

The Disciples' Relationship to The World

John 15:12-17 NAS

¹² *"This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.*

¹³ *"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.*

¹⁴ *"You are My friends if you do what I command you.*

¹⁵ *"No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but **I have called you friends**, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.*

¹⁶ *"You did not choose Me but **I chose you**, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.*

¹⁷ *"This I command you, that you love one another.*

If we were to stop right now and take a quiz on the main point of this passage, what would you say it to be? Love other people? Obey all of Jesus' commands? The promise of answered prayer? Bearing fruit for God? Jesus' love for us? All of the above? You might want to give some thought to what your answer might be as we look more carefully at this passage.

And in doing so we would also suggest reading what John wrote in **1 John 4:17 (NLT)**:

¹⁷ *And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world.*

Now most of us like to hear interesting stories, and quite often a story is the best way to nail down a point. We have several stories that we believe will help give you a better understanding of this passage.

Longest Love Letter

"The longest—and simplest—love letter ever written was the work of a Parisian painter named Marcel de Leclure in 1875. The woman addressed was Magdalene de Villalore, his aristocratic light of love. The letter contained the phrase 'jevous aime,' which means 'I Love You,' 1,875,000 times—a thousand times the calendar year of the date. The remarkable lover did not pen the letter with his own hand. He hired a scribe. A lazy type could have instructed the secretary: 'Write the loving statement 1,875,000 times.' But Leclure was too entranced with the sound of the three words. He dictated it word for

word and had the hired man repeat it verbatim. All in all therefore the phrase was uttered orally and in writing 5,625,000 times—before it reached its destination. Never was love made manifest by as great an expenditure of time and effort.”¹

Love Over Will Power

“Aleida Huissen, 78, of Rotterdam, Netherlands, had been smoking for 50 years. And for 50 years she had been trying to give up her harmful habit. But she had not been successful—that is, until one significant event occurred. She finally gave up cigarettes, cigars, and pipes. The secret? Leo Jansen, 79, proposed marriage to her, but refused to go through with the wedding until Aleida gave up smoking. Says Aleida now: “Will power never was enough to get me off the tobacco habit. Love did it.”²

Sparing Enemy For God’s Work

“Duncan McColl, a British soldier in the Revolutionary War, lived through a dangerous assignment. He was protected by an American officer who commanded his men: ‘Hold your fire. That man has work for God to do.’

“The officer proved right. Duncan McColl became a minister when the war was over, and built a church on the Canadian side of the St. Croix River. Members came from both Canada and Maine.

“When the War of 1812 came on, McColl told his people that they were brothers in Christ. So they ignored the war and continued worshipping together.

“Today the same spirit of fellowship and friendliness still prevails in the sister towns of St. Stephen and Calais. Though separated by a national border, the Americans still cross the river to attend church.

“A fire in one town is a call for volunteer fire fighters and equipment from the other town. On the Fourth of July the Canadian Mounties parade with the Americans; in return state troopers from Maine, and various bands cross the river to help their neighbors honor their Queen.”³

Giving His Last Biscuit

“Sir Ernest Shackleton was asked to tell of his most terrible moment in the Arctic. And he said his worst was one night in an emergency hut. He and his fellows were lying there; he rather apart from the rest. They had given out the ration of the last biscuits. There was nothing more to divide. Every man thought the other was asleep.

“He sensed a stealthy movement and saw one of the men turning to see how the others were faring. He made up his mind that all were asleep and then stretched over the next

¹ Tan, Paul Lee: Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers. Garland TX: Bible Communications, 1996, c1979. **Some synonyms substituted.**

² Ibid. (Minor tense changes)

³ Ibid.

man and took his biscuit bag and removed the biscuit. Shackleton lived through an eternity of suspense. He would have trusted his life in the hands of that man. Was he turning out a thief under terribly tragic circumstances? Stealing a man's last biscuit! Then Shackleton sensed another movement. He saw the man open his own box, take the biscuit out of his own bag, put it in his comrade's, return the man's biscuit, and stealthily put the bag back at the man's side. Shackleton said, "I dare not tell you that man's name. I felt that act was a secret between himself and God."⁴

Francis Of Assisi Kissed The Leper

"Francis of Assisi was terrified of leprosy. And one day, full in the narrow path that he was traveling, he saw, horribly white in the sunshine, a leper! Instinctively his heart shrank back, recoiling shudderingly from the contamination of that loathsome disease. But then he rallied; and, ashamed of himself, ran and cast his arms about the sufferer's neck, kissed him, and then passed on. A moment later he looked back, and there was no one there, only the empty road in the hot sunlight. All his days thereafter he was sure it was no leper, but Christ Himself whom he had met."⁵

We hope these stories have been helpful in giving you a feeling for what Jesus is trying to convey in John 15:12-17. Let us now go back and get the best understanding we can of this essentially critical passage for each and every practicing Christian.

John 15:12 NAS:

¹² *"This is My commandment, that you **love one another**, just as I have loved you.*

One command was given by Jesus to believers to help them be obedient to almost all of Jesus' commands, and that was for them to have a mutual love for one another. Literally "love one another" means "keep on loving one another."⁶ This included, among other things, nurturing and caring for one another. The example for that kind of love was to be found in the humble sacrificial service of Jesus Christ. They were to care for one another in the same way Jesus cared for them. They were to put the needs of their fellow Christians ahead of their own needs. To love like that would be to love like Jesus. That kind of living and loving would produce the most satisfying and rewarding life possible.

If we had a dollar for every time we have heard this verse or read this verse or heard or read some reference to this verse, most of us would probably be pretty wealthy people. "Love one another" may be the most recognized phrase in the Bible for people all over the world. But how many people if asked would know the full meaning of this phrase? Well, if someone is not a Christian that would undoubtedly prevent them from providing an answer. But I wonder how many Christians even know its full meaning. It takes a

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Word Pictures In The N.T.*, John 15:12; Non-final use of βίá [*hina*], introducing a subject clause in apposition with Ἰντολῆς [*entolē*] (commandment) and the present active subjunctive of ἄγαπάω [*agapaō*], "that ye keep on loving one another."

great deal of Scripture knowledge to understand what it means to love one another. You see, many people cannot relate to love or know the feeling of love because of a number of environmental and genetic factors including parenting, school experiences, the kind of friends one chose while growing up, sexual addictions, being abused, what one sees when they look in the mirror, height, weight, size of one's nose, ears, breasts, and a bunch of other things.

Speaking for myself (Ron Teed), I still cannot feel a sense of trust that someone could truly love me. I am relatively certain that this could be traced to my formative years while I was growing up, but I am not going to go there because even though my parents made mistakes and were not openly expressive of feelings of love, I know in my heart that they wanted the best for me, made many sacrifices for me, and tried to do the best they could with what they had. I can only imagine what my children might write about me on this subject if they were ever asked to do so.

My parents, by the way, were not "Christians," they were "Lutherans." If that gives you a chuckle, try to think of people you might know who call themselves Christians and never go to church. My mom and dad did not understand the concept of Jesus Christ as a loving Savior who died for their sins. In fact they had no interest in such things. They just tried to be good people who did what was good and right in the eyes of their community. They would proudly state that they were Lutherans and would attend church on Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, and perhaps a few other times when there were special occasions. I can tell you from personal experience that they were good people, in fact they were very good people. My father owned a hardware store and I do not believe he ever took advantage of or cheated anyone. In fact I can remember times when he received calls in the evening from customers who had an emergency situation and needed things like plumbing or electrical supplies to take care of that emergency. Remember this was in the "old days" when you could not get a plumber or electrician after 5:00 P.M. and stores closed at 5:00 or 6:00 P.M. in the evening and were for the most part closed on Sundays. My dad would get in the car, go down and open the store, and give the customer what he needed. There were times when he even accompanied them home and fixed the problem himself at no charge for those who were not very handy around the house.

They taught me values that are still ingrained in me today. If I did anything wrong when I was a kid, I often paid for it with a good old-fashioned beating which sometimes I felt to be too severe. I was consciously aware of my behavior because I did not want to do anything that would upset my dad and warrant his punishment. My parents were not well educated but they wanted the best possible education for me and they worked very hard to save money for that day. There was never any question about whether I would go to college. The only question was where I would go to college.

If I were to go to a psychologist or psychiatrist today and tell them about my inability to believe I am worthy of being loved, they would undoubtedly trace the problem to my childhood. But let me just say this: I consider myself fortunate to have been provided the opportunities I had as a child. I grew up in a wonderful neighborhood and a wonderful time in the United States. I attended great schools and had exceptional teachers who not

only provided a quality education but also implanted in me a desire to learn. For the most part I would change very little if I had the opportunity to do so. But before I really get carried away on my past I want to get to the point I have been leading up to, and that is that there was a major missing piece to the puzzle of my life and that was Jesus Christ.

Although I was taught to develop integrity, honesty, moral values, and to be a good all-around person, it was clear to me who I was to develop all of these qualities for, and that was me. Neither my parents nor I knew anything about the love that Jesus was talking about in verse twelve of John fifteen. They were good people and did good things because they wanted their friends and neighbors to see them as being good and thereby letting them know how good they were. I was part of how people viewed my parents. If I failed or if I was known as a “*bad kid*” it would reflect on them and their image in the community. Therefore I had better not let them down, and if I did I would find myself in the woodshed. I quite naturally picked up on that lifestyle and tried my best to do and accomplish things that would make me look good to others. However, none of those things we were doing were for the glory of God, only for the glory of the Teeds. So let us look at that verse again to see what my family could have had and what you can have by understanding it and putting it into action in your life, John 15:12 NAS: *“This is My commandment, that you **love one another, just as I have loved you.**”*

It is true that Jesus commands them to love one another, but how does He tell them they should do that? They should love one another just as Jesus has loved them. They are to take Jesus’ behavior as their example and copy it. They are not to love each other as Lutherans or Methodists or Baptists or Catholics. They are to love each other as followers of Jesus Christ, the one and only way to God and salvation. Why should they love each other? Go back to verse 11 and you will get the answer.

He wants them to love each other so that their joy in this world may be filled to the brim. This means finding joy in everything including trials and suffering, and yes even death. Wouldn’t that be great!

Would you be able to find joy in something like the death of a parent, spouse, or child? After expressing a natural feeling of grief, loss, and sadness, yes there can be joy in knowing that your loved one is with Christ in Heaven and that one day you will have a joyous reunion with them. How do we know that? I must assume that if that loved one is not a believer, you as a believer would have been praying for them for some time. If you have been praying for them for some time and you are a redeemed, obedient, and Spirit-filled follower of Jesus Christ, your prayer is going to be answered, **John 15:16 NAS: *So that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.***” If you continually pray for the salvation of someone in the name of Jesus Christ, I believe that somehow and some way, even if it is in the last few seconds of life, that person will be given the opportunity to accept Jesus before the end comes, and they will be saved.

For you to love us and for us to love you, we must place ourselves in total submission to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will then program us to live in accordance with the Word of God as expressed in the Bible. It is therefore important for us to cooperate with the

Holy Spirit by having a thorough and working knowledge of our Bibles. When we combine the power and leading of the Holy Spirit with a mind that is filled with knowledge of the Word of God, we are going to be capable of obeying this command in verse 12. Such a level of obedience to Christ's command can be attained only by allowing the love of Jesus to flow from the Vine, Jesus, into and through the branches, which are His obedient followers.⁷

John 15:13-14 NAS:

¹³ *"Greater love has no one than this, that **one lay down his life for his friends.***

¹⁴ *"You are My friends if you do what I command you.*

Jesus' own death on the cross proved His love for them; now they must prove their love for Him by loving those that He loved. Friends love each other and help each other. The obedience that Christ asks from us is not the kind of obedience a slave gives to a master, but of a friend. Because we are His friends and **abide** in Him, we know His will and share His secrets.⁸

What greater demonstration **of love** could one person show for another (one's friend) than to be willing to die in their place and then go ahead and do it? So, might we be able to claim that Jesus loved those "**friends**" for whom He died? You bet your life we can (pun intended). Such a death is an undeniable expression of true love, and the fact that Jesus called them His "*friends*" equates to Jesus acknowledging that they were obedient; quite a commendation from the Lord. Abraham was called God's "*friend*" because he did what God commanded Him.⁹

"Who is a 'friend' of Jesus? Those who know him intimately and obey him willingly."¹⁰

Perhaps this would be a good time to be reminded of what Jesus said back in John 14:21-24 NAS:

²¹ *He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.*

²² *Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?"*

²³ *Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My*

⁷ Pfeiffer, Charles F.; Harrison, Everett Falconer: *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament.* Chicago: Moody Press, 1962, S. Jn 15:9

⁸ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament.* Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1997, c1992, S. 252.

⁹ 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23.

¹⁰ Hughes, Robert B.; Laney, J. Carl; Hughes, Robert B.: *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary.* Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001 (The Tyndale Reference Library), S. 480.

word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.

²⁴ *He who does not love Me does not keep My words.*

And how about John 13:34-35 NAS:

³⁴ *A new commandment I give to you, that you **love one another**; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.*

³⁵ *By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*

So we see that loving one another also shows the world that we belong to Christ. It is a testimony.

Warren Wiersbe comments, "So, our friendship with Christ involves love and obedience. But it also involves knowledge: He *'lets us in on'* His plans. Indeed, He is our Master (John 13:13, 16), but He does not treat us as servants. He treats us as friends, *if* we do what He commands."¹¹

How is it possible for Jesus to *command* us to love one another? Can true love be commanded? You must keep in mind that Christian love is not basically a "*feeling*"; it is an act of the will. The proof of our love is not in our feelings but in our actions, even to the extent of laying down our lives for Christ and for one another. 1 John 3:16: *We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another*" (NRSV). We may not like having to do something even if it is accordance with God's will, but the test of real love for Christ is that we do it anyhow. While the emotions are certainly involved, real Christian love is an act of the will.¹²

One of the greatest privileges we have as His friends is that of learning to know God better and "*getting in on*" God's secrets. Warren Wiersbe described the following impact made on him by Dr. Oswald Sanders: "*I can never forget the impact on my own heart when I heard Dr. Oswald Sanders say to the Back to the Bible staff, 'Each of us is as close to God as we choose to be.'* We are His friends, and we ought to be near the throne, listening to His Word, enjoying His intimacy, and obeying His commandments."¹³

John 15:15-17 NAS:

¹⁵ *No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but **I have called you friends**, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.*

¹⁶ *You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that **whatever***

¹¹ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 15:12.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

¹⁷ *These things I command you, that you love one another.*

Jesus tells them that although He is their King, He does not consider them to be His servants but His friends. In fact if we look elsewhere in John we see that Jesus, the King, actually humbled Himself to a position where He served the disciples.

John 13:3-5 NAS:

³ *Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God,*

⁴ *rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself.*

⁵ *After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.*

Do you realize what this means? The King of the whole universe, the Creator of all things came to earth willing to humble Himself to serve you and me in order to show us how to love. He was willing to humble Himself to serve His disciples by what was considered a humiliating task in the culture **so that we might know what love is**. He then was willing to serve you and me by “*laying down His life*” so that we might have eternal life in Heaven with Him. The next time you question God’s love for you, please remember these things and then ask for forgiveness and thank Him for this assurance: That you are a son or daughter of the King! That makes you royalty! It means that you are guaranteed eternity in Heaven if you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior!

A servant does not for the most part have a buddy-buddy relationship with their master. For the most part a servant does what he is told without question. Jesus **called** His disciples “**friends**” because He had shared with them the very secrets which God had shared with Him.

Let us look at verse 16.

John 15:16 NAS:

You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

It was common practice in those days for disciples (or students) to select a teacher. Jesus reminds them that He had actually chosen them instead (cf. John 15:16,19). The purpose of His choosing them was so that they would produce **fruit**.

John 15:5,8 NAS:

² *Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*

⁵ *I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, **bears much fruit**; for without Me you can do nothing.*

⁸ *By this My Father is glorified, that you **bear much fruit**; so you will be My disciples.*

Just as a lieutenant in the special forces of the Marines may choose a few **especially** good men (they are all good men) for a special assignment, Jesus **chose** these twelve men for a mission, and He promised them that His **Father** would answer their requests in order to accomplish that mission (“**whatever you ask in My name**”).¹⁴

You are also chosen by God for whatever ministry you have. That can be a very comforting thought, especially when the going gets rough.

We see also in verse 16 that Jesus links being chosen and producing fruit with the privilege of prayer. The friends of the king certainly speak to their sovereign and share their burdens and needs with him. In the days of monarchies, it was considered a very special honor to be invited to speak to the king or queen; yet the friends of Jesus Christ can speak to Him at any time. The throne of grace is always available to them.¹⁵

That brings us to John 15:17 NAS:

These things I command you, that you love one another.

Christ comes full circle. He has talked with His disciples about being His friends. He has told them that He has chosen them. He has shared His heart with them so that they may bear fruit in their own lives and experience answered prayer. Now He once again charges them: “*Love one another.*”

How do we fare in this? We can rejoice in our salvation, in being chosen by Christ, and in whatever ministry we may have. We can have the awesome experience of answered prayer. But if any of that is going to have a real impact it must be bathed first, last, and always with our love for Christ and for each other. “The world will know we are Christians by our love,” as the old song goes.

That is easy enough when our brother or sister is a pleasant person and easy to love. But it is even more important to show love to that difficult, grumbly, or angry person that gets on your nerves or irritates you. It is important to love that individual with the love of Christ.

Who is God calling you to show love to this morning? Ask Him right now for His love and grace to help you truly love that individual.

¹⁴ John 15:7; 14:13-14; 16:23-24,26.

¹⁵ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 15:12.