

A COMMENTARY ON JOHN 14:1-16:4

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Abstract

This article deals with the teaching of Jesus regarding Himself, the Father [and their relationship], the Spirit, the relationship of the three persons of God to each other and to those who follow God, the kingdom of heaven, its citizens and their conduct as heavenly citizens while in the mortal flesh. The consistency of these teachings with the other teachings of Jesus [especially the Sermon on the Mount and the Matthew 13 kingdom parables] is emphasized, with particular attention being given to John 15:1-8. The unified purposes of God's revelation of truth during all ages [dispensations] are alluded to also.

Introduction

In this section of Scripture, the Lord Jesus is strengthening His apostles. The time frame is immediately after the last supper; Jesus has washed the apostle's feet; and Judas Iscariot has gone out into the night to betray Jesus to the Temple authorities. In John 13:31&32, Jesus declares, "*Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately.*" These statements from Jesus pertain to His impending sacrifice for the sins of the world. The ignominious death He will suffer by crucifixion, God will transform to glory for His Christ and for Himself. Thus, the writer of Hebrews can state, "...Who for the joy that was set before Him [Jesus] endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."(Heb.12:2b). Jesus then commands His apostles to love (*agape*) one another, so the world will know that they are His disciples (John 13:34-35). In 13:33, He intimates that this will be His last fellowship with them before giving Himself over to His enemies. This is a solemn time. The apostles' hearts are heavy. Their understanding is far from complete, and their minds have questions.

The Lord Jesus Comforts the Eleven

In John 14:1-4, Jesus begins to comfort them with very precious promises. Belief in God should be belief in Jesus. He uses words that they will understand from their Jewish traditions. When a bridegroom prepared to marry, his father built for him [or let him build] a place for him and his bride in the father's compound. Thus, when Jesus promised to go and prepare a place for them in His Father's spacious house, and to come again for them, they began to make the connection between the Jewish family and God's family. They had to learn about Christ and His bride, the Church, a little at a time, and their curiosity was certainly aroused by verse 4, "*And where I go you know and the way you know.*" Their perception concerning this was surely not yet clear, and they had questions. Their minds were turned from sorrow to seeking. Their Master was about to go away, and they needed to know more—much more!

Jesus Teaches the Eleven

Thomas' question in 14:5 created a teachable situation, as Jesus knew it would, and He proceeded to teach them. The answer to Thomas' question does not come until 16:28, when Jesus plainly told them without any figurative speech, "*I came from the Father [in heaven] to the world, and I am leaving the world and returning to the Father.*" But before clearly revealing this to the eleven remaining apostles, He has much more to teach them. Jesus' answer to Thomas, "*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life*" (v.6) holds them in a learning mode.

Next, Jesus teaches them about who He is (14:7-11). He and the Father are the same. Seeing Jesus is seeing the Father. From now on they know the Father, because He is revealed in Jesus, the Son. Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in Him (14:10a). The words that Jesus spoke are the words of the Father (14:10b). These statements have deep scriptural ramifications—we must always keep in mind that Jesus was Immanuel (God with us). Therefore, ***everything that Jesus said on any particular subject will agree exactly with what He (God) had said on that subject through His prophets.*** An example of this

essential unity of Father and Son is found in Matt.23:34, Jesus said “Therefore indeed, **I** send you prophets...”—God sent the prophets. Therefore Jesus said, “**I** send you prophets...” This unity of authority and scriptural consistency is a principle that must be applied to the entire Bible, if one is to rightly interpret and understand what God has said. God is not the author of confusion, but of order, producing a sound mind in those who would be His. This is of utmost significance as we examine this final discourse of Jesus before He offered Himself for our sin sacrifice. This is **God** speaking and teaching.

In this vital teaching session, Jesus explained His relationship to the Father. He had accepted certain limitations due to His status of being in the flesh of a man. *John 14:10*, “...but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.” ; *14:24*, “...the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who dwells in Me.”; *14:28*, “...for My Father is greater than I.” John 14:19-24 explains much concerning the relationship among Father, Son, and Jesus’ followers as God’s children. It is a relationship based on *mutual love*, the *unity* between Father and Son, and the *obedience of faith* of the children. In 14:16-18, Jesus introduces the Holy Spirit as the third person of God and promises that He (H.S.) will come to them and be with them forever, and in 14:18 He equates Himself and the Holy Spirit (“I will come to you.”). ***It should be understood here that Jesus predicates everything in this entire discourse upon love and obedience of faith on the part of His followers, and one cannot fathom this portion, especially John 15, without realizing this and bearing it in mind. These criteria constitute the test for and measure of discipleship in Christ [and every believer must be a disciple also], and they are as applicable today as they were for the apostles. See John 14:15, 21, 23 and 15:10.***

At the end of John 14, Jesus and the eleven leave the upper room and begin walking toward Gethsemane—Jesus continues teaching them. ***He instructs them on the nature of His kingdom and the appropriate conduct of kingdom citizens [of vital importance to them and to all believers of all time].*** There is but one kingdom of God, and it is spiritual in nature, citizenry, and conduct. One understands that flesh and blood [the physical] can enter the kingdom only in spirit by faith, but such, nevertheless, are in the kingdom by the Spirit, are

governed by the Spirit while in the flesh, and ultimately will leave the earth to enter heaven by the Spirit as glorified citizens.

The Vine and The Branches: John 15:1-8

These next several verses (especially 15:1-6) have evoked much controversy among Bible students and theologians. The controversy centers upon the exact relationship of the ‘Vine’ and the ‘branches’, and more specifically, the true identity of the ‘branches’. The major cause for this controversy stems from the views held by many Dispensationalists, a faction that departed from Covenant Theology some 150-200 years ago. J.N. Darby of the Plymouth Brethren appears to have formalized early dispensational doctrines, followed through the years by such as C.I. Scofield, L.S. Chafer [founder of Dallas Seminary], and many others. These held strong antinomian views [the belief that law and grace are in total opposition], insisting on eternal security for all who ever professed faith in Christ [regardless of the sinful, unrepentant lives that many professing ‘Christians’ live, even to becoming unbelieving with a ship-wrecked ‘faith’]. Sadly, these have had a strong and widespread influence on Christianity, particularly upon the Fundamentalists of the 20th and 21st centuries and to date. The rapid spread of this doctrinal system has given rise to the ‘easy believeism/cheap grace/ carnal Christian/non-lordship’ evangelism practiced by so many today. Unfortunately for the lost, the extreme dispensationalists of this post-modern church era have continued to propagate their collage of confusion concerning the law of God, the Israelites, and salvation. Paul’s words in I Tim.1:5-7 seem particularly appropriate here: **“Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the Law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.”**

In approaching John 15, one needs to realize that it is of the same vein and tenor as the ‘Sermon on the Mount’. In fact, Matt.7:21-23 reflect the righteous judgment of the ‘Vinedresser’ in John 15:2a and 6. Jesus taught that *the kingdom of heaven in this present age is made up of both the true and the false*, and so it will be

until the judgment at the end of the age when ‘wheat’ and ‘tares’ will be separated by removal of the ‘tares’ from the ‘wheat’ and burning them. At that time He will send His holy angels to remove everything from His kingdom that offends Him (Matt.13:37-43). It is the same in John 15, except that the Lord deals also there with the cultivation of the fruitful, as well as with the destruction of the dead and unfruitful. The pruning of the fruitful to make them more fruitful is in view in John 15, and this is accomplished through testing, discipline, reproof, suffering, instruction, and every means that the Lord uses to further sanctify and cleanse us. However, *what is not in view here* is the winning of the lost or the supposed restoration into the True Vine of ‘**dead wood**’ that is cast out. See vv.2a and 6. Some of the branches were never the same ‘species’ as the ‘Vine’, just the same as the “tares’ in the wheat field. They look so much like wheat that they are left in the field till harvest so the real wheat will not be rooted up. So it is with the ‘Vinedresser’ in John 15. He is God, and only He can both prune the true branches and remove the useless dead wood *in due time*. I believe that, except for the pruning of true branches [authentic Christians], the removal of the unfruitful branches refers to end time judgment [Second Advent of Christ]. As in the kingdom parables of Matt.13, all the judgment is eschatological [end time] in John 15, also. This is an important point, for it would prove the ‘sin unto death’ theory for the ‘branches’ that are removed early [for a premature entrance into heaven because of their carnality] to be erroneous, since these [like the tares in Matt.13:30] must await the Lord’s Second Advent judgment

The words ‘**in Me**’ in 15:2a have caused some to insist that the unfruitful branches are true believers who have become totally unfruitful. But this is not tenable since every true branch bears fruit and is pruned to increase its productivity. As with the parable of the wheat and the tares or the parable of the dragnet in Matt.13, at the end of the age the tares are removed and burned and the trash fish are thrown away. Again, looking into Matt.13 at the parable of the sower, only the good seed that fell on good soil brings forth fruit. So it is in the John 15 metaphor. The ‘in Me’ has the same connotation as ‘the world’ or ‘the dragnet’[what we call Christendom, knowing that the true and the false are ‘in Christendom’]. For being in Christ in the world is like the wheat (*sons of the kingdom—Matt.13:38—in the*

world but not of the world). At the end of the age the good and the fruitful are kept, but the useless and unproductive are removed and burned [‘to burn them’] or thrown away [‘furnace of fire’] (compare John 15:6 with Matt.13:49-50.).

There is one thing that every horticulturist knows—he never attempts the impossible by trying to graft dead wood back into a living plant. Others would laugh him to shame. It is physically impossible to do such a thing, and it is spiritually impossible also. **The only remedy for a dead branch is to replace it with a brand new living branch (and that is called the new birth, a new creation in Christ—John 3:3** “...unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”). **This, however, is not being discussed in John 15.**

Those who misinterpret John 15:2 to mean that God ‘lifts up’ an unfruitful branch to take it to heaven by an early death, rather than ‘takes it away’ to destruction are then left with the problem of what to do with 15:6, which clearly means removal and destruction. We will discuss v.6 in due time.

Verse 3 speaks specifically to the eleven remaining apostles, assuring them of their place in the kingdom. They have been washed in the water of the Word and made holy—“clean by the word I have spoken to you” (see also Eph.5:25b-27.). Also, as John MacArthur pointed out in his book “*The Gospel According to Jesus*”, pp.170-172, the unfruitful branches ‘in’ the Vine may be considered ‘Judas branches’ because Judas Iscariot and his false ‘apostleship’ typify all of the branches that are taken away and cast out and burned. In John 13:10-11 Jesus specifically tells the twelve that they are clean, but not all, and John writes that Jesus knew who would betray Him, therefore He said “You are not all clean.”

Verse 4 makes it abundantly clear that believers can do nothing without Christ and must abide in Him to remain in His kingdom and be fruitful branches. See especially 15:8; ***“By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”*** “If you abide (continue, remain) in My word, you are My disciples indeed.” (John 8:31b). Here (15:8b) discipleship is based upon fruit bearing. Verse 3 is clearly indicating the acceptance of the remaining eleven, the opposite of rejection. I Pet.1:6 & 7 very well illustrates the process of acceptance: “In this you greatly rejoice, though...you have been

grieved by various trials, that the [genuineness] or trial (*dokimion*) of your faith... may be found (*dokimazomenou*) to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Note: that the Greek *dokimion* and *adokimos* share the same root, the great difference being the ‘a’ or alpha prefix (negative particle). The ‘a’ means ‘not’ or ‘without’. Thus, *dokimion/dokimazomenou* means **tried and approved**, whereas *adokimos* means **tried and not approved**. We have adopted this prefix convention in numerous English words: moral vs. amoral, typical vs. atypical, symmetrical vs. asymmetrical, etc., where the ‘a’ prefix indicates the exact opposite meaning from the original word. Keep this word study in mind as you continue to read.

Verse 5 identifies who Jesus is—the ‘Vine’ (see also v.1.). It also identifies, **without any room for equivocation**, true believers as the true ‘branches’. Therefore, deadwood is cast off [rejected] as branches, meaning in the similitude of real branches, but they are not authentic branches (see verse 6).

Verse 6 can be difficult unless one maintains the contextual perspective of the whole discourse of Jesus firmly in mind. Let’s take a close look at this verse:

“If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out (**eblethe** **exo/equivalent to adokimos here, for rejection is clear by context.**) as a branch and is withered, ***and they gather them up and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.***” See Matt.13:41-42 and compare to 15:6b above—“they [angels implied] gather and throw them into the fire...”. See also Heb. 6:8 –“But that which bears thorns and briars is rejected (*adokimos*), and is near to cursing, whose end is for burning (*telos eis kausin*)” conveys the same thought as John 15:6. Judgment in an eschatological sense is in view here—eternal hell. It is the person who cannot remain in the Vine, not his worthless works that is cast out. The Greek term ‘**adokimos**’ means **unapproved, worthless, rejected, not genuine, castaway, reprobate.** It is used in Rom.1:28, II Tim.3:8, Titus 1:16, II Cor.13:5-7 for ‘reprobate’, in I Cor.9:27 for ‘castaway’, and in Heb.6:8 for ‘rejected’. All of the above meanings fit the person who does not abide in Christ.

“If anyone does not abide [**remain**] in Me, he is cast out **as a branch**” This statement most logically refers back to v.2a, because Jesus now (v.5) has identified branches **as persons** who have laid claim

to kingdom citizenship. His apostles are true branches (and by broader scriptural context this also includes all true believers), but there are (and will be up to the end of the age) many who will make invalid claims (See Matt.11:12ff, John 2:23-25, and Matt.7:21-23.). These false branches (Judas branches) are not even the same species as the vine, as already mentioned above. These are interlopers who try to change and twist the words of Jesus and the requirements for kingdom citizenship, and they continue to do so today. Some of these, with their ‘gospel’ of easy belief and ‘cheap grace’ and their demands for eternal security even for reprobate ‘Christians’ are guilty of preaching another gospel (Gal.1:8 & 9). The Lord will reward them according to their words and works.

When God granted Moses’ request to see His glory (Exod.33:18-23; 34:5-7), He made a monumental proclamation in Exod.34:6-7 — ***“The LORD, The LORD GOD, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, [but] by no means clearing the guilty...”*** Thus, the Lord, though He is eternally merciful and gracious and longsuffering and full of goodness and truth and forgiveness, yet as the ‘Vinedresser’ ***He will cast out that which does not belong to the True Vine***—those who insult His grace and mercy and refuse to love, fear, and obey Him, He will reject and they will bear the eternal consequences of their sin.

We should never smugly proclaim that we are eternally secure, for that secure salvation is conditional. It is conditioned on the obedience of faith and not on profession alone (John 14:15 and many others). The Scriptures are full of warnings regarding one’s eternal destiny. Also, there are numerous admonitions to examine one’s own beliefs and life to be sure one is in the true faith that God taught in His holy word. I will list only a few:

- Ezek.18:20a—“The soul who sins shall die.”
- ***Ezek.18:24—“But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All the righteousness he has done will not be remembered: because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die.”***

- Exod.32:32-33—“Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book [of life] which You have written.” And the Lord said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot out of My book.”
- Psa.51:11— David pleads, “Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.” The sins David willfully committed were punishable by death without atonement, but God showed him mercy (though He could have remained just if He had not shown mercy).
- Luke 9:62— But Jesus said to him, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”
- Phil.2:12b,16—Paul told the Philippian Christians to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling...**holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.**”
- II Pet.1:10-11—After listing the major fruits of sanctification in the Christian life, Peter wrote, “Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, ***for if you do these things you will never stumble*** (see also **John16:1** and **Rom.9:31-33**)*; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”
*Stumbling is not only possible, but without faith, inevitable.
- ***Heb.3:14—“For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.”*** A more straightforward warning would be hard to imagine.

What, then, should we say about the many Scripture verses, especially in the New Testament, that seem to promise unconditional eternal life. Certainly, one must be very careful here. I believe the book of Hebrews gives much insight into this most vital topic. Heb.5:9 states, “And having been perfected [through suffering and trials], He became the author of eternal salvation ***to all who obey Him.***” Here, salvation is eternal, but with a condition of obedience. Then in 7:25, the writer of Hebrews state that “Christ is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him...” Is, then, the writer of this great epistle a double-minded man? Certainly he is not that! Then we must conclude that Christ is **able to save** and those who accept this

greatest of all blessings from God *must be obedient and faithful to the end*. Likewise, in John 10:27-30 it is God's ability to give and to keep that is in view. The 'sheep' must hear the Lord's voice and must follow Him to be kept. If they do not hear His voice and follow Him, they are not His 'sheep'; their shepherd is another [the devil].

The words of Jesus in John 14:15, 21, & 24 are helpful. If we love Christ, then we keep His commandments. Those who do not love Him do not keep His commandments. Those who keep His word and love Him are loved by the Father. *Persons who want a free trip to heaven without loving Christ and obeying Him are practicing self deception and will be sorely disappointed in the end*. Those who divorce repentance from salvation and justification from sanctification are making a spiritually fatal error. Salvation is free in the sense that it cannot be earned, but it cost one his life of self and sin—in exchange for a life of obedient faith, *a very good exchange*.

How one views assurance of eternal salvation will depend very much on his understanding of grace and faith. If he sees faith as belief only and grace as an entitlement of belief, then he must demand eternal security of salvation as his right because of *professed belief* (hyper or ultra dispensationalism).

On the other hand, if a person believes that faith is belief that obeys and that grace is God's gift to all who come to Him in faith, holding fast their confession and confidence by the power of God to the end, thus abiding in Christ, he is wise and blessed. See the articles on *Biblical Grace* and *The Redemptive Covenants of God* for more comprehensive coverage of teachings supporting this latter view.

How One Abides in Christ

One who believes, must love Christ and keep His commandments; and understand that as the Father loves Christ, so Christ loves those who love Him and keep His commandments (John 15:9-10, 14:15,23). "This is My commandment, that you love one another (15:12, 17). As stated previously, a true follower of Christ not only believes in Him as Savior but also obeys Him as Lord. In the Old Testament, He made the same requirements for one who would walk by faith (Deut.30:15-20,

5:29, Jer.7:22-24, and others). James said that Abraham's faith was perfected by his obedience (James 2:22) and Abraham was called a friend of God. In John 15:14, Jesus said "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you." Acceptable fruit of Christians will remain (15:16). Acceptable fruit is produced by every person who is an authentic branch of the 'Vine'.

Christ has commanded His followers to abide, *meno*, in Him (John 15:4). *Abiding in Christ is one's evidence of salvation (1 John 3:24).*

Note: One should not be confused by Paul's comments in I Cor.3, where he discusses the relative merits of his ministry and that of others such as Apollos. There, Paul decries the carnal behavior of the Corinthian believers *in one area of their lives, their envy and strife over who they are trying to follow (Paul or Apollos)*, so he points out that God will judge the merit of ministers for rewards according to how they have built on the one true foundation who is Christ. Some produce more than others, but all do produce. I Cor.3 should never be viewed as an endorsement for a so-called 'carnal Christian' doctrine, but as a caution against being a poor builder on the one true Foundation.

In all of Paul's letters, he consistently exhorts all Christian to be sanctified and fruitful and he never contradicted any teaching of Jesus. Paul's teachings in Rom.6 - 8 alone should dispel any thought of carnal Christianity. Heb.12:14 plainly states "Pursue peace with all and holiness [righteousness, sanctification], without which no one will see the Lord." Also, Gal.6:7 & 8 states, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life." Again, Rom.8:13-14 is concise and to the point on this: "For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." Christ's own are led by His Spirit (vv.9 & 14).

The true branches of the True Vine will experience joy (15:11). will not be made to stumble (16:1), but they will be hated by the world (15:18-25) even as the Lord Jesus is hated by the world. But Jesus said in 16:33, "These things I have spoken to you that in Me you may have peace. In the world, you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, *I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD.*"

General Discussion

The Dispensationalists have created a great problem with their theological model for God's word, a model which in effect disqualifies very significant portions of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as pertaining to the Gospel of Christ. Add to this list, James and I John. According to today's dispensationalism, these N.T. books principally pertain to a future dispensation of law, and not to what they call the dispensation of grace. According to this doctrinal system, mankind falls into three categories: The *natural man*, the *carnal man*, and the *spiritual man*. The creation of this unbiblical category of ***carnal man or carnal Christian*** is a matter of grave concern, for many have erred due to this doctrine that has led to a cheap grace and a false salvation concept in the minds of lost persons.

Moreover, radical Dispensationalism places the Apostle Paul into a position of disparaging God's holy and perfect law. They, apparently, do not understand that Paul used the term 'law' in more than one way. The first way is illustrated in Rom.3:20, "Therefore, by *the deeds of the law* no flesh will be justified in his sight..." ; but in 3:27, Paul contrasts the ***law of works*** with the ***law of faith***, which eliminates boasting about the deeds of the law mentioned in 3:20. The *law of works* refers to attempting self justification through meritorious keeping of the law; whereas the *law of faith* is obedience to the spirit of the law while walking by the Spirit (Rom.7:7-14) (See also article titled ***A Biblical and Contextual Examination of Rom.9:30-10:13***. One should not refer to the law in any negative or degrading way, for "the law is holy and just and good and spiritual" (from Rom.7:12 & 14). "The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of coins of gold and silver." (Psa.119:72).

In I Tim.1:8-9a, Paul tells Timothy "But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and insubordinate...". In Gal.3:21, Paul states that the law is not against the promises of God [here referring to the grace to be found in the promised Seed of Abraham, who is Christ Jesus], therefore the law cannot be antithetical to grace as the dispensationalists believe.

The beauty of adopting a **Berean** theological perspective [which I certainly advocate] (Acts 17:10-11), is that it honors the unity and integrity of the Bible and accepts God's single redemptive plan for all people of all ages (or dispensations). ***Thus, it is true that all people are saved by grace though faith, regardless of when they have lived or now live or will live.*** Belief is belief and faith is faith, attested to by obedience to God's commandments, statutes, and judgments. God made no *Covenant of Works*, but ***the Covenant of Law*** given through Moses is God's standard for righteousness that convicts of sin and leads all who will follow Him in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. ***True branches will abide in the True Vine, and God will finish by His grace the work that He has begun in the circumcised heart of every true believer, but those who practice lawlessness will die(Ezek.18:20).***

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