

Exegesis of John 15:1-11

**A Paper
Submitted to Dr. Fred Chay
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Scottsdale, Arizona**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for
Biblical Interpretation**

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4-January-2004**

Observations In John 15:1-1

Verse 1:

As Jesus is not literally a 'true vine', Jesus is using a literary device to convey an idea.

In this literary device:

Jesus is the true vine

Jesus' Father is the vinedresser

Verse 2:

Father takes away (αἰρεῖ) branches that *do not* bear fruit

Father prunes (καθαίρει) branches that *do* bear fruit

Verse 3:

Some group (ὕμεις) Jesus is addressing is already pruned (καθαροί) because of the word which he has spoken to them.

Verse 4:

Jesus commands this group to abide (μείνατε) in Jesus and Jesus in them.

Jesus compares the purpose of this abiding to a branch abiding in a vine being the only way for it to bear fruit, and if it does, it will bear fruit. (cf. v. 5)

Verse 5:

Jesus confirms that this group who he is addressing are the branches in this literary device.

Verse 6:

A one which doesn't abide, as a branch, is thrown out (εβλήθη), is withered (εξηρανόθη) (observe passive), and some group gathers (συναγουσιν) them and throws them (βαλλουσιν) into the fire.

Verse 7:

If Jesus' words abide in the abiding ones of this group who He is addressing, they may ask what they will and it will be done for them.

Verse 8:

When abiding ones bear much fruit, the Father is glorified, abiding ones will be Jesus' disciples.

Verse 9:

Jesus compares the Father's relationship with Him with Jesus relationship with this group He

is addressing:

Father Loves Jesus : Jesus Loves addressed group.

Jesus commands this group to abide in his love.

Verse 10:

Jesus keeps the Father's commandments (εντολας) and abides in His Love : If this group keeps Jesus commandments they will abide in Jesus' Love.

If this group keeps Jesus' commandments, they will abide in His love

Verse 11:

Jesus has spoken these things to the purpose that His joy will remain in this group, and that their joy may be full.

Chart

Vine metaphor v.1-6	Explanation, application v.7-11
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Verses	Metaphor Atom	Reality Atom
1;5	True Vine	Jesus
1	Vinedresser	Father
5	Branch	Individual in Jesus' addressed group (hereafter PERSON)
7;8	Fruit	Jesus' desire realized
7;8;11	Bear fruit	Jesus' words producing good requests to God and God working to fulfill requests; Jesus' joy in person and person's joy made full.
7;8;9;10;12	Branch abide in vine	Jesus' words abide in person. Prove to be disciple. Person abides in Jesus' Love by keeping Jesus' commandments. Commandment = Love one another.
7;8	Abiding branches	Jesus' disciples.
	Non-Abiding branches	Not Jesus' disciples.
2	Fruitless branches vinedresser takes away	Not Jesus' disciples.
2	Fruitful branches vinedresser prunes	Jesus' word has something to do with this.
2	Pruned so that more fruit they will bear	
4;5	Branches that don't abide in vine cannot bear fruit	Person must abide in Jesus or cannot bear fruit
5;7	Branches that abide in vine will bear fruit	Person abiding in Jesus will bear much fruit. Ask what they wish and it will be done. Prove to be Jesus' disciple.
6	Branches that don't abide in the vine are thrown away	Harsh warning to abide
6	Branches that are thrown away dry up	"
6	Branches that dry up are gathered and thrown into the fire	"

In John, Chapter 15, Verses 1-11, we find Jesus using a metaphor to teach His disciples their need to abide in Him. Our Lord stresses the importance of abiding by showing its necessity for effectiveness and by warning of consequences for not abiding. In the immediate context, some elements of the metaphor that Jesus presents are **explicitly** defined, others are fairly clear from the metaphor, though not necessarily specific:

- o **Vine** - **Jesus**
- o **Vinedresser** - **Jesus' Father**
- o **Branches** - **People Jesus is addressing who are 'in' Him**
- o **'You all'** - **People Jesus is addressing**
- o They - Ones who gather and burn branches
- o Them - People 'in' Jesus who do not abide in Him
- o abide - Remain in
- o takes away - To cause to NOT abide; simple, to remove from

Jesus uses a metaphor to related to the people of the time through the common vocation of vine horticulture practiced throughout the region. Insight into vine horticulture can be seen from this excerpt on the subject from The International Bible Encyclopedia:

The mountain regions of Judea and Samaria, often little suited to cereals, have always proved highly adapted to vine culture. The stones must first be gathered out and utilized for the construction of a protecting wall or of terraces or as the bases of towers (Isa 5:2; Mt 21:33). Every ancient vineyard had its wine press cut in a sheet of rock appearing at the surface. As a rule the vinestocks lie along the ground, many of the fruit-bearing branches falling over the terraces (compare Ge 49:22); in some districts the end of the vine-stock is raised by means of a cleft stick a foot or more above the surface; exceptionally the vine branches climb into trees, and before a dwelling-house they are sometimes supported upon poles to form a bower (compare 1Ki 4:25 , etc.).The cultivation of the vine requires constant care or the fruit will very soon degenerate. After the rains the loosely made walls require to have breaches repaired; the ground must be plowed or harrowed and cleared of weeds--contrast with this the vineyard of the sluggard (Pr 24:30-31); in the early spring the plants must be pruned by cutting off dead and fruitless branches (Le 25:3,4; Isa 5:6) which are gathered and burned (Joh 15:6). As the grapes ripen they must be watched to keep off jackals and foxes (So 2:15), and in some districts even wild boars (Ps 80:13). The watchman is stationed in one of the towers and overlooks a considerable area. When the grape season comes, the whole family of the owner frequently take their residence in a booth constructed upon one of the larger towers and remain there until the grapes are practically finished. It is a time of special happiness (compare Isa 16:10). The gleanings are left to the poor of the village or town (Le 19:10; De 24:21; Jud 8:2; Isa 17:6; 24:13; Jer 49:9; Mic 7:1). In the late summer the vineyards are a beautiful mass of green, as contrasted with the dried-up parched land around, but in the autumn the leaves are sere and yellow (Isa 34:4), and the place desolate.

The time and occasion of this passage is near the end of Jesus' ministry, during Passover. Details of a Passover meal found detailed in The International Bible Encyclopedia are as follows:

The Passover was the annual Hebrew festival on the evening of the 14th day of the month of 'Abhibh (Abib) or Nisan, as it was called in later times. It was followed by, and closely connected with, a 7 days' festival of matstsoth, or unleavened bread, to which the name Passover was also applied by extension (Le 23:5). Both were distinctly connected with the Exodus, which, according to tradition, they commemorate; the Passover being in imitation of the last meal in Egypt, eaten in preparation for the journey, while Yahweh, passing over the houses of the Hebrews, was slaying the firstborn of Egypt (Ex 12:12 f; 13:2,12); the matstsoth festival being in memory of the first days of the journey during which this bread of haste was eaten (Ex 12:14-20).

The ordinance of pecach mitsrayim, the last meal in Egypt, included the following provisions:

- (1) the taking of a lamb, or kid without blemish, for each household on the 10th of the month;
- (2) the killing of the lamb on the 14th at even;
- (3) the sprinkling of the blood on doorposts and lintels of the houses in which it was to be eaten;
- (4) the roasting of the lamb with fire, its head with its legs and inwards--the lamb was not to be eaten raw nor sodden (bashal) with water;
- (5) the eating of unleavened bread and bitter herbs;
- (6) eating in haste, with loins girded, shoes on the feet, and staff in hand;
- (7) and remaining in the house until the morning;
- (8) the burning of all that remained; the Passover could be eaten only during the night (Ex 12:1-23).

Examining the immediate Scripture context, we find this passage in Jesus' last address to His disciples, summarizing His ministry and preparing them to begin their ministry after His time on earth, which would soon be complete. Starting in John 13, Jesus exemplifies a humble servant to His close group of followers during his last meal. He then delivers the troubling news that one of them would betray Him, followed by the disconcerting announcement that He must return to the Father. In Chapter 14, Jesus proceeds to encourage His disciples, after they seemingly are distraught from the news that they cannot physically follow Jesus where He plans to go next. He concludes His consolation with a promise that the Holy Spirit will be with them after He departs. The beginning of Chapter 15 is our text, at hand, and seems to address their perseverance as His

followers. Immediately following our text, beginning in verse 15, Jesus begins to give them future instruction and foretelling of times regarding when He is gone. This continues through Chapter 16.

John 15 occurs at the turning of the times. All the Law and Prophets up to and including John foretell the coming of God's Salvation for His people. In times past, God had overlooked the sins previously committed by men who desired to follow Him. Now He was about to justify that action by paying the price for those sins, and all sins to come.

What is evident in these Chapters of Scripture is the amplitude of references to the theme of 'love'. Throughout this entire section of Scripture, Jesus impresses the imperative for His disciples to **love one another**. The relationship and love between all three entities: Jesus, the Father, and the disciples, is developed. We see **Jesus loving "His own** which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John 13:1, 23; 15:9, 12, 13). We see **Jesus' love for the Father** declared (John 14:31). We see the **Father's love for Jesus** expressed (John 15:9,10;17:23,24,26). And we also see the **Father's love for the disciples** conveyed (John 14:21, 23; 16:27; 17:23).

The remaining 3 relationships are all our part if we consider ourselves disciples of Jesus. It seems expected that the **disciples** understand that they need to **love both Jesus and the Father**. The verses addressing these relationships are not directed at convincing His followers that they should; but instead, they are instructional, addressing how this is to be gone about. In John 14:15, Jesus tells us "If ye **love Me, keep My command-ments**." John 14:21 also stresses this same action, "He that hath My **commandments**, and **keepeth** them, **he it is that loveth Me**: and **he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father**, and **I will love him**, and will **manifest Myself to him**." John 14:23 and 24 repeat again this same mandate, and confirm the relationship by restating the same fact in both the positive and negative, "Jesus answered and said unto him, `If a man **love Me**, he will **keep My words: and My Father will love him**, and **We will come unto him**, and **make Our abode with him**. **He that loveth Me not keepeth not My sayings**: and the word which ye hear is not Mine, but the Father's which sent Me." Then we come to our focus passage of Scripture where we find an

astonishing statement by Jesus which holds His love/obedience relationship to the Father next to our love/obedience for Him, “If ye **keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love.**” (John 15:10).

At this concluding time in Jesus' ministry here on earth, He impresses the importance of *abiding*-- or simply, *remaining in*-- His love by keeping His commandments (εντολας). This may seem alarming; are we to understand our Lord a legalist and a fickle Saviour? This, most certainly, cannot be our conclusion. Our answer may lie in a correct understanding of The Law which our Lord came to write on the heart of His follower. And over these 4 Chapters the single command that He mentions regards the last of the final three relationships.

Jesus, no less than three times, repeats His commandment that His **disciples should “love one another”** (John 13:34,35;15:12;15:17). Three times Jesus relates the keeping of this command to *abiding* in His love.

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another.” (John 13:34-35)

“If ye love Me, keep My commandments. (John 14:15)

“As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you: continue ye in My love. If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love.... This is My commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.” (John 15:9-12)

“These things I command you, that ye love one another.” (John 15:17)

In another Gospel, we see Jesus plainly addressing this same group of entities: God, mankind, and a commandment for relationships between them: “Jesus said unto him, **Thou shalt love the Lord thy God** with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the **first and great commandment**. And the second is like unto it, **Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself**. **On these two commandments hang all the law and the**

prophets.” (Matthew 22:37-40)

Jesus' mission to internalize the Law in the hearts of His people was nothing new (“Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt **love thy neighbour as thyself**: I am the LORD.” (Leviticus 19:18)), though it was very new to the religious leaders of the time. Judea being under Roman rule by the hand of Pontius Pilate, the Jewish Nation was allowed some religious government of itself, as long as peace was kept. The Sanhedrin assembly of Jewish leaders was headed by Caiaphas, the High Priest, and Annas, his associate High Priest father in law. Drawn sharply between 2 major sects, the Pharisees-- a more conservative party-- and the Sadducees-- their liberal counterpart-- sticklers to the rules they had become, with blackened hearts and whitewashed walls. Jesus was never as harsh as when rebuking these religious authorities for their heartless, loveless, legalistic rule of God's children. They were in expectation of a Messiah that would save them from the Roman oppressors of the time. God intended to save His people from a much blacker oppression which had turned His people's hearts to stone and conducted by these very men.

Jesus' mission was to be Saviour of the World-- to seek and to save that which was lost. Nowhere can we see Jesus pressing the urgency of His central message better than here, in His summary to His disciples at the end of His ministry.

How often do we pass up loving an unsaved friend by neglecting to give them a ride to the airport because we need to make it to church on time. How many times do we refuse to love the unsaved because they have habits and habitats from which our churches shun association. How many times would Jesus have been overlooked by our religious leaders of today as they go about their busy church schedules doing all the right things and yet neglecting the summary of all those things. Or how often do we, today, read Scripture out of a desire to solidify our systematic theology, all the while neglecting the heart and purpose of our Lord in what we read.

“If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.” (John 15:10)

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

Appendix A: Verses in John and the Love word used

Verse	Text	Love Word
John 13:1	Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.	Αγαπησας
John 13:23	Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved.	ηγαπα
John 13:34	"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another."	ηγαπησα
John 13:35	"By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another."	αγαπην
John 14:15	"If ye love Me, keep My commandments."	αγαπατε
John 14:21	"He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him."	αγαπων
John 14:23	Jesus answered and said unto him, "If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love Him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him."	αγαπα
John 14:24	"He that loveth Me not keepeth not My sayings: and the word which ye hear is not Mine, but the Father's which sent Me."	αγαπων
John 14:28	"Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved Me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for My Father is greater than I."	ηγαπατε
John 14:31	"But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence."	αγαπω
John 15:9	"As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you: continue ye in My love."	αγαπη
John 15:10	"If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love."	αγαπη
John 15:12	"This is My commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you."	αγαπατε

Verse	Text	Love Word
John 15:13	"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."	αγαπην
John 15:17	"These things I command you, that ye love one another."	αγαπατε
John 15:19	"If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."	φιλει
John 16:27	"For the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God."	φιλει
John 17:23	"I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me."	ηγαπησας
John 17:24	"Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world."	ηγαπησας
John 17:26	"And I have declared unto them Thy Name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them."	αγαπατε