

ABIDING IN CHRIST: JOHN 15:1-11

IBCD Summer Institute, June 2010

Engaging the Heart

- I. We have an exciting theme for the conference.
 - A. Maintaining a passion for Jesus Christ is a worthy goal.
 - B. Of course, it presupposes that you have it to begin with!
 - C. A passion for Christ is a great blessing, but I want to temper our thinking.
 - D. What is “passion”? How is it defined? Is it an emotional response? Is it a mind-set? Is it a core covenantal commitment? Is it all the above? I think most would define it as a fierce feeling. But is that correct? What is “passion”?
 - E. Moreover, is it a necessity? Good physicians of the soul might argue otherwise. A close reading of the **WCF** chapter 18 would be helpful in this regards. **1 John** is an indicator that this is an important issue. Christians **CAN** lose their joy and assurance. To imply that it does not happen is unrealistic. To imply that it should not happen **and** is easily remedied can be cruel. It is to imply that Song of Solomon is the paradigm for everyday and every second of the Christian walk. If passion= hard work of heart, head and hands. I say “amen”! If passion = the emotional results of zeal, I say oh Lord, “may it be”.
 - F. I’m really not a Puddleglum trying to let the air out of the joy of our conference. But I am reminding us all that the Christian life **IS** warfare against the world, the flesh and the devil. People **ARE** different. While there is only **ONE** Savior, He ministers **UNIQUELY** to individuals, cf., the Gospel of John and His counseling individuals: Nathaniel, Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the paralyzed man the blind man, Mary, Martha, Thomas, Peter.
- II. The Bible does have a command to love God totally.
 - A. The 1st and greatest command is clear.
 - B. The 2nd is like it.
 - C. We are to be like Jesus who is not only our Mediator and Master but our Model.
 1. He is the epitome of zeal; **Jn 2:17(Pm 69:9)**; 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 14:31. This is the fulfillment of the Messianic Servant whose zeal, which comes from Jaweh, results in hatred by the rebellious people of God: Pm 119:139; Is 9:7; 37:32; 42:13; **59:17**(Eph 6:10-20). Jesus did come to His own and was rejected, Jn 1:11.

2. We need to maintain our 1st love as He maintained His love of the Father; Rev 2:5.

D. The closest we come to a specific command for “passion” is in the concept of zeal.

1. We are told by Paul in Rom 12:11 **NOT** to be slothful in zeal: σπουδή= earnestness, diligence, eagerness, zeal, effort, but **FERVENT** in spirit, serving the Lord. The word fervent is ζέω= to boil. Acts 18:25 says that Apollos was fervent in spirit. (This probably means fervent by the Holy Spirit).

2. We see Pm 69:9 fulfilled in Jesus, Jn 2:17. This is amidst much suffering. The **emotions** of Jesus differed in cleansing the Temple and in the Garden cleansing His people! The constant always was, not my will but yours be done.

3. We need to avoid false carnal zeal: Rom 10:2; Phil 3:6.

E. What is clear are the biblical instructions to persevere in the Christian walk.

1. You can see this in Eph 4:17-13 on progressive sanctification.

2. You can see this in Eph 6:10-20 in the Spiritual armor.

3. You can see this in Phil 3 in the pressing on.

4. You see this in Hebrews in the not going backwards.

5. You see it in 2 Pet 1:3-15 in adding spiritual growth to the foundation of faith in Christ.

6. You see this clearly in John 15:1-11 where Jesus Himself addresses this issue.

III. Jesus tells us He is the Vine: John 15:1-11.

A. Understand John’s purpose in writing the gospel.

1. Jn 20:30-31: that you might believe in Jesus and have life.

2. John’s evidence: 7 signs; the Wonderful Counselor’s knowledge of humans’ hearts; the Other Counselor’s application of the work of Jesus, why Jesus is the Messiah though rejected by His own, etc.

3. **N.B.**, the apostle John wrote this prior to 70 A.D. and probably from Ephesus in Asia Minor with several sub-points under his main evangelistic theme.

B. Understand the flow of the book.

1. Chapters 1-12: the signs and His rejection by His own people.

2. Chapters 13-17: the preparation of the disciples to receive the Other Counselor and His /their work.
 3. Chapters 18-20: the betrayal, trials, death and resurrection of Jesus.
 4. Chapter 21: The restoration of the disciples, especially Peter, and the testimony of the absolute reliability of this gospel.
- C. Grasp the passage in its immediate context: Chapters 13-17.
1. 13:1-20: Christ the humble servant as Mediator, Model and Master.
 2. 13:21-30: prediction of betrayal.
 3. 13:31-38: The New Commandment.
 4. 14:1-14: The Way, the Truth and the Life.
 5. 14:15-30: The Other Counselor continues the Wonderful Counselor's ministry to the apostles.
 6. 15:1-11: Our Text
 7. 15:12-17: peace in the midst of persecution.
 8. 15:18-16:4; the hatred of the world.
 9. 16:4-15: the increased effectiveness of the Holy Spirit in the gospel age.
 10. 16:16-33: sorrow becomes joy because Jesus overcomes the world.
 11. 17: Jesus' High Priestly Prayer.

Exposition of the Word

- I. Jesus is the true vine, v 1.
 - A. The image is picked up from the O.T.
 1. The vine is Israel, Is 5.
 2. The vine is Israel as she comes to focus in the Messianic Servant of the Lord, Pm 80, cf., Is 53 etc.
 3. N.B., a large subtheme of the book is the rejection of the Messiah by Israel and the inclusion of the gentiles in the Vine, Jesus.

4. Jesus is claiming to be the true Israel. He may have been pointing to the Temple mosaic. Jesus says He is the Messianic King and the true stock of Israel. True Jews are in Him.

B. The image is explained and expanded by Jesus.

1. The Father is the vinedresser, again picking up the theme from the Old Testament.
2. The Son is the Vine.
3. By implication, the Holy Spirit is the sap.
4. The disciples are the branches.
 - a. Non-productive
 - b. Productive.

II. The word of God is the source of life, growth and fruit, vv 2-6.

- A. The Father uses the Word to cleanse or regenerate His chosen children. This is the *initial* cleansing referred to in Jn 13:1-11.
- B. The Father prunes the branches. This is the *continuous, convicting cleansing* referred to in the same passage.
- C. The Word then produces fruit in the branches. This is the continual need for the Bible throughout the whole of life. The vine dresser is looking for fruit. The beauty of the vine/branches is a side benefit! The church is not merely an ornamental vine!

III. Love and the Word are symbiotic partners, vv 7-10.

- A. You must “abide” in Christ. You must trust, rest in, rely on the Person and work of Christ.
- B. Remembering, relying on and responding to the words of Christ are the functional equivalent of abiding.
- C. Prayer centered in the words of Christ is the core connection to Christ. You must know and do His Word in conscious dependence on and fellowship with Him.
- D. The parallel could not be clearer: Jesus loves the Father, therefore He keeps the Father’s Word. Thus, He experiences the Father’s love as He prays and experiences the Father’s fellowship and answered prayer. We are to relate to Jesus as He relates to the Father.

IV. The Word and love of Jesus produces joy, v 11.

- A. Thus, the words of Jesus produce a full joy.

- B. It is the joy He has with the Father and which He now shares with us.
 - C. This joy can be full to overflowing.
 - D. This joy is the result of zeal = a dogged, determined to do the Fathers will and **NOT** an emotional high. Ex. In the Temple; in the Garden. Heb 12:1-2. While integrally and intimately related zeal and emotions are not the same thing.
- V. This joy leads to sacrificial service/love to the brothers and conflict with the world and comes **ONLY** via His High Priestly work, Jn 15:12-17:26 and chapters 18-21.

Exhortation for Life

- I. You need to start with Jesus Christ.
 - A. You cannot disciple an unbeliever.
 - B. You cannot disciple a dead branch.
 - C. You cannot disciple an unrepentant, un-cleansed branch, cf., ***Repentance: Don't Counsel Without It!***
 - D. Union with Christ is not an option. No Vine, no life or fruit.
- II. You need a balanced, nuanced symbiotic cycle.
 - A. We do not want to produce legalistic Pharisees. Self-centered self-righteousness kills.
 - B. We do not want to produce libertine Sadducees. Self-centered self-indulgence also kills.
 - C. There are ditches on BOTH sides of the narrow road that leads to Life!
- III. We must be careful of formulaic answers and cramming individuals into them.
 - A. The Word is needed to convict, cleanse and drive us to cling to Christ, 2 Tim 3:15-17.
 - 1. Reality check
 - 2. Knowledge of sin
 - 3. Conviction of sin
 - 4. Increasing sin
 - 5. Pushing to the cross of Christ
 - B. The Word is needed to conform us to Christ and consume us in His service.
 - 1. Obedience check: convince of guilt

2. Gratitude check: convince of God's grace in Christ; consume with gratitude and joy.
 - C. Start all over. One must pick up his cross **daily**.
 - D. **Therefore**, there is a **GREAT** need for Biblical counseling to be **MORE** biblical not less. We do not need experiences, silver bullets, formulae; we need more of the Incarnate Word and His written Word. Meditation, memory, practice.
 - E. **Therefore**, the normal means of grace cannot be denigrated, undermined or substituted. Thus, individual counseling must be in the **context of normal church life and not a substitute for it**. I believe too often this is ignored in the Biblical Counseling movement. This is a whole presentation in and of itself.
 - F. Special cases: This is also a whole presentation in and of itself.
 1. Doubts of salvation.
 2. Weak faith; Cf. ***Westminster Confession of Faith***: Chapter 18; ***Westminster Larger Catechism***: Q 167; 171; 172.
- IV. May the King of the Church grant us the wisdom and zeal to do His will. May the zeal of our risen, glorified and reigning King accomplish this through us.