who were given greater privileges than the other disciples. John was the only disciple who was present at the crucifixion. Jesus even committed the watch care of His mother Mary to John while on the cross (John 19:26-27). Thus, John shared a special intimacy with

¹ Another area of noteworthy depth is our Lord's high priestly prayer recorded in John 17. This passage is truly the "Lord's Prayer" containing remarkable, edifying words from the Son to the Father.

² W. Robert Cook, *The Theology of John* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1979), 25. Cook also points out how John's epistles are climactic to the epistles of Paul and the other epistles while the book of Revelation is climactic to the entire Bible.

³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary On The New Testament, ed. F.F. Bruce (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans, 1971), 8-30.

⁴ Merrill C. Tenney, "The Gospel of John," in *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, Vol. 9, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 9.

⁵ Morris, 35.

⁶ Cook, 29.

Jesus while He was upon the earth not shared by the other disciples.

AUDIENCE

It is important to remember the primary audience of the apostles. They wrote to and for believers first and foremost. This is evidenced by the epistles of the New Testament which were written primarily to churches. These churches read the epistles, made copies, and then disseminated them to other churches. The message of the epistles is not evangelistic; instead the message is for the benefit and edification of believers.⁷ In like manner, the Gospels were written primarily to believers. This fact can be observed in Luke 1:1-4 where Luke addresses Theophilus, a believer in need of further instruction in the faith.⁸ While none of the other gospels are addressed to an individual, they were intended for believers in general.

Although not exclusive to Jews of the first century, the Gospel of John seems to be addressed to them. John's express purpose statement (John 20:31) includes the fact Jesus is the Messiah giving the Jews a special reason to take note. The seven signs outlined in the first twelve chapters were meant to convince the readers of Jesus' claims, thus producing belief. Since Jews require a sign (1 Cor 1:22), it seems plausible the original recipients were Jews who needed to believe either for everlasting life (final deliverance from the lake of fire) or abundant life (the present and future enjoyment of everlasting life).

However, it is also surmised the Gospel was most likely penned somewhere near Ephesus.⁹ The majority of recipients in this area were Gentiles indicating a Gentile audience. This may help elucidate why John adds explanations to his references of Jewish customs and conditions (cf. 2:6; 4:9; 7:2; 10:22; 18:28; 19:31, 41, 42). Further evidence for a Gentile audience comes from the ministry John had in Asia Minor after Paul's martyrdom. The churches in this area were Gentile. This ministry is evidenced in John's letters to the seven churches of Revelation.

Thus, it seems John did not have an exclusive audience in mind. Rather, John wrote to both Jew and Gentile believers.¹⁰

PURPOSE

John's purpose statement is conveyed in John 20:31. On the surface, the purpose statement is clear: the reason John penned his Gospel was to produce faith that in turn would yield life. However, numerous theories have been postulated with regard to the purpose of John's Gospel.¹¹ These theories range from an evangelistic purpose to an apologetic purpose. Many theologians view John's purpose as exclusively evangelistic with a focus on justification,¹² while others see the purpose more towards the sanctification of believers.¹³ The internal evidence can be argued either way depending upon the reader's perception. The heart of the controversy revolves around a textual variant of the word "believe" in 20:31. The word can either be aorist or present tense. If aorist, it would mean "come to believe," thus addressing non-

⁷ Believers who possess a mature faith are able to be strong and effective witnesses to the lost. Hence, the message of the epistles enables believers to fulfill the great commission of producing disciples from among the lost.

⁸ Gary Derickson and Earl Radmacher, *The Disciplemaker* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing, 2001), 22.

⁹ Tenney, 10.

¹⁰ Certainly an unbeliever could read John's account and believe. However, this is not the primary audience.

¹¹ Morris, 35-39.

¹² *Ibid*, 40.

¹³ Tenney, 10. Also see Derickson and Radmacher, 24-27.

believers. If present tense, it would mean “continue to believe,” thus addressing believers.¹⁴ Because of the textual variant, there is no way to determine with absolute certainty which tense was intended. However, the variant is a blessing in disguise. The purpose for writing the book need not be exclusive. John’s purpose statement should be seen as having a broad scope rather than a narrow one. John’s purpose was to allow unbelievers to come to faith and to allow believers to strengthen their faith. The principal way unbelievers come to faith is through the ministry of believers. When believers possess a mature faith and operate in love, a great witness to the world takes place (cf. John 13:34-35).

John’s Gospel is much more than merely a “Gospel tract” which is intended to bring men to faith. Its depth and breath attest to much more. John’s Gospel is the Gospel of belief in the Son of God. To believe is synonymous with faith. Faith is reliance or trust in someone or something. Faith is defined as “a confident belief in the truth, value, or trustworthiness of a person, idea, or thing.”¹⁵ Belief in the atoning work of Christ grants final deliverance from the lake of fire. This experience of faith is a one-time event where an unbeliever is regenerated and given eternal life. The gift of eternal life is absent of man’s works; it is a gift from God based on His grace (cf. John 3:16; Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:5). The inherent nature of eternal life is that it never ends; hence, once a person is in possession of eternal life, they can never “not be” in possession of this life. But, eternal life has more than one aspect. It is something a believer possesses and can experience during the present time. Beyond the possession of eternal life is the experience and enjoyment of the possession. This aspect of eternal life is what John spent a great deal of time recording. The climatic statement concerning eternal life is revealed in John 10:10 where Jesus stated: “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” In this passage Jesus conveyed the experiential aspect of eternal life using the term περισσόν, which is translated “abundantly” in the KJV and NASB, “to the full” in the NIV, and “fullness” in the TLB. The term means over and above, excessive, and in full abundance.¹⁶ John presents eternal life as more than simply a possession one obtains at justification. Its meaning is much broader including the present and future enjoyment of the possession. John’s “focus on the deity of Jesus and His revelation of the Father indicated a broader message than one limited to ‘how to be born again.’ And, its focus on ‘eternal life’ encompasses much more than issues of regeneration. This is not an ‘either...or’ issue, but a ‘both...and’ issue.”¹⁷

CONTEXT

The message of the Gospel of John can be seen in the prologue and the purpose statement: Jesus is the Son of God, He is God in the flesh, and life exists because of Him. The deity of Jesus Christ is the central focus of the book. John reveals how the will of the Father was paramount in the mind and actions of Jesus. The love between the Father and the Son is relayed in John with great fervency. The Father’s will was that the Son reveal God to lost mankind so they might possess and experience eternal life. Jesus came to disclose the Father and give

¹⁴ Ibid, 10.

¹⁵ *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), Online, www.yourdictionary.com. Also see Wesley J. Perschbacher, ed., *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1990), 329. According to this lexicon, the Greek word for believe “πιστεω” means to have faith or be assured of a fact. The idea is that of firm conviction something is true.

¹⁶ Perschbacher, 325.

¹⁷ Derickson and Radmacher, 26.

eternal life to those who believe. Derickson and Radmacher summarize John's message as follows: "Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God reveals the Father and grants experience of eternal life to those who are believing in Him."¹⁸ Thus, the experience of eternal life – life which is overflowing with love, joy, and peace – is an integral part of Jesus' message. John's Gospel uniquely conveys this important aspect of eternal life.

Understanding how John wrote to build up the faith of believers so they might experience eternal life during the present and how his message moves on beyond issues surrounding justification allows one to properly understand the context of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17). The information in chapters thirteen through seventeen is unique to John's Gospel. Jesus and His disciples had just finished eating the Passover meal (cf. Luke 22:7-14). Having spent three and one-half years with the Messiah, the disciples had learned a great deal. However, they had much more to learn. They were still carnal with jealousy displayed among them. Following the supper, Luke reveals they were arguing among themselves about who would be the greatest in Messiah's kingdom.¹⁹ Jesus admonished them to follow His example by serving one another. The way to greatness in Christ's future kingdom is to be a servant during the present time. Amidst the carnal display of His disciples as well as the atmosphere of strife, Jesus presents the Upper Room Discourse. This discourse is properly understood as an exhortation to His disciples who are already regenerate believers. With Judas out of the room, Jesus is ready to speak His last words to His beloved disciples prior to His betrayal, trial, and crucifixion. The issue of justification is not in view during this time. Understanding this truth allows one to "see the Upper Room Discourse in its proper light, filling the critical place in the message of the Gospel of John without reducing it to a further description of justification truths."²⁰

COMMENTARY

The Upper Room Discourse begins in John 13. As a final example of humility and servant hood, Jesus arose from the Last Supper table to wash the disciple's feet. Jesus explained the necessity of serving with respect to God's economy. Those who are willing to serve are those who love. Jesus and the Father desire as well as delight in disciples who love one another. Hence, Jesus gave His disciples a new commandment to love one another (cf. John 13:34-35). Through their love for one another, the most effective evangelistic campaign was about to be waged. Jesus revealed this love would convince unbelievers of the authenticity of the disciples' relationship with Him.

The unity of the Upper Room Discourse can be observed by the focus on love. The passage is held together with two "book ends" created by the use of love. The book ends are a literary device called an inclusio. Three inclusio's exist in the discourse with all of them related to love. John 13:1 begins the discourse and highlights "Jesus' love for the disciples as the motivating factor in His discussion and ends with a record of Jesus' prayer that His love would be expressed in His disciples (17:26)."²¹ This section displays the broad inclusio of love. John

¹⁸ Derickson and Radmacher, 28.

¹⁹ See Luke 22:24-30. Messiah's kingdom – the kingdom of God – refers to the future literal-geographic millennial kingdom over which the Godman Jesus Christ will rule. Faithful believers will accompany and assist the Messiah during this golden age. A spiritual, mystical, or present mystery form of the kingdom is not contemplated. Cf. Rev 11:15; 20:1-6.

²⁰ Derickson and Radmacher, 27. For a different view, see D.A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 96-98.

²¹ Ibid, 17.

13:34 to John 15:17 marks the first inner inclusio which highlights Jesus' command to love one another. John 13:35 to John 15:8 forms the third inner inclusio dealing with the importance of love with regard to fruit bearing.

John 15:9-17 is a continuation of the broader teaching concerning love with its resultant fruit bearing. The allegory of the vine and branches introduced in John 15:1-8 is further clarified in John 15:9-17. The topics of love, service, prayer, and fruit bearing introduced earlier in the discourse are summarized as well as amplified in John 15:9-17.

VERSE IX

“AS THE FATHER HATH LOVED ME, SO HAVE I LOVED YOU: CONTINUE YE IN MY LOVE.”

Jesus explains love by comparing the love the Father has for Him with the love He has for His disciples. The word καθὼς is a comparative term translated “As” in the KJV, NIV, and NAB. This word carries the idea of “just as” or “even as” conveying the thought of how or in what manner²² the love of the Father has been shown to the Son. The depth and implication of these words are astounding. In the prologue, the relationship of the Son and the Father is introduced (cf. John 1:18). Verse nine expounds upon the intimacy shared between the members of the Godhead. This intimacy is what Jesus wants believers to understand and experience. Throughout the Gospel of John, the intimate fellowship between the Father and Son is emphasized. The Father's love for the Son is described in John 3:35; 5:20; 17:23-24. From these verses one understands the love of God is not a static, mystical, or simply emotional concept. Love is always expressed through action (cf. 1 John 3:18). That action usually involves giving.

The word “loved” is a verb used to describe the actions of the Father and the Son. The “Father ἠγάπησεν (hath loved) me” and “so have I ἠγάπησα (loved) you,” both Greek terms are aorist active indicatives showing action which has existed and the context suggests it will continue. The Father loves the Son, and in like manner the Son loves His disciples. The Greek root for the term “loved” is ἀγαπάω. The word means to value, esteem, feel or manifest generous concern for, be faithful towards, and to delight in.²³ Several times the Father expressed His delight in the Son. The Son likewise demonstrated His desire to please the Father.

The love Christ has for the disciples has been shown all through the Gospel. He loved them before they loved Him. His love was displayed vividly towards them as He knelt to wash their feet. However, the next several hours after supper would reveal the depth and height of His love. Jesus esteemed the disciples so greatly that He was willing to reveal His innermost thoughts in the Upper Room Discourse as well as pray His high priestly prayer. Then He was willing to suffer the woes of crucifixion along with the humiliation associated with this act. Jesus' love was clearly expressed by His actions. He was not self serving; on the contrary, He gave His life because of His generous concern for His disciples and the entire human race. It was His Father's will He make this sacrifice. Hence, the Father and the Son displayed their Omni-benevolence for the entire world to observe.

Jesus exhorts the disciples to “μείνατε” (continue in the KJV; remain in the NIV and NAB) in His love. The verb μείνατε is an aorist active imperative. Thus, Jesus commands His disciples to continue in His love. Morris writes, “It is possible for men to live without being

²² Perschbacher, 215.

²³ Ibid, 2.

mindful of Christ's love for them and to break the closeness of the fellowship. They are enjoined not to do this."²⁴ Continuing in Christ's love is not understood as something automatic for those who are regenerate. Thus, the doctrine of progressive sanctification is implicit in this command. Just because the disciples are regenerate does not mean they will walk in fellowship with Christ. Quite the contrary, the battle of the Christian life is not to remain in a relationship with Christ; it is to remain in fellowship with Him.²⁵

The meaning of μένντε is to abide, remain, or continue in a certain realm or place.²⁶ The use of the aorist form of this command conveys the idea that the disciples should start abiding in His love.²⁷ The need for this command is apparent when one recognizes the atmosphere of jealousy among the disciples. Just prior, they were arguing about who among them would be the greatest in the kingdom. Jesus was showing them their need to change focus and begin a fellowship with each other identical to the fellowship existing between the Father and the Son. The only way they could accomplish this kind of fellowship was to start abiding in His love. By μένντε, Jesus meant to remain in close intimate fellowship with Him. This term is John's favorite word to describe "something conditional in the believer's relationship with Christ, fellowship within the family."²⁸ John uses this term fifteen times in the Upper Room Discourse. In 1 John the term is used 24 times and has the same meaning as in the Upper Room Discourse. Continuing or abiding is the core of sanctification truth. Those who have a relationship with Christ have the ability to remain in or out of fellowship on a daily basis. The importance of staying in fellowship (abiding) is manifold.

VERSE X

"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."

Jesus describes how the disciples are to abide in His love. Abiding is accomplished through obedience. Jesus was the perfect example explaining how He was obedient to remain in His Father's love. Believers are to emulate Christ with respect to abiding in love.

The Greek word ἐάν translated "if" is a form of the Greek main conditional conjunction εἰ.²⁹ The word is used to show responsibility on the part of the disciples with regard to abiding in Christ's love. The construction of the condition is third class which describes the possibility

²⁴ Morris, 673.

²⁵ The regenerate are those who have received the gift of everlasting life by grace through faith alone. The reception of everlasting life is understood as being a past event. The regenerate have believed the gospel with respect to everlasting life (John 3:16; Eph 2:8-9) and are in possession of that life. Once in possession, they are unable to lose everlasting life. They are justified by faith and are members of the body of Christ; being a member means they have a relationship. Justification in this sense describes the moment in time in which an individual believes, thus is born again. It is a one time event which can never be nullified. Sanctification is a term that describes a setting apart for a specific purpose. It is connected to justification in some contexts (cf. 1 Cor 1:2). Sanctification is also described as being progressive in nature and not implicitly connected to justification. Progressive sanctification involves the work of Christ in the believer's life after justification (Rom 8:29; Phil 2:12-16; 1 John 2:28). This work involves the cooperation of the already justified individual. Hence, the imperative to continue or remain in fellowship involves sanctification, not justification.

²⁶ Perschbacher, 270.

²⁷ Derickson and Radmacher, 191.

²⁸ Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Company, Second Edition, 1993), 174.

²⁹ William D Mounce, *Greek for the Rest of Us* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 89.

that the disciples may or may not choose to obey.³⁰ There is nothing hidden or difficult in these simple words. The way to abide is to obey the commands of Christ. Morris attests, “this is not some mystical experience. It is simple obedience.”³¹ The Greek word τηρήσητε is translated “keep” in the KJV and NAB while “obey” in the NIV. It means to keep watch upon, guard, to mark attentively, or to heed.³² Thus, to “keep” or “obey” means to pay close attention and heed. The word is an aorist active subjunctive which indicates the possibility of obedience or disobedience.

Earlier in the discourse Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” (John 14:15) The theme of love and obedience is abundant throughout the discourse. To love Jesus is to keep His commandments. To abide in His love requires obedience to His commandments. As the believer obeys and loves Christ, Christ and the Father will in turn love the believer (John 14:21, 23). This interaction is a love cycle which begins with God. When the believer finds himself in this revolving cycle then hears and obeys, he will be drawn ever closer to the Lord, thus, abiding in His love.

Over the course of His ministry, Jesus made numerous directives teaching with clarity and authority. The Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7) contains Jesus’ most comprehensive teaching. In it He gave numerous commandments and set forth His royal law. Consistent with the teaching of the Upper Room Discourse, the royal law hinges on love (Matt 7:12; 22:37-40). Thus, when Jesus directed the disciples to obey His commandments, He was referring to all His various commandments.³³ However, all of these commandments are summed up in the commandment to love one another given in John 13:34-35.³⁴

The cycle of love describes how a believer experiences eternal life while still on earth in a sinful body. The experience of eternal life is a truth of progressive sanctification. One does not love and obey God to obtain eternal life (salvation from the lake of fire). Instead, they love and obey in order to enjoy the benefits of eternal life. The Christian who refuses to love and obey Christ will not enjoy all the benefits of eternal life (present and future). Further, they will not fully experience Christ’s love. This teaching is not in contradiction with Paul’s teaching in Romans 8:39. Paul is not describing practical truths relative to progressive sanctification. Instead, he is describing positional truths relative to justification. From a positional standpoint, the believer cannot be separated from Christ’s love. From a practical standpoint, a believer can become estranged from the love of Christ. Robert Cook provides great insight when he writes “our obeying Christ and thus abiding in Him is compared to the Son’s obeying the Father and thus abiding in Him; the Son was already *in* the Father by virtue of His sonship, but the son *abided* in the Father by obeying Him. We see, then, that just as Christ’s abiding in the Father was the maintenance of personal fellowship with the Father, so our abiding in Christ is the maintenance of personal fellowship with Christ. Just as Christ’s abiding in the Father was the continuous enjoyment of the position that was His, so our abiding in Christ is the continuous

³⁰ Derickson and Radmacher, 192.

³¹ Morris, 673.

³² Perschbacher, 407.

³³ Christ’s commandments are not synonymous with the Ten Commandments or the Law of Moses. Moses’ Law has been fulfilled. Therefore, the applicable law is now the Law of Christ – love. The current dispensation of grace is not lawless. Rather, it is governed by Christ’s Law given in the Gospels and expounded upon in the epistles. Adherence to Christ’s Law allows believers to remain in fellowship with Him. Adherence to His Law does not allow an individual to attain justification. Justification is by grace and given as a result of faith alone.

³⁴ Paul recognizes the law of love and its relation to the new covenant. For Paul, all of the law is summed up in love. When believers love each other, they fulfill the Law of Christ (cf. Gal 5:13-14; 6:2).

enjoyment of the position that is ours [emphasis his].”³⁵

VERSE XI

“THESE THINGS HAVE I SPOKEN UNTO YOU, THAT MY JOY MIGHT REMAIN IN YOU, AND THAT YOUR JOY MIGHT BE FULL.”

Jesus explains the purpose for obedience. He tells them the reason He has taken the time to speak these words of exhortation and admonition. Joy is the reason. Jesus wants the disciples to share in His joy. For the remainder of the discourse, joy is a prominent theme.

The noun χαρὰ translated “joy” in the KJV, NIV, and NAB conveys the idea of gladness, rejoicing, and delight.³⁶ It is associated with life (cf. 1 Thes 3:8-9) and is the antonym of sorrow (cf. John 16:22-24). Joy is usually associated with accomplishment. Joy is mentioned one time in John 3:29 while seven times in the Upper Room Discourse (15:11; 16:20-22, 24; 17:13). Jesus expressed His desire to share His love, joy, and peace (14:27) with the disciples. These attributes are the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, and peace all proceed from God. Hence, when Jesus uses the pronoun ἐμὴ translated “my,” He is referring to joy which can only come from God. He wanted His disciples to abound with this type of fruit.

The word “remain” is a proper translation of the Greek word μέινη which exists in the Majority Text but is not present in the Critical Text. The KJV is based upon the Majority Text. The Critical Text has the Greek word ἦ instead of μέινη. The NIV and NAB are based on the Critical Text using the phrase “may be” instead of “might remain.” Either translation says essentially the same thing. However, “might remain” seems to intuitively follow the theme of abiding through the passage.³⁷ Both μέινη and ἦ are in the subjunctive form conveying the idea of possibility but no guarantee. Hence, the relative nature of joy is suggested. Joy will be experienced if the disciple obeys Christ and abides in His love.

Jesus then introduces the concept of “full” (KJV) or “complete” (NIV and NAB) joy. The word πληρωθῆ is an aorist passive subjunctive. It is a predicate adjective describing the amount or type of joy possible. The meaning is to pervade, possess fully, or to be complete and perfect.³⁸ The fact joy would have a maximum point suggests levels of joy. Being a subjunctive, it is possible but not guaranteed. Again, the prerequisite for full or complete joy is an abiding life. The one who abides will experience everlasting life as Jesus described in John 7:38: “He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” It is this same experience of joy John desired the brethren to experience when he wrote his first epistle (cf. 1 John 1:4). John wanted believers to experience maximum joy.

Jesus’ joy was His inner delight which resulted from His obedience. Jesus knew the will of His Father and was delighted to be an integral part of His Father’s plan. Jesus also knew His time of sorrow and suffering was limited, but incredible joy would follow. Thus, His mindset was beyond the sorrow and focused on the joy. He wanted the disciples to experience this same inner delight. They were presently troubled and sorrowful (14:1, 27; 16:6), but Jesus wanted them to have maximum joy (cf. Phil 2:17-18; 1 Pet 1:6-8).

Another aspect of Jesus’ joy is referenced in Heb 12:1-2. Jesus persevered (abode in the

³⁵ Cook, 134.

³⁶ Perschbacher, 437.

³⁷ It is not understood why the KJV translators chose to translate μέινη different ways (abide, continue, remain) in this short passage when the meaning is the same.

³⁸ Perschbacher, 332.

Father's love through obedience) and endured the cross. The result was a reward from the Father which is described as the joy set before him. The joy set before Him was the lofty position at the right hand of the Father and His subsequent reign over the earth (cf. Heb 1:13). Jesus is currently at the right hand of the Father awaiting His exalted position as the Second Adam over the earth. When the will of God is done on earth just as in heaven (cf. Matt 6:10), Jesus will fully experience His joy. This same joy awaits the believer who abides in Christ. God rewards faithful believers with joy (Matt 25:21, 23). The full realization of the believer's joy will occur at the same time Jesus fully realizes His joy – during His reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. Thus, the reason for abiding during this period of suffering is because the day of exaltation is coming. This teaching can be summarized as follows: the cross precedes the crown (cf. Rom 8:17; Phil 2:5-16; 2 Tim 2:12).

VERSE XII

“THIS IS MY COMMANDMENT, THAT YE LOVE ONE ANOTHER, AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.”

Jesus emphasizes the importance of love by restating the previous command to love one another (cf. John 13:34) in the same manner He has loved them. The emphasis on love continues as it is part of the love inclusio (13:34-15:17) which emphasizes the commandment to love one another. The next few verses amplify and expand the message about love.

The subject of the sentence “this” is described by the predicate noun “commandment.” The word order in the KJV is more forceful than the NIV (“My commandment is this”) because it forces the reader to take note of what is being emphasized. The word “commandment” is an imperative and a restatement. The purpose for restatement is to provide emphasis upon the importance of the matter. There are numerous reasons for the emphasis on love – one being the future work of the disciples who were going to form the New Testament church (Eph 2:20). Their attitudes toward one another would be crucial to the success of this new entity.³⁹

In verse ten Jesus discusses the result of obeying His commandments. The “commandments” of verse ten are reduced to “commandment” in verse twelve. All the commandments of Christ can be summarized in one word – love. The meaning of the word commandment in this context is not of a cold, outward, and codified law. The concept is of a warm precept conveying the direction the Father and Son desire for the disciples. Jesus provided the ultimate example of love and now entreats the disciples to follow His path. This command to love regulates as well as forms the inner attitude and outward conduct of the disciples.⁴⁰

VERSE XIII

“GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN THAN THIS, THAT A MAN LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS.”

Jesus begins to discuss levels of love. He provides an example of the highest form or level of love. This level involves the resolve to put the needs of others before the wants of self. The one who humbles himself in this manner shows the extent of his love to those for whom he cares the most.

The term *μεῖζονα* translated “greater” is an adjective which describes “love.” “Greater”

³⁹ Tenney, 153.

⁴⁰ William Hendrickson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1954), 252-253.

speaks of degrees and in this sense, the highest degree.⁴¹ Hence, there are levels of love with Jesus describing the highest level of love. The term also carries the sense of being the most important kind of love. It is a love with significant purpose and meaning.

The love referenced in Rom 5:8-10 should not be confused with Jesus' love for His friends. The type of love described in Rom 5:8-10 is different as well as the object of love is different. Christ died for the world because of His love for lost mankind. He wanted to restore man and bring him into favor with God. God restored what Adam lost through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. The reason for this love escapes human intellectual capacity. Jesus loves His friends because of their obedience. This is another level of love above His love for the world (cf. John 14:21, 23); it is a love for friends.

Love is displayed by actions. The action of love in this verse is self sacrifice. Up to this point, Jesus has displayed His love to the disciples in various ways (cf. Phil 2:5-8). Contextually, His love has been shown by His humility and willingness to serve. The beginning of the discourse describes the servant's heart existing in the Lord Jesus. He humbled himself to serve the needs of His disciples. Their need extended beyond the act of foot washing. The real need was an example of what love is about – namely humility and service to others. The cross is certainly in view as it was the ultimate act of love Jesus would display. However, the context suggests the focus is on service to other Christians just not simply the cross.

VERSE XIV

“YE ARE MY FRIENDS, IF YE DO WHATSOEVER I COMMAND YOU.”

A new aspect of Jesus' fellowship with the disciples is now introduced – friendship. This aspect of friendship is not automatic. Rather, it is conditioned upon obedience. This is the first time Jesus has called the disciples His friends. Hence, a deeper level of fellowship is in view.

Jesus' fellowship with His disciples has strengthened over the years, and now He views the disciples as faithful followers worthy to be called His friends. The word φίλοι translated “friend” describes a favored companion or a congenial associate.⁴² Morris' comments about friendship are worthy of note: “Friendship depends on common aims and outlook . . . obedience is the test of discipleship . . . the friends of Jesus are those who habitually obey Him.”⁴³ The conditional nature of friendship is indicated by the qualifying word “if.” The disciples have a choice to make with regard to being Jesus' friend. If they commit themselves to Him in obedience, they will retain this most revered title of friend. To be a friend is not a synonym for a believer. Only a believer can become a friend of Jesus. “Friendship with Christ is *not* a free gift; it is conditional. [emphasis his]”⁴⁴ As the disciples grew in their fellowship with Jesus, they earned the right to be called His friend.

Being a friend of Jesus does not mean the disciples were instructed to refer to Jesus as their friend. The friendship is one directional.⁴⁵ Jesus is the Master with the obedient disciple as His friend. The condition of obedience makes a reciprocal friendship impossible because Jesus does not need to be obedient to the disciples. A proper view of Jesus' position as Lord and Master necessitates this understanding.

⁴¹ Perschbacher, 267-268.

⁴² Perschbacher, 429.

⁴³ Morris, 675.

⁴⁴ Dillow, 325.

⁴⁵ Carson, 105-106.

VERSE XV

“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.”

Jesus contrasts the status of a servant versus a friend. The servant is on a lower level with the Master than the friend. The friend has more intimate knowledge of the Master’s affairs than the servant.

The word δοῦλος translated “servant” in the KJV and “slave” in the NIV and NAB denotes the idea of service by an inferior or follower. Either translation is appropriate. The status of the disciples had moved from servant to friend based on their faithfulness. The word οὐκέτι translated “henceforth” in the KJV and “no longer” in the NIV as well as the NAB means no longer, indicating a change of status.⁴⁶ Because of their faithfulness, Jesus was elevating them to a special status. Because of their status as friends, Jesus would reveal his inner most thoughts to them. In fact, the Upper Room Discourse is a presentation of His inner feelings and desires. They had the privilege of understanding more of God’s will than a servant.⁴⁷ Only those who are faithful are allowed this special privilege.

Of special note, Jesus declares His revelation from the Father was complete. Since Jesus is Deity, He is all knowing. But in His human capacity, He received instruction from the Father. This is a great mystery and only understood in light of the kenosis (cf. Phil 2). Although His revelation of the Father was complete, Jesus had more to reveal; but they were not ready (cf. John 16:12). In future days, their faith would increase with their understanding growing deeply.

VERSE XI

“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.”

The issue of election is discussed with reference to fruit bearing. Jesus chose the disciples to be the foundation of the church in order that it might grow into a mighty structure. It is in this context that the abiding disciple should bear fruit even experiencing answered prayer.

The words ἐξελέχασθε and ἐξελεχάμην translated “chosen” (KJV) and “chose” (NIV and NAB) means to pick out or select.⁴⁸ Both are aorist middle indicative verbs. The aorist construction is not specific with regard to time or duration. The rendering “chosen” seems to be more accurate because it does not indicate a specific time frame or duration as much as “chose.” The word ἔθηκα translated “ordained” (KJV) and “appointed” (NIV and NAB) means to set aside, assign, or appoint.⁴⁹ The rendering in the KJV is somewhat archaic but is still used today

⁴⁶ Perschbacher, 299.

⁴⁷ Moses and Abraham were each made privy to the inner thoughts of God. Not only were they allowed to know these thoughts, they were privileged to converse with God about various important matters. However, only Abraham was given the privilege of being called a friend of God.

⁴⁸ Perschbacher, 127-128.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 408.

in describing those who officially serve in the ministry. The thought being conveyed is how Jesus has chosen as well as set aside these disciples for a specific and privileged purpose.⁵⁰

Rabbis did not usually choose their followers. It was just the opposite. However, Jesus was not an ordinary Rabbi. He chose the disciples as His representatives for Israel (cf. Luke 22:30) and the Church (cf. Eph 2:19-22). His reason for choosing them was specific with a view to their contribution towards the establishment of His church and rulership in His coming kingdom. The word ἵνα is a conjunction translated “that” in the KJV but not supplied in NIV or NAB. ἵνα means “in order that” or “so that.”⁵¹ The KJV translation of this word is important. It more forcefully relays the purposes for which Jesus chose and set apart the disciples.

The purposes were so the disciples would produce fruit and their fruit would be of a lasting nature (remaining or continuing fruit). The nouns καρπὸν and καρπὸς translated “fruit” are used figuratively in this passage. The range of meaning is offspring, conduct, actions, benefit, profit, or reward.⁵² This fruit which the disciples would produce has several aspects. Firstly, they would produce a multitude of converts to Christ.⁵³ Secondly, they would grow in their fellowship with Christ and would walk in the Spirit displaying the divine graces thereof (cf. Gal 5:22; Eph 5:9; Col 1:6).⁵⁴ Thirdly, they would be the foundation of the Church (Eph 2:19-22).⁵⁵ It is important to recognize how all three aspects of the disciples’ fruit are intertwined. The establishment of the New Testament church depended upon their decision to abide in Christ. In order to abide in Christ they must love one another. By loving one another many people would be converted thus forming the New Testament church. The lasting nature of their fruit is witnessed today since the New Testament church is still in existence. The writings of several of the disciples have stood the test of time and are included in the canon of the New Testament.

A third purpose is indicated by the word “that” in the last clause of the sentence. This last purpose was the privilege of answered prayer. The prepositional phrase “in my name” indicates how the disciples should approach the Father with their petitions. As they continued to abide in Christ, their desires would be changed to the desires of Christ. When their desires were Christ’s desires, the mood and intention of their petitions would be pleasing to the Father; and therefore would be subsequently granted by Him. The production of fruit involved work and prayer. Govett summarizes this truth when he says: “All work for Christ requires prayer; and prayer enlarges and confirms, and makes abiding work. Prayer and the bringing forth of fruit go together.”⁵⁶

VERSE XIIV

“THESE THINGS I COMMAND YOU, THAT YE LOVE ONE ANOTHER.”

Jesus emphasizes the significance of His command to love one another. This verse serves as a summarization of the main subject of the entire discourse – love. To love one another is the all encompassing command.

The direct object of the sentence, “things,” refers to all Jesus had taught the disciples that evening. He enjoined them to love one another, obey His commands, and abide in His love. By

⁵⁰ The force is not soteriological; the choosing is with a view to a task and to fruit bearing. Only those who are already in Christ are able to fulfill this purpose.

⁵¹ Perschbacher, 209.

⁵² Ibid, 220.

⁵³ Morris, 676.

⁵⁴ Hendrickson, 508.

⁵⁵ Robert Govett, *Govett on John, Volume II* (Miami Springs, FL: Conley & Schoettle Publishing Co., 1984), 214.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 214.

doing these things, they would experience maximum joy. He called them to be His friends, a position which would allow them to know His innermost thoughts and desires. He chose them to bear fruit; fruit which would not rot. The election they enjoyed was superlative with privileges unfathomable. The chief matter was one they must heed – to love one another as He loved them.

THEOLOGICAL POINTS

The theological implications of John 15:9-17 are critical. They are Jesus' last, most intimate words. He spoke them to men who are the foundation of the New Testament Church. The time they spent with Jesus in the Upper Room greatly affected their teaching and influence which consequently affects the New Testament Church today. Time spent in the Upper Room with Jesus was time well spent. Although not exhaustive, the following seven theological points are observed from the Upper Room Discourse.

1. Love is an attribute of God. Love is the very nature of God. He loves Himself which is shown by the actions within the Godhead. Jesus' love for the Father was so great that He never strayed from the Father's will.
2. Love is the law of Christ. The Law of Moses has been abrogated being replaced by Christ's law of love. Grace is not a lawless system. Rather, it is a system of worship allowing the New Testament believer to fellowship with God based on the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus gave numerous commands Himself and through the apostles which they recorded in their epistles. All of these commands are encapsulated by the word love.
3. Obedience is the key to abiding in Christ's love. The abiding life is one which every Christian can experience. Abiding in Christ's love is not the way of justification; instead, it is the way of progressive sanctification. The way to abide is to obey.
4. Abiding in Christ's love produces joy. The Christian can trust in Jesus' promise of joy as they abide in His love. The reason for obedience and love is to produce joy. God's desire is that all His children experience maximum joy. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit and only available in its fullness for the abiding believer.
5. Abiding in Christ's love results in friendship with God. The status of friend is not an automatic position obtained at the moment of initial salvation from the lake of fire. To become a friend of God involves obedience. Only those who obey and hence abide in Christ's love are eligible to be considered a friend of God. This friendship is one directional as God is not our friend, but we are His friend. God is all powerful with no one on an equal status with Him able to say He is their friend. He is the Lord who is worthy of all worship, honor, and praise.
6. Abiding in Christ's love results in abundant lasting fruit and answered prayer. The works of Christ's followers are important. An abiding life is the will of God. When a believer abides, they are able to produce converts, exhibit the attributes of God, and build up the New Testament Church. This work is accomplished through prayer and abiding as they are inseparable.
7. God rewards obedience. The obedient are those who love God. They, like Christ, desire to please God because they choose to obey Him. God will reward them with His love. He will reward them with joy. He will reward them with lasting fruit and answered prayer. All of these are rewards for obedience. Thus, reward is an incentive for obedience.

APPLICATIONS

THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

The main focus of the Upper Room Discourse was upon love. The disciples were gathered together to witness the last words of their Lord. Through word and action, Jesus had taught them the importance of loving God and each other. Jesus' message is just as relevant today for the church as it was then. If the church is to be a successful witness in the world, it must love. The church needs to focus its time and attention on love, a focus which is both elementary and fundamental.

The Upper Room Discourse should be taught regularly by pastors and teachers. Love should be practiced, not simply given lip service. When carnality surfaces (arguing, strife, jealousy), it should be addressed directly and immediately. Church leadership should be prepared to exhort and rebuke with authority having love, joy, and peace as the focus. Provision should be made encouraging love while discouraging carnality. A practical way to accomplish this is for pastors to surround themselves with individuals who desire to serve the Lord. The pastor should allot regular times of close knit fellowship to serve these leaders. The purpose is to model the practice of love. These leaders will then have the proper example to be better prepared in leading others in the congregation in the way of love.

Sunday school classes should make it a priority to serve the needs of their members in love. Priority should be given to fellowships at member's homes or other appropriate places. Times of worship should encourage members to show love towards one another. Acts of love should be recognized by the leadership in tangible ways. Every effort should be made to put into practice the principle of foot washing. Churches should look for ways to reach out to members who need spiritual and physical assistance.

INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS

The exhortation to love is paramount in the life of the individual believer. Fellowship with the Lord is determined by our obedience to Him. Individuals should make devotions with God a priority in their lives setting aside a special time during the day for quite time. This simple practice will lead the way to greater intimacy and fellowship with God. While it is practically impossible to keep this appointment every day, it should be met the overwhelming majority of the time.

Falling deeper and deeper in love with Jesus is not automatic. Every believer should recognize the battle they face with the world, flesh, and devil. The way to overcome is by faith. Believers should purpose in their heart to spend time during their devotions in prayer. During their prayer time, they should practice the privilege of praise. Reading the Psalms and dwelling on the majesty of God will transform lives allowing a greater sense of love and devotion towards God. It is during these times that faith is built with the full realization of God's nature of love being revealed to the believer.

Additional time should be allotted for deeper Bible study. Every believer should have a special study in process during the year. Topics or books can be studied to enhance understanding and increase knowledge. The end result will be wisdom defined as experiential knowledge. The wisdom of expressing love as Jesus commanded in the Upper Room should be the focus of every believer.

APPENDIX

LESSON PLAN

CHRIST'S LAW OF LOVE GOVERNS THE BELIEVER'S LIFE John 15:9-12

1. Introduction
2. Love: An attribute of God
 - a. Definition: What is love?
 - b. Illustration: The reciprocal love within the Godhead. God is Omni-benevolent. John 3:35; 5:20; 17:23-24
 - c. Illustration: Jesus' love for His followers. John 13:1-5
3. Love: The place to abide
 - a. Definition: What does it mean to abide? What does it mean to obey?
 - i. Belief precedes obedience.
 - ii. Obedience allows intimacy.
 - iii. Abiding allows continued intimacy.
 - b. Explanation: Obedience is the way to abide in God's favor.
 - i. Illustration: Obedience modeled by Jesus. Phil 2:5-8
 - ii. Explanation: Obedience is the way to blessing and reward. Phil 2:9-16
 - c. Explanation: Obey the command to abide in love.
 - i. It is not the way for justification.
 - ii. It is the way of progressive sanctification.
 - iii. It is the way of worship/service to God.
4. Love: The fruit of the Spirit
 - a. Definition: What is joy?
 - b. Explanation: Abiding in love produces joy. Gal 5:16, 22-25
 - i. Abiding in love is walking in the Spirit.
 - ii. Abiding in love produces maximum fulfillment and accomplishment.
5. Summary: Love is the law of New Testament worship
 - a. Explanation: Love governs every aspect of the Christian's life. Gal 5:13-14; 6:2
 - b. Explanation: Heed Christ's command to love.
 - i. Illustration: Meditate on God's nature of love
 - ii. Illustration: Follow Christ's example of obedience
 - iii. Illustration: Enjoy the benefits of living life in the Spirit

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