

Remain in Me
John 15:1-17

Turn to John 15. “Remain in Me.” John chapters 13-14 happened at the Last Supper, when Jesus washed their feet. At the end of John 14, Jesus said, “Let’s go for a walk.” So they left and walked to Gethsemane, a place they went to often. Judas would know to look for Jesus there.

And quite possibly that they actually walked past a vineyard on the way. There were many vineyards around, and perhaps Jesus used the vineyard they were passing to teach about himself.

The vine and the branches section seems to end at verse 6, but Jesus brings up bearing fruit again in v16, so we know that he’s still talking about vine and branches and fruit. Verse 18 starts something new. So we’ll read John 15:1-17.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. These things I am commanding you, that you love one another.

Here is the core teaching: *I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*

The center of the Christian life is the person of Jesus Christ. Each and every one of us is directly connected to Jesus Christ. From that connection flows every bit of our spiritual life, and however we act out being believers and children of God. It all pours out of him and into us.

Jesus is very clear: we are called and appointed to bear fruit, and we bear fruit only by our union with him. The word is “remain,” the old English is “abide”; it just means “stay.” Stay with this person, remain with this person, that’s the secret and the key. Every part of our life of faith flows from that person into us.

What is the fruit that we bear?

There is no clear answer to what our fruit is, and that’s okay. There does not need to be. Jesus did not say, “go out there and bear fruit.” He said, “remain in me and I in you, and you will bear fruit.” Jesus is not trying to tell us what the fruit is. He’s telling us where it comes from. IF we remain in him, abide in him, the fruit will take care of itself, we will surely bear fruit.

But listen to the last two verses again, to understand what the fruit is: *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. These things I am commanding you, that you love one another.*

The fruit is above all that we love one another as Christ loved us. Jesus mentions nothing else at all in our text, and Jesus gave that command twice here, v12 and v17. If he has named the fruit at all, that’s what it is, to love one another. But again, what Jesus really wants is that we remain in him. The rest will work out.

The Better Question: How do we Remain in Him?

I wanted to know what the fruit was, but Jesus wants to answer a different question: how do we remain in him? I was not asking that because I thought I knew how to remain in him. I thought remained in him by my private disciplines, by praying, by reminding myself that I am dependent on Christ, by thinking about his words.

But how we remain in him is the question that Jesus cares about. And his answer is not what I expected.

The Lord’s call is: “remain in me.” If we pick up the Lord’s teaching from the middle of John 14, and read to the end of our text today, we see that Jesus has three other ways to say, “remain in me.” Three other phrases mean about the same thing: 1, love me; 2, remain in my love; and 3, be my friend.

All four of those are talking about the same thing: Remain in me. Love me. Remain in my love. Be my friend. How do we do we love him, and remain in his love, and be his friends? They all have the same answer.

How do we love Jesus?

14:15 - *If you love me, keep my commands.* 14:21 - *Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me.* 14:23 - *Anyone who loves me will keep my teaching.* 14:24 - *Anyone who does not love me will not keep my teaching.*

This is how Jesus shows love to his Father, this is our family likeness to Jesus: 14:31- *The world must learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me.* So we obey Christ's commands because we love him, just as he obeys the Father's commands because he loves the Father. We love Jesus by keeping his commands. That's clear.

How do we remain in his love?

15:9-10 - *Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands, and remain in his love.* To remain in his love we keep his commands, because that's how Jesus relates to the Father. It's our family likeness.

How do we be a friend to Jesus?

15:14 - *You are my friends if you do what I command.* Jesus has his own ideas of friendship. Jesus is a friend to us by telling us everything the Father told him, and by laying down his life for us. That's what it means to Jesus for him to be our friend. And we will show ourselves to be his friends by loving him and obeying his commands.

This is not how I would think about friendship, but we must let Jesus have his say here. We can call Jesus our friend, but we will only call him our friend when we are working with his definition of friendship. We are his friends when we do what he commands.

Love: John's writings never let us make love a personal emotion or sentiment. The Bible as a whole is not that interested how what I feel when I tell the Lord "I love him." Jesus loved us by coming to earth, by calling us and teaching us, and especially by laying down his life for us. That how Jesus understands his love for us.

And we respond to him with loving obedience, just as he responds to the Father with loving obedience. We love Jesus by keeping his commands. We remain in his love by keeping his commands. We are friends to Jesus if we do what he commands. So, how do we remain in the vine? How do we stay connected to Jesus? We keep his commands.

What are His Commands?

In John's Gospel, Jesus did not give commands like the kind of thing we read in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. But in this final teaching of Jesus, in John chapters 13 to 16, one command completely dominates: "love one another as I have loved you."

The only thing in John's Gospel that Jesus ever calls a "command" to us is "love one another as I have loved you." He gives us this command three times, and every time he calls it his "command." He never calls any other instruction to us a "command" even once.

This becomes clearer 15:17, the last verse of our Scripture section: *these things (plural) I commanded you, that you love one another*. Most translations change it to singular, "*This is my command*," but the way John wrote it is plural, and the good old KJV has it that way, and a few others. *These things I commanded you, that you love one another*. All the Lord's commands boil down to one command – love one another.

Here's where this is going, people: if we remain in Jesus, we will surely bear fruit. How do we remain in him? We obey his commands, which means we love one another. We remain in him by loving one another. What fruit do we bear? We love one another. How we remain in him, and the fruit we bear, are the same thing.

You will tell me this does not really make sense. How we remain in him, and the fruit we bear are the same thing? And I will agree with you that this seems a strange set-up. I was a hard sell, because it did not make sense to me. But in John 14-15, I cannot see how to avoid it.

When we see how we love him, and how we stay in his love, and how we are his friends, this is where it goes.

Life Among the Disciples

Jesus speaks these things to the twelve. No, Judas is gone, he's talking to the eleven. How will the eleven remain in him? By loving one another.

There is a context here. The apostles did not love each other. The other Gospels tell us that they repeatedly argued and bickered among themselves about which of them was the greatest. In Luke's Gospel, this happened again *after the Last Supper*. After the Last Supper, there was a dispute among them about which of them was the greatest.

Now we can better understand why Jesus got up and washed their feet, and told them that if he, their Lord and Teacher, did this for them, they should do it for each other. Now we can better understand why Jesus said the new command was to love one another as he loved them. They really needed to hear this. This was first of all for *them*.

In the other Gospels he told the apostles the same thing: “Whoever **among you** wants to be great in the kingdom will be **your** servant, and whoever **among you** wants to be first will be **your** slave.” Their kingdom greatness was how they treated each other. And they were not serving each other, and not even close.

So the new command is completely relevant to the eleven disciples who first heard this.

Summary

Jesus said: *I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*

How do we remain in him? We love him by keeping his commands, that is, we love one another. We remain in his love by keeping his commands, that is, we love one another. We are friends to Jesus by keeping his commands, that is, we love one another. This is how we remain in him.

Much of this happens in our church body. We’ve all heard this call before, and it has shaped our lives together. May it increase. Paul tells the Thessalonians church that God has already taught them to love each other, and then Paul urges them to do so still more and more. That’s God’s call to us. God urges us to +do so more and more.

And in that way we stay attached to the Vine, we remain in the Vine, and that we absolutely must do. Amen.

PRAYER: O Lord, you are the true Vine, and we have to stay connected to you, we have to remain in you. That we understand, and we pray that you will come after us if we ever begin to lose that. Help us remain in you and in your love. Be gracious to us, lead us with your Spirit. And keeping your command to love one another as you loved us is such a big part of this. We submit to this, and we pray that your Spirit will work in us so we remain in you, and bear much fruit. This will bring glory to the Father, and that is very good. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give us a spirit of unity among ourselves as we follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth we may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Go in God’s peace to love and serve the Lord.