

“This is my commandment, that you love one another
as I have loved you.” John 15:12

No One Has Greater Love than This

JOHN 15:9–17 ⁹*As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.*

¹²*“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.*

In his first letter, John summarizes his teaching about divine love: “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them” (1 John 4:16). Because God is love itself, love is the divine energy that

binds the Father with Jesus, and Jesus with his followers. In John's gospel, Jesus teaches his disciples that because the Father has loved him and Jesus has loved his disciples, their task is essentially this: "Abide in my love" (verse 9). As Jesus responded to the Father's love with obedient, sacrificial love for others, so the disciples must respond to the love of Jesus with obedient, self-giving love for one another (verse 10). All that Jesus asks of his followers can be summarized in one great commandment: "Love one another as I have loved you" (verse 12).

This energy of divine love—the Father for Jesus, Jesus for his disciples, and disciples for one another—demonstrates that the obedience demanded in the Christian life is not grudging compliance. The commandments of Jesus are not to be obeyed out of a sense of obligation or fear; rather they are motivated by love and their purpose is joy. Jesus tells his disciples that he has given all of these teachings "so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete" (verse 11). This is the joy that Scripture anticipated for the age of the Messiah. This complete joy is an experience of God's life, the kind of lasting joy that no sadness or hardship in life can take away.

Abiding in the love of Jesus is not just a warm feeling or sentimental emotion. Abiding is not static; it means doing something. Loving one another means loving as Jesus loves. It means self-giving for others, even laying down one's life for one's friends (verse 13). This is the example Jesus sets, symbolically in the foot washing and climactically in his death on the cross. Abiding in him, like branches on the vine, means following his example of service, even at the cost of one's life.

Though Jesus had previously spoken of his disciples as servants, he now chooses another term to express the type of relationship he desires with those who follow him. Though a servant might be loved by his master, Jesus uses the word "friend" to call particular attention to his love for his disciples (verse 15). A master generally tells his servants only what they need to know to do their job; "the servant does not know what his master is doing." However, friendship means sharing knowledge and insight: "I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father."

Only Moses, the greatest figure of the Hebrew Scriptures, was privileged to speak to God as a "friend" (Exod 33:11), a relationship that seemed unattainable to the average Israelite. Yet Jesus calls his disciples "friends," and like a true friend, Jesus shares the best of himself with his disciples. He lays down

his life for them (verse 13), and he offers them the key to his Father's house with all its riches. The relationship of servant and master is based on obligation and earned privileges, while the relationship of friends is rooted in freedom and generosity. As friends of Jesus, disciples need only ask for what we need from the riches in our Father's house: "The Father will give you whatever you ask in my name" (verse 16). The Father's love that we experience in Jesus is not something that we have earned or even asked for. Jesus says, "You did not choose me but I chose you." This unearned, undeserved gift of friendship gives disciples the freedom and the motivation we need to "bear fruit that will last."

Reflection and discussion

- In what ways has Jesus convinced me that love is the central dynamic of the Christian life? How has he made me more aware of the quality of that love?

- In what ways are these verses an explanation of Jesus' image of the vine and the branches? What is the fruit that will last?

- How does Jesus give us complete joy (verse 11)? How is this joy different from the temporary happiness that I sometimes feel?

- Why do people sometimes feel like a “servant” to Jesus, rather than a “friend”? What are the main differences?

- What do I find comforting and challenging about the fact that Jesus calls me his “friend”?

Prayer

Son of the Father, give me your Spirit of truth to give me confidence in my friendship with you. Thank you for the riches you offer me as your friend, and help me to respond to your love by the quality of my life.