

Main Idea: According to Jesus, two things happen when we abide in His love, that He spells out in John 15:9-13. We’re going to consider those two evidences this morning.

- I. If we abide in His love, we will experience intimacy with Him (9-11).
  - A. It will affect my aim (9).
    1. We have received His love.
    2. We are to remain in His love.
  - B. It will affect my actions (10).
    1. When I obey His Word, I am continuing in His love.
    2. I am also keeping myself in a position where I can enjoy His blessings.
  - C. It will affect my attitude (11).
    1. Joy is found in Jesus, and nowhere else.
    2. Joy is connected to objective truth.
    3. Joy is something Jesus wants us to experience.
- II. If we abide in His love, we will experience intimacy with one another (12-13).
  - A. We have a mandate (12a).
    1. To be right with Christ, I must love you.
    2. If I don’t love you, I am not right with Him.
  - B. We have a model (12b-13).
    1. Jesus gave His life for us.
    2. We’re to do the same for each other.

Make It Personal: Am I experiencing and exhibiting His love?

We are so loved by Jesus. That’s something we don’t grasp as we ought. I know we don’t. How much does Jesus love us? This has to be one of the most staggering things Jesus ever said.

*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.*

How much does Jesus love His own? The same way His Father loves Him. With the same kind of love? Yes. Jesus says He demonstrated His love for us in the *same way* His Father has demonstrated His love for Him.

This is staggering, breath-taking, liberating, and life-transforming. All around us people are looking for love. But let’s not be abstract. *We* are looking for love, but of course, apart from grace, we look in all the wrong places, and for all the wrong reasons.

We expect people to love us, and get upset when they don’t. But of course, we’re mistaken if we think another creature can give us what God alone can provide.

This morning, as we open our Bibles to John 15, we’re going to learn about love. You say, “I thought John 15 was about life in the vine. Now it’s love?” According to Jesus, there’s a close connection between life in the vine, and love. Jesus gives the vine illustration in verses 1-8 and actually uses the word “fruit” seven times, but then seems to leave the vine analogy, and uses a form of the word “love” eight times in verses 9-17. Yet then at the end of the section, in verse 16, He mentions “fruit” again, making it clear He hasn’t changed the subject.

He’s still talking about life in the vine, in the whole passage. He wants us to know that life in the vine, which is the dependent life, is a life of fruit, and a life of fruit is a life of love. The fruit of the Spirit is *love* (Gal 5:22).

But love isn’t just the evidence of a fruitful life. It’s the motivation for it. In that order. There’s a love that *motivates*, that’s Jesus’ love for us, and that’s patterned after

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\*\*\* Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

His Father's love for Him. And then there's a love that *mimics*, that's our love for Him and each other. *Love each other as I have loved you*, He says.

That's today's message in a nutshell. Life in the vine is a life of love, experiencing it, and exhibiting it. In verses 1-8 He told us to *abide in Him*, and now in verses 9-17 He's going to tell us to *abide in His love*.

Or, to put it another way, in verses 9-16, Jesus, in essence, gives us His own exposition of the vine analogy in verses 1-8. What He illustrates in verses 1-8, He explains in verses 9-16.

According to Jesus, two things happen when we abide in His love that He spells out in verses 9-13. We're going to consider those two evidences this morning.

#### I. If we abide in His love, we will experience intimacy with Him (9-11).

To be intimate is to be near, to be close. Right here is one of the most baffling and mind-boggling truths of Scripture. The God of the universe invites us to experience intimacy with Him. He wants us to be close to Him, and took steps to make that a reality.

A lot of people don't know God in those terms. To them, He is only an Awesome Being who is far off. He is mighty. He is high and lifted up.

Granted, God is that. Yet listen to what He says about Himself in Isaiah 57:15, "For this is what the high and lofty One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, *but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit*, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite."

He offers to us intimacy. We need to know that if we want to grasp what it means to experience life in the vine. Fruitfulness is not the result of living according to a list of do's and don'ts. It's not mechanical. It's not going through routine. Fruitfulness is linked to a relationship. Fruit is the evidence of an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.

Consider Jesus' words in verses 9-11, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. <sup>10</sup> If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup> I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

In these three verses, Jesus reveals that if I am experiencing intimacy with Him, it will affect my life in three ways.

**A. It will affect my aim (9).** "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you." There it is again. How much does Jesus love His own? How much does He love us? He loves us *as* God the Father loves Him. Jesus loves us with the same type of love.

Usually, when we think of God's love, we think of His love for *us*. And certainly, He loves us (John 3:16). God the Father does love the world. And He does love His Church. Yet don't miss this. God the Father loves His Son.

How much? John 17:24 says He loved His Son before the foundation of the world. John 3:35 reveals that because the Father loves the Son, He put all things in the Son's hands. John 5:20 indicates that because of His love, the Father revealed all things to the Son.

The Father's love for His Son is eternal. It's without beginning and ending. It never fails. And it's the same type of love we can experience! (see also--John 17:26)

Don't miss the connection. Jesus said, "In the same way that the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you."

Now a question. What's our responsibility in light of His love? Jesus tells us at the end of verse 9. "Now remain in my love." Notice the connection Jesus makes...

1. *We have received His love.* Therefore...

2. *We are to remain in His love.* Please observe that this isn't optional. It's an imperative, a command. *Remain* ("continue" in the KJV). It's the same Greek word we saw in verse 4. We're to remain (abide) in Christ. We're to remain (abide) in His love.

But what does it mean to remain in Jesus' love? You say, "It sounds like this abiding in Jesus' love is kind of a mystical thing." Is that true? No, it's not. It has to do with our *aim* in life. Abiding in His love is to be our aim.

Think of it this way. Love, in verse 9, is like a *sphere*. Suppose I drew a circle on the floor. When I'm inside the circle, I'm inside the sphere of Christ's love. When I move outside of the circle, I've moved outside of the sphere of His love. Inside this circle is where we can taste the fruit, the benefits of Christ's love. As long as I'm in the sphere, I'm okay. But when I move out of the circle, I forfeit those benefits.

So Jesus says to us, "I want to shower you with the blessings of My love. Make sure you keep yourselves in the place where you can enjoy these benefits."

Picture a greenhouse in a vast desert. Imagine that you are a plant. Life inside the greenhouse is safe and conducive for fruitfulness. Outside it's barren. But suppose you said, "I'm tired of living in here. I want to go out in the world. I don't like that the Gardener makes all the decisions. I want to go where I want to go. I want to do what I want to do. I want to be free!"

That's not freedom, is it? No. That's a foolish way of thinking, and it will result in barrenness and destruction.

See the parallel? The Father is our gardener. He has designed where and how we should live if we want to enjoy fruit. When we stay in the greenhouse, when we stay within the boundaries of Christ's love, we can enjoy the blessings of His fruit.

And when we have intimacy with Christ, abiding in His love will be our aim. You say, "Just what are those boundaries' you're talking about?" Good question! Jesus answers it in verse 10. "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love."

If I am experiencing intimacy with Christ, first it will affect my *aim*. Secondly...

**B. It will affect my actions (10).** "If you obey my commands," Jesus said. What are the boundaries that mark off the sphere of Christ's love? Christ's commands. The commandments of Christ are like the walls of the greenhouse. They protect us. They guard us. They keep us in the place where we can enjoy the wonderful benefits of Christ's love.

Intimacy with Christ affects our aim—our aim ought to be to abide in His love. It also affects our actions. What did Jesus say we are to do with His commands? Obey them. And what is true if we obey His commands? "You will remain in my love," He said.

Notice that. Abiding in the love of Christ is not some abstract or mystical experience. It's very concrete and tangible. To put it simply...

1. *When I obey His Word, I am continuing in His love.* And of course, even my obedience is something He makes possible. He's the vine, we are the branches. But there's another tangible benefit. When I obey His Word...

2. *I am also keeping myself in a position where I can enjoy His blessings.*

The key to intimacy, then, is obedience.

At this point comes the objection, "Wait a minute! If you command love, it's not love, is it?"

Is it? To answer that question, let's take a look at the divine model. That's exactly what Jesus points to at the end of verse 10, "Just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love."

Let's ponder this carefully. Jesus obeyed the Father. He didn't do His own thing. He kept the Father's commands. Listen to Jesus' own words:

**John 4:34** "My food," said Jesus, "is *to do the will of him* who sent me and to finish his work."

**John 8:29** "The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for *I always do what pleases him.*"

**John 12:49** "For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me *commanded me* what to say and how to say it."

**John 14:31** "The world must learn that I love the Father and that *I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.*"

Ultimately, when facing the cross, He prayed, "Not My will, but Your will be done (Mk 14:36)." We read in Hebrews 5:8-9, "Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered<sup>9</sup> and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."

Did you catch the connection? Jesus obeyed His Father. His people obey Him. Obedience is a vital aspect of abiding. In order to be obedient, we have to die to ourselves. We make a choice to submit our will to His will.

So can true love be commanded? Yes, because biblical love is not initially, nor fundamentally a feeling, but a choice, an act of the will. Jesus loved His Father, so He obeyed Him, and in so doing, remained in His love.

The Bible presents Jesus as our Redeemer and our Savior, and He certainly is that. But He's also something else. He's our model. He's our example. "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, *just as I have obeyed* my Father's commands and remain in his love."

Do you feel the nearness of your Savior? If not, take inventory right here. Are you obeying His commands? Are you treating your spouse the way He said? Are you honoring your parents? Are you giving the first-fruits of your income to Him? Are you harboring bitterness towards anyone? Do you have any known sin in your life? Have you been looking at things He forbids?

To remain in His life we must *obey Him*. We're not talking about earning His life. He loved us when we were unlovely and gave His life as a sacrifice for us on the cross, and then conquered death to save us. We become His people simply by repenting and placing our trust in Him. And then, as His blood-bought people, we are secure in Him (John 10:28).

But to remain in His love—to remain in the "greenhouse" and experience the blessings of His abiding presence—we must obey Him.

If I am experiencing intimacy with Christ, it will affect my life in a third way. Intimacy with Christ affects my aim (verse 9), my actions (verse 10), and...

**C. It will affect my attitude (11).** "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete." The key word is *joy*.

I find the Lord's perspective so stunning. Remember, this was His hour of greatest need. Soon, He will be on the cross, enduring the horrid penalty of hell. Yet He talks about joy, first, His own joy. "I have told you this so that *my joy may be in you.*" And then His followers' joy. "And *your joy may be complete.*" To the very end, His focus is on others.

And this is what He offers to His people. *I am the vine, you are the branches.* As branches connected to Him, we have the capacity to experience what He experienced. In this case, it's joy in the most trying of circumstances.

I had the great honor this week to hold my mother's hand, with my sister on the other side of her hospital bed, as we sang one of her favorites...

*I heard an old, old story, how a Savior came from Glory  
How He gave His life on Calvary, to save a wretch like me.  
I heard about his groaning, of his precious blood's atoning,  
Then I repented of my sins, and won the Victory.*

*Oh, Victory in Jesus, my Savior forever  
He sought me and he bought me with His redeeming blood  
He loved me ere I knew Him, and all my love is due Him  
He plunged me to Victory, beneath the cleansing flood.*

He loved me ere I knew Him, and all my love is due Him. That's it. It's when we abide in Christ's love that we experience joy.

Based on verse 11, I'd like to make three observations about joy.

1. *Joy is found in Jesus, and nowhere else.* "My joy may be in you," Jesus said. Joy is a by-product of an intimate walk with Christ. Jesus doesn't want us to settle for a deficient joy. The world offers counterfeit joy, but it's like fizz in a can of pop. It doesn't last. People can take away my happiness, but they can't touch my joy because joy is wrapped up in the person of Jesus Christ who Himself gives me His joy.<sup>1</sup>

2. *Joy is connected to objective truth.* "I have told you *this* ["these things" in the KJV] so that my joy may be in you." Joy is not a sentimental feeling. It's not something we work up. It's connected to "this," to "these things," to the truth Jesus is speaking.

That's why we do so much teaching at this church. To experience joy, you must know truth.

3. *Joy is something Jesus wants us to experience.* "That your joy may be *complete*." Jesus doesn't dangle joy in front of us like the proverbial carrot in front of the horse. He has joy (Heb 12:2). He offers us joy.

So if joy is found in Jesus and nowhere else, is connected to the objective truth of the Scriptures, and is something Jesus wants His own to experience, then joy is something foreign to the world. Only disciples of Christ are candidates for true joy.

C. S. Lewis put it this way in his classic observation, "Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition, when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in the slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

Do you have joy in your life? True joy belongs to those who are intimately connected to Christ.

To summarize what we've seen so far, if we are going to experience intimacy with Christ, there are three things He offers with which we must come to grips in our lives—His love, His commands, and His joy. My aim must be to remain in His love. My actions must be governed by His commands. And my attitude must demonstrate His joy.

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hull writes, "Joy is a supernatural sense of well-being that comes from knowing that we are pleasing to God."

Jim Elliot, martyred missionary to the Auca Indians, once prayed, “Lord, make my way prosperous, not that I may achieve high station, but that my life may be an exhibit to the value of knowing God.”

Psalm 91:1 says, "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

How much do you value intimacy with Christ in your life? Can you say, as did Fanny Crosby...?

*Thou my everlasting portion, more than friend or life to me;  
All along my pilgrim journey, Savior, let me walk with Thee.  
Close to Thee, close to Thee, Close to Thee, close to Thee;  
All along my pilgrim journey, Savior, let me walk with Thee.<sup>2</sup>*

According to Jesus, two things happen when we abide in His love. First, He says we will experience intimacy with Him. Here’s the second.

## II. If we abide in His love, we will experience intimacy with one another (12-13).

And why is that? For two reasons...

**A. We have a mandate (12a).** Jesus says, “My command is this: Love each other.”

Of course, it wasn’t the first time Jesus gave the Eleven this command that night. Earlier He told them in John 13:34-35, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Love is to be the trademark of Jesus' followers. We have the capacity to love one another because we’re connected to Christ, who is love. But we also have a responsibility to love each other. This is a command.

1. *To be right with Christ, I must love you. And...*

2. *If I don’t love you, I am not right with Him.* I am not *abiding* in Him, for if I were, I would see the evidence of His love going your way. “My *command* is this,” Jesus said, “Love each other.”

How much are we to love each other? Notice, in addition to a mandate...

**B. We have a model (12b-13).** “Love each other *as I have loved you.*” Now that’s a high standard! We are to love as He loved.

Remember the context. He is the vine. We are the branches. He wants to reproduce His life, His love, in and through us. We ought to resemble Him. By the way we treat each other, we ought to give evidence of His presence in our lives.

Now answer this. What’s the greatest demonstration of love a person can give? Here’s Jesus’ answer. Verse 13—“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”

Self-sacrifice.

Obviously, that’s exactly what Jesus Himself would do in a matter of hours. Lay down His life for His friends. But His challenge to us is to show the same kind of selfless, self-sacrificing love to each other.

Let that sink in...

1. *Jesus gave His life for us.* That’s a fact. If we’re Christian, it’s the most cherished fact of our lives. But here the One who gave His life for us says...

2. *We’re to do the same for each other.*

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<sup>2</sup> *Close to Thee*, #365, by Fanny Crosby

Paul pointed to Christ's model in Ephesians 5:2, "Live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Do as Christ did.

The apostle John made the same connection in 1 John 3:16, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."

You say, "But it's hard to love that way!" Actually, it's more than hard. On our own strength, it's impossible. But we're not on our own, right? We're branches connected to the vine, and as such, His life flows through us! When we abide in Him.

D.A. Carson says it well, "The believer who hungers for deep intimacy with Jesus Christ must follow this new command. It is not easy. The unlovely ones in the brotherhood bring out the worst in me. The whiners get on my nerves. The gossips and the arrogant, the immature and the silly, conspire to drain my resolve. But the answer is to remember that the branch can do nothing apart from the vine, and that Jesus himself loved his friends, his unlovely, whining, gossipy, arrogant, immature and silly friends, enough to die for them."<sup>3</sup>

Brothers and sisters, this is Christianity 101. According to Jesus' mandate and model, if we've experienced Jesus' love, we must love each other. Not just tolerate, but *love*.

I must reach out and get involved in sacrificial ways to meet the needs of my brothers and sisters—like Jesus did with me. No it's not easy, but it's absolutely essential. It's our mandate, one which our Savior modeled. And it's the evidence that we are abiding in His love.

In his classic, *A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens tells us about the character Charles Darnay, who, though innocent, was unjustly found guilty during the French Revolution. While in prison awaiting execution, a friend who resembled him by the name of Sydney Carton secretly drugged him, exchanged clothes, and took his place at the guillotine the next morning. His life was spared because his friend died for him."<sup>4</sup>

In John 15 Jesus is saying that kind of love—sacrificial love—is to be our badge. We ought to be known as people who day by day look for ways to give of ourselves for the good of one another.

*Love each other as I have loved you.*

It's so encouraging to see this kind of love being expressed in our church family. When our Sunday School teachers carve out hours of time each week to feed their classes God's Word, that's what Jesus did, and that's love. When our nursery workers pick up the children and care for their needs, that's what Jesus did, and that's love. When the sick are visited, when food is shared, when those in sin are warned, this is what Jesus did, and it's love.

Do expressions of love make you weary? Yes. Do they at times seem unappreciated? Yes. But when these, and countless other expressions of daily love take place in this church family, the world is seeing evidence that we are connected to Christ, that we are abiding in His love.

By the way, if we are *not* loving our brothers and sisters in the tangible ways God places before us, they are not the only ones who will miss out. We will too. How so? Jesus makes it clear that our intimacy with Him and our intimacy with each other go hand

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<sup>3</sup> D. A. Carson, p. 103.

<sup>4</sup> As told by John MacArthur, p. 60.

in hand. If I'm withholding my love from you, I won't experience the fullness of His love.

The apostle John talked to believers about this connection in 1 John 4:7-12: "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> *Whoever does not love does not know God*, because God is love. <sup>9</sup> This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup> This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. <sup>11</sup> Dear friends, *since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another*. <sup>12</sup> No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us."

Did you catch those final words? If we love one another, what is true? God "lives" in us—the Greek word is *meno*. God *abides* in us.

This morning, we've seen two evidences of abiding in Christ's love. If we abide in Christ's love, we will experience intimacy with Him, and then intimacy with one another. This isn't something we strive to attain. It's something He generates in and through us. He is the vine, and we are the branches.

*I stand amazed in the presence  
Of Jesus the Nazarene,  
And wonder how He could love me,  
A sinner, condemned, unclean.*

*He took my sins and my sorrows,  
He made them His very own;  
He bore the burden to Calvary,  
And suffered and died alone.*

*When with the ransomed in glory  
His face I at last shall see,  
'Twill be my joy through the ages  
To sing of His love for me.*

*O how marvelous! O how wonderful!  
And my song shall ever be:  
O how marvelous! O how wonderful!  
Is my Savior's love for me!<sup>5</sup>*

Make It Personal: Am I experiencing and exhibiting His love?

Both are vital. First, *experiencing*. Then, *exhibiting*. In that order.

Oh, how He loves you! That's a fact, for He gave Himself for you. But are you experiencing that love? Are you feeling the weight and wonder of it? And then, are you cooperating with Him as He seeks to exhibit His matchless love to others?

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<sup>5</sup> Charles H. Gabriel