

J. C. RYLE'S NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN  
15:12-16

12. This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you. 13. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. 14. Ye are my friends if ye do whatever I command you. 15. Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant does not know what his Lord 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. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and ordained you that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give you.

12.--[*This is my commandment, etc.*] In this verse our Lord returns to the old lesson that He has taught before--the great duty of love towards other Christians. He backs the command by His own example. Nothing less than His matchless love towards sinners should be the measure and standard of love to one another.

The frequent repetition of this command teaches the vast importance of Christian charity and the great rarity of it. How anyone can pretend to Christian hope who is ignorant of Christian love, it is hard to understand. He who supposes he is right in the sight of God because his doctrinal views are correct, while he is unloving in his temper, and is sharp, cross, snappish and ill-natured in the use of his tongue, exhibits wretched ignorance of the first principles of Christ's Gospel. The crossness, spitefulness, jealousy, maliciousness, and general disagreeableness of many high professors of "sound doctrine" are a positive scandal to Christianity. Where there is little love there can be little grace.

13.--[*Greater love...for his friends.*] In this verse our Lord teaches what should be the measure and degree of the love that Christians should have to one another. It should be a self-sacrificing love, even to death, as His was. He proved the greatness of His love by dying for His friends, and even for His enemies. (Rom. 5:6-8.) It would be impossible for love to go further. There is no greater love than willingness to lay down life for those we love. Christ did this, and Christians should be willing to do the same.

Let us note here that our Lord clearly speaks of His own death as a sacrificial and propitiatory death. Even His friends need a substitute to die for them.

14.--[*Ye are my friends...command you.*] This verse seems closely connected with the preceding one. "You are the friends for whom I lay down my life, if you do whatever things I command you." We are not to dream that we are Christ's friends if we do not habitually practice His commands. Very striking is it to observe how frequently our Lord returns to this great

principle, that obedience is the great test of vital Christianity and doing the real mark of saving faith. Men who talk of being "the Lord's people" while they live in sin and neglect Christ's plain commands, are in the broad way that leads to destruction.

15.--[*Henceforth I call you not servants, etc.*] Having used the word "friends," our Lord tells His disciples that He has used that word purposely to cheer and encourage them. "Observe that I call you friends. I do so intentionally. I no longer call you servants, because the servant from his position knows not all his master's mind and is not in his confidence. But to you I have revealed all the truths that my Father sent me to teach the world, and have kept nothing back. I may therefore justly call you friends."

When our Lord speaks of "having made known all things" to the disciples, we must reasonably suppose that He means all things needful to their spiritual good and all things that they were able to bear.

The high privilege of a believer is strikingly taught here. He is a friend of Christ, as well as a child of God. No one need ever say he has no "friend" to turn to so long as Christ is in heaven. Once only before this place does Christ call the disciples "friends" (Luke 12:4).

It is noteworthy that Abraham is the only person in the Old Testament who is called "the friend of God" (Isa. 41:8), and of him the Lord says, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" (Gen. 18:17).

16.--[*Ye have not chosen Me, etc.*] The connecting link between this verse and the passage preceding it is not very clear.

Hengstenberg thinks that it refers to the commandment just laid down, to love one another. "I may fairly lay down laws and rules for your conduct, because I first chose and called you to be members of my church."

I much prefer thinking that our Lord's object is to exalt the privilege of discipleship in the eyes of the eleven. "Remember, when I call you friends, that I called you into the number of my people and chose you before you chose Me. See then how great and free and deep is my love to you."

When our Lord speaks of "choosing" in this verse, I think that He means two things: viz., His choice of the eleven to be His apostles and their eternal election to salvation. There seems to be a peculiar fulness in the phrase. The choice of the believer to eternal life is not the whole idea that our Lord means to convey. True as that glorious doctrine is, it is not the whole doctrine of this verse. The "choosing" includes a choosing for an office, like John 6:70, and seems to have a special reference to the choice of the eleven faithful apostles to be the first children of Christ's Church.

Calvin certainly says: "The subject now in hand is not the ordinary election of believers, by which they are adopted to be God's children, but that special election by which Christ sets apart His disciples to the

office of preaching the gospel." (See John 6:70.) This also is the view of Chrysostom and Cyril. But most of the Latin fathers apply the "choice" to eternal election. So also does Lampe. My own impression is that, for once, the expression includes both official and eternal election.

The Greek word rendered "ordained" means simply, "I have placed you" in a certain position as my apostles.

When our Lord says, "I have chosen and ordained you that ye should go and bring forth fruit," I think He refers to the work of conversion and building a Church in the world. "I chose and set you apart for this great purpose, that ye should go into all the world preaching the Gospel and gathering in the harvest and fruit of saved souls, and that this work begun by you might remain and continue long after your deaths." And then to encourage the eleven He adds, "It was part of my plan that so bringing forth fruit, ye should obtain by prayer everything that ye need for your work."

It is vain to deny that the verse is a very difficult one both as to its connection and contents. As a general rule, I hold strongly that the things spoken by our Lord in this last discourse decidedly belong to all believers in every age and not to the eleven only. Yet there are perhaps exceptions, and this verse may be one. The expression "Go and bring forth fruit" certainly seems to apply peculiarly to the eleven, who were to "GO" into all the world and preach the Gospel. It is as though our Lord said, "Take comfort in the thought that I chose you as my friends for this great purpose--to go and preach, to reap an abundant harvest of souls, to do lasting work, and to obtain a constant supply of grace and help, by prayer." I cannot see how the word "go" can apply to any but the eleven to whom the Lord was speaking, and this weighs heavily with me in interpreting it. "That your fruit should remain," again, is a phrase that I cannot apply to anything but the lasting and abiding work which the Apostles did when they went through the world preaching the Gospel. But I freely admit that I find in the verse "things hard to be understood."