

May 14th, 2017
 APART FROM ME YOU CAN DO
 NOTHING PT. 3
 John 15:9-17

The Apostle Paul tells his young protege pastor in **2 Timothy 3:1** “But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.” “Everything after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ are the last days.”¹ These are the days of difficulty.

And that is the reason the Jesus spent so much time in the upper room with his disciples. He was preparing them—preparing you—for times of great difficulty. And the Great Physician of your soul has been very thorough in performing this heart surgery. He has given us sure and steadfast promises for every difficulty in life.

For the times when you are homesick for heaven. **John 14:3** “I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”

For the times when you feel most abandoned. **John 14:18** “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

For the times when you feel like giving up. **John 15:5** “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

Jesus has been systematically addressing every difficulty that you will face. In our passage today, Jesus addresses a very peculiar difficulty. A very peculiar temptation. The temptation to stop loving one another. Jesus speaks about the danger of lovelessness in the last days in **Matthew 24:11**, in those days

¹ The Reformation Heritage Study Bible, Ed. Joel Beeke, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), pg. 1783

“lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.” That is the danger that you face: lovelessness. Dear congregation, remember what Jesus has told us: “In this world you will have tribulation.” (**John 16:33**) And this tribulation comes not merely from the outside world but also from within the church.

Ask yourself: why does Jesus have to say “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you?” (**John 15:12**) Why does Jesus have to tell Christians to love one another? Love is the overwhelming emphasis in our passage today, it’s mentioned nine times in as many verses. Why? Because when disappointment with each other, and suspicion, and betrayal, and disillusionment set in—all those tribulations that Jesus promised—you will be tempted to stop loving each other. You will be tempted to throw in the towel and say “Enough” I can’t do this anymore. ‘I’ve been hurt too many times, lied to too many times, ignored too many times.’ That’s why this passage exists. Jesus tells us to love one another, as I have loved you **BECAUSE** our natural disposition is to hate one another.

We were born haters of God and haters of one another. **Titus 3:3-5** “For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, *hated by others and hating one another*. **But** when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy,”

Why should you love one another? Why should forgive one another *again*? Why should you seek reconciliation *again*? Because Jesus Christ has saved you from things that you have done, that are infinitely worse than what your greatest enemy can do to you. That’s Jesus’ whole point in the parable of the unforgiving servant. The servant of the king owed him ten thousand talents which is equivalent to 200,000 years worth of wages for a laborer.² He was pardoned, and yet he turned around and threw his fellow servant in prison for 8

² “A talent was a monetary unit worth about twenty years’ wages for a laborer.” Holy Bible (New York, NY,: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pg. 815, fn. 3

hours worth of wages that was owed to him. (**Matthew 18:21-35**) The servant had forgotten that his debt was infinitely more atrocious than what was owed him. Failing to love another another is forgetting the gospel. Peter says “For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.” (**2 Peter 1:9**) That’s why Jesus says in our passage “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you,” He is preparing us for the ongoing temptation to abandon love for one another.

- ☆ Jesus Gives us the Cause of Love
- ☆ Jesus Gives us the Condition of Love
- ☆ Jesus Gives us the Command to Love

The Big Idea...

Those who have been chosen by Jesus will love one another

I. Jesus Gives us the Cause of Love

Why does Jesus say “You did not choose me but I chose you...?”

If this passage is emphatically about loving one another, which it is, then why does Jesus insert v.16? “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.” What’s the point of this verse? Take it in it’s full context:

You have been commanded to love one another (v.12)

If you keep that commandment; you will abide in Jesus’ love (v.10)

If you don’t abide in Jesus’, you will be thrown away and burned (v.6)

Your salvation hinges on bearing fruit—chiefly, in loving one another. John, who was heard Jesus’ words, did not miss this point. He said in his first letter³ in **1 John 2:9-10** “Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother *abides* in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling.” If you love you abide in the light, if you don’t you are still in the darkness. Therefore v.16 couldn’t be of more importance. To sum up what Jesus is saying negatively: “If I didn’t choose you, you would never love anyone, and you would perish.”

What type of choosing is Jesus speaking about here?

The word for choose—“You did not *choose* me, but I *chose* you” is ἐκλέγομαι eklegomai. ἐκ ek means “out of.” λέγω legō means “to call.” ἐκλέγομαι eklegomai means to “to call one out of.” It can refer to several different types of choosing.⁴ Some would look at this passage and say that the “choosing” Jesus is referring to is simply the choosing of the 12 out of the rest of the masses to be his apostles. The word is used that way. In **Luke 6:13** we read “And when day came, he called his disciples and *chose* from them twelve, whom he named apostles.” Is that what Jesus means here? Is He simply speaking about choosing these men as his disciples? No, Jesus doesn’t mean that. [Look back in John 13] In **John 13**, Jesus entered into the upper room with all 12 of his disciples, including Judas. He ate with them, washed their feet, and then commanded them to follow His example. Picking up in v.17 “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. [18] I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have **chosen**. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’” Do you see it? There was a type of choosing which included all 12 of the apostles (**Luke 6:13**)—that is, being *chosen*

³ Also see 1 John 2:4 “Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him,”

⁴ It can refer to God *choosing* the Israelites out of the rest of mankind (**Acts 13:17**). It can refer to people being chosen for a particular office, like Stephen as a deacon in **Acts 6:5**. It can refer to the choosing of the twelve: Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.” (**John 6:70**)

to be an apostle. And there is a type of choosing that includes some while excluding others. “I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have **chosen.**” Judas was chosen to be an apostle, but not chosen to be saved. He wasn’t elect.

Choosing means electing

And that is relevant for **John 15:16**, because Jesus makes no such qualifier when He says “You did not choose me, but I chose you.” He didn’t need to. Judas was gone. This “choosing” Jesus is speaking about is election.

Election is God freely choosing some to salvation apart from any foreseen faith, any foreseen works, but according to His free grace alone.

Romans 9:16 “So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.”

Election is entirely the work of God.⁵ If you are saved, it is because God chose you.⁶

This election always bears fruit

The reason Jesus speaks of election here, is because it is the source of your fruit bearing. Look at the middle of v.16, Jesus says “and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.” What is the fruit that Jesus has in view mainly? Loving one another. How do we know that? Consider the total imagery that Jesus has used thus far in John 15. Jesus

⁵ So we hear Jesus saying in **Matthew 11:27** “All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and *anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.*”

⁶ You cannot approach the doctrine of election and say that God gave grace to all mankind, and in that sense, He *chose* all. And that man must make the decisive choice in being saved. Jesus will not allow that interpretation.

John 6:44 “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 6:37 “All that the Father gives me will come to me”

is the true vine, the Father the Vinedresser, we are the branches. And now this imagery of fruit is being used. Vine—branch—fruit. What is fruit, but “the out-forming of what has passed”⁷ from the vine to the branch? But what do we receive from the Vine—from Christ? His love. How do we know that? Compare v.4 with v.9. In v.4 we read “Abide in *me*,” Then in v.9, Jesus changes it to “Abide in my *love*.” Meaning, when we abide in Christ, we are receiving that nourishing sap of Jesus love. And that sap is what produces fruit. The fruit of love.

This is what Augustine’s mother Monica experienced in her walk with Christ. Augustine was the early church father (354-430) who wrote amongst other works *The City of God* and *Confessions*. Monica had a very difficult life. She begged God for years for her son to be saved. Augustine said of her later, that “she shed more tears [over] my spiritual death...than other mothers shed for the bodily death of a son.”⁸ Monica’s husband, Patricius, was a serial adulterer. But Monica was so connected to the Vine that the love of Christ flowed freely through her. Augustine said “her patience was so great that his infidelity never became a cause of quarreling between them. For she looked to you to show him mercy, hoping chastity would come from faith...In the end she won her husband for you [O Lord] as a convert in the very last days of his life on earth.”⁹

Where did Monica’s supernatural love come from? v.16, Jesus appointed her to go bear fruit, and her fruit was to abide. This is why v.16 is the anchor of this passage. If you have been chosen by Jesus, you will bear the fruit loving one another. It’s a sure thing.

⁷ <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/i-chose-you-to-bear-fruit>

⁸ John Piper, *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy*, (Wheaton, IL,.: Crossway Books, 2000), pg. 65

⁹ *ibid*

II. Jesus Gives us the Condition of Love

Getting our gospel “right”

Now that we’ve looked at the cause of our love towards one another, namely election, let’s return to v.9-10 to look at the conditions that Jesus give us.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. **If** you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, **just as** I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

It’s easy to approach v.10 here and miss out on the infinite treasure that Jesus has for us because we are nervous about what it might be saying. Jesus is not requiring a sinless perfectionism here. John says in **1 John 1:8** “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” Neither is Jesus saying that it is possible for true believers to stop keeping His commands and therefore fall away from His love, anymore than it is possible for Jesus to stop keeping his Father’s commands and therefore fall away from his love. That is why Jesus’ comparison is so helpful. Jesus is continuing to unpack what He has already said in v.2 and v.6. If anyone gives up and quits bearing fruit, quits obeying Christ, they prove they were never loved by Christ. They prove that they were never made clean by His Word (v.3), that they were never truly his disciples (v.8) True faith will *always* result in a transformed life. Therefore, this conditional statement in v.10 isn’t a formula for *earning* Christ’s love. Love is not the same thing as keeping Christ’s commandments. Keeping his commandments is the fruit of love. That’s why Jesus said in **John 14:15** “If you love me, [*then*] you will keep my commandments.” If you get that order mixed up, you will have a different gospel.

Obedience is the overflow of joy in Christ

But it’s so easy to stop right there. ‘Ok, I got my gospel right. I’m not saved by obedience. And I affirm that obedience is the inevitable fruit of a genuine faith. Check.’ But if you stop there, you miss **v.11**: “These things I have

spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be **full**.” Full in the Greek means “full,” —“filled to the brim: so that nothing shall be wanting; to make complete in every particular, to render perfect.”¹⁰ In other words, Jesus tells us to obey His commandments *because* He wants His joy to be in us. **Obedience is the overflow of joy in Christ.** As one author put it “Loving God is being so satisfied in God and so delighted in all that He is for us that his commands cease to be burdensome.”¹¹ In other words, there is no divorce between duty and delight.

The medicine that Jesus offers us

So when you are tempted to stop loving others, to throw the towel in, to give up, and burn those bridges, listen to what Jesus is saying here. “If you want my joy in you, if you want your joy to be full, then keep my commandments, and love one another just as I have loved you.” That is the only path to joy. Paul saw this invincible connection between fullness of joy and brotherly love when he wrote to Philemon. He said in **Philemon 1:7** “I have derived *much joy* and comfort from *your love*, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.”

III. Jesus Gives us the Command to Love

Why does Jesus repeat himself?

When Jesus speaks of “keeping his commandments” in v.10, He now shows us exactly what He means. v.12 “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” This is the second time in this farewell discourse that Jesus has given us this command. The first was in **John 13:34** “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.” Why does Jesus repeat Himself? Because when disagreements arise, often the first thing to go is love. Jonathan

¹⁰ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G4137&t=KJV>

¹¹ John Piper, *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy*, (Wheaton, IL,.: Crossway Books, 2000), pg. pg. 58

Edwards wrote about the intense disagreements that took place in his grandfather Solomon Stoddards church in the early 1700's. This is what he said:

“There were some mighty contests and controversies among them, in Mr. Stoddard’s day; which were managed with great heat and violence: some great quarrels in the church, wherein Mr. Stoddard, great as his authority was, knew not what to do with them...[Once] the church was divided into two parties, the heat of the spirit was raised to such a degree, that it came to hard blows. A member of one party met the head of the opposite party, and assaulted him, and beat him unmercifully.”¹²

Those fights were not in a church that didn’t value doctrine. That was a Reformed church. Dear congregation, lovelessness in the church is a serious issue, and it’s found within every denomination, in every age, and in every place. It’s not a problem “out there” you are the problem. I am the problem. Nobody is immune from this. You carry this disease everywhere you go. **Jeremiah 17:9** “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick, who can understand it?” Left to yourself you will degenerate into a hateful, spiteful, grudge-bearing, revenge-seeking person.

“Love as I have loved you”

Jesus needs to repeat Himself, not because He has run out of things to say, but because you need to hear it again. “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” The end of this command is where all the force is. Jesus doesn’t say ‘Love one another, when it’s convenient, or love one another when you feel like it, or love one another when others love you back.’ He says “*as I have loved you.*” Consider how Christ has loved us.

¹² Ian Murray, Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2008), pg. 87-88

Jesus loved us all the way to His death

v.13 says “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends...” Greater is μέγας *me-gas* in the Greek. Jesus uses this word in **Matthew 24:21** when He speaks of the great (*me-gas*) tribulation calling it “unequaled from the beginning of the world until now--and never to be equaled again.”¹³ That’s the sense of the great love that Jesus has loved us with. It is unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. **Ephesians 3:19** says that “the love of Christ... surpasses knowledge.” Dear congregation, Jesus died for you. For you! A sinner! “...You were ransomed...not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.” (**1 Peter 1:18-19**)

Jesus calls us to love each other with that same self-sacrificial love. **1 John 3:16** says “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.” “The Christian life is not a spectator sport.”¹⁴ The Christian life is violent because you have the world, and your own flesh and the devil bearing down on you. And their main attack is to get you to stop loving one another. Jesus is asking you to die to self, to take up your cross, and love others in spite of the pain that it brings you.

The essence of our loving is to show each other God

Ultimately, loving others is doing whatever it takes to help them taste and see the glory of God.¹⁵ That’s ultimately what Jesus accomplished for us in the gospel. **1 Peter 3:18** “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God,” Jesus died so that we could be

¹³ NIV

¹⁴ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago, IL,: Moody Publishers, 2008), pg. 163

¹⁵ John Piper, *God is the Gospel: Meditations on God’s Love as the Gift of Himself*, (Wheaton, IL.,: Crossway, 2005), pg. 153

with God. That is the essence of love. Doing whatever it takes to help others taste and see the glory of God.

Application

Our Doctrine: Grace says: you are a bad person

The *main* reason why we fail to love others as we ought is because we don't believe how bad we actually are. Jesus said "...he who is forgiven little, loves little." (**Luke 7:47**) Meaning, if you have little love for others, it is because you think you are a little sinner. It is because you think that you are more able and more equipped and more righteous than others. A failure to love is a self-righteousness problem. That's why Jesus places v.16 where He does in the passage. "You did not choose me, but I chose you." You are far worse than you could ever imagine. If God didn't choose you, and appoint you to bear fruit, you would never love anybody. That's what grace does. It tells you the most awful things about yourself.

Something very strange happened to me this week. I found myself praising God that a pastor—R.W. Glenn—whom I read and listen to, disqualified himself from the ministry. Don't get me wrong, I'm not glad he disqualified Himself. I'm glad that God showed me a greater glimpse of what grace is. Glenn who I first exposed to by Wretched Radio is a Westminster Seminary Graduate. He had all the theological giants as his professors. Coming out of seminary he took up a post at Redeemer Bible Church and has faithfully preached the doctrines of grace. He has taught sermon series that have influenced my own. He has preached repeatedly, against the danger of self-righteousness. He wrote a book against it. He held seminars for pastors about the dangers of self-righteousness. I started to listen to one of his sermons this week and within the first 60 seconds, he quotes a book that I am currently reading, and then it hit me like a ton of bricks—"I have nothing to hide behind" If Glenn knew all this doctrine, had all this training, read all these books, preached against self-righteousness, ran in all the right circles, and yet He "fell"

where does that leave me? I felt totally exposed. I realized that I have nowhere to hide. I am not safe. I'm not safe. If of all those good things didn't protect Glenn from falling, then how will anything that I'm doing every protect me.

Dear congregation, nothing that you are doing right now makes you safe before God. Good doctrine does not make you safe. A good marriage does not make you safe. A good job, a good devotional life, a good church, good friends, a good budget—none of those things make you secure before God. Nothing in your life could ever cause God to hold onto you for the next two seconds. All of your life counts for naught if Christ is not continuing to uphold you. Or let me put it a different way: If Christ doesn't forgive you for the good things that you do, you will go to hell.

That's what the gospel of grace tells us. Grace says: you are a bad person.

Grace says you could not failed God more miserably than you have. "All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God" **Romans 3:23**

Grace says that even very best things that you do in life completely stained with sin before God. "All our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment." **Isaiah 64:6** Which means that even our righteousness requires repentance.

Therefore grace says, that on your own, you are not a good wife, you not a good husband, you are not a good employee, you are not a good friend, a good father, mother, daughter, son. Grace says that the very worst things that anyone has ever said about you are nothing compared to how bad you really are.

Dear congregation, this is the message of the gospel. You are **so bad** that the Son of God—Jesus Christ had to come down to earth and lay down on a cross for your sin. But this is the good news. Jesus suffered on the cross because **He loves You**. He loved you in spite of the evil that you have done. And He loves you in spite of the sin that you still commit. You are that bad, but Jesus Christ is that good. So trust Him. Trust His grace. Flee from every sin that you

pursuing. And stop resting and comforting your soul in every “good thing” that you are doing. Christ only is your hope. Christ alone is your security. Christ alone is your refuge.

That’s our **doctrine**: Grace says: you are a bad person, “but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (**Romans 5:8**) Therefore our **duty**...

Our Duty: Pray to the Father to bear the fruit of love

It is not an accident that this command to love one another is bookended on both sides by prayer. The command to love one another is an impossible command. Jesus said in v.5 “Apart from me you can do nothing.” And so Jesus sandwiches the command to love in between the promise of prayer. First in v.7 “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, *ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*” And then at the end in v.16 “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, **so that** *whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.*” Jesus tells us in both of these verses, that prayer is for bearing fruit. What are you to pray for? Everything in between. To love one another. How often do you pray like that? “Lord, help me to love so-and-so?” Do you want to know why you need to pray like that? Because so-and-so is unlovable. And you are incapable of loving them on your own. ‘God give me power to love. Give me sap from your vine Jesus, so that as your branch, I can blossom and send forth the fragrance of love.’

I would venture to say that there is much contention and lovelessness in the church today, because we think that we have the power within ourselves to love each other. We don’t. Jesus tells you to pray for that fruit.

That’s our **duty**: Pray to the Father to bear the fruit of love. Therefore our delight...

Our Delight: Those who have been chosen by Jesus will love one another

There is a great confidence in having a sovereign God. Just as we saw the last two weeks that Jesus will not allow his true disciples to defect and be cut off the vine, so we see this week that Jesus guarantees that we will produce the fruit of love. He says in v.16, "I...appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide." Believers, ultimately will not fail in loving each other. This is a promise of future grace. 'Lord Jesus, you have said in your Word that you appointed me to go and bear fruit, and that my fruit will abide. I believe you Lord. Though my branch looks empty right now. Though I see lovelessness, and conflict, I know that Your Word gets the final say." The promise of v.16 is the anchor for the soul. Because as you look at the NT and see all the failures and hardships of the saints, we know the reason they persevered is because of this promise in v.16. Why did Peter repent of his wrong views of the gospel in Galatians 2? Because Jesus appointed Him to bear fruit. How did Timothy overcome the false teachers in Ephesus in 1 Timothy 1? Because Jesus appointed him to bear fruit. How did Paul not lose heart after he was "afflicted in every way...perplexed,...persecuted and struck down" (2 Cor. 4:8-9). Because Jesus appointed him to bear fruit. Dear congregation, how will you survive the temptation to stop loving each other? Because Jesus appointed you to bear fruit, and that your fruit would abide. Hold on to that hope. Jesus says in v.17 "These things I command, so that you will love one another."