

Readings

Scripture

¹“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ²Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹As the Father has loved me, so have I 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. ¹¹These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

¹²“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ¹⁷These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

- John 15:1-17 (English Standard Version)

Reflection

I quickly found that the exposition of the hard sayings of Jesus is a difficult and responsible task; yet I am glad that I undertook it, for it has proved specially rewarding. His yoke is easy and his burden is light, but his sayings are often hard because they run counter to well-entrenched presuppositions and traditional assumptions about life and human relations. When they are hard for this reason, I hope I have not made them easier, for that would be to obscure their meaning.

For to us there are two kinds of hard sayings: there are some which are hard to understand, and there are some which are only too easy to understand. When sayings of Jesus which are hard in the former sense are explained in dynamically equivalent terms, then they are likely to become hard in the latter sense. Mark Twain spoke for many when he said that the things in the Bible that bothered him were not those that he did not understand but those that he did understand. This is particularly true of the sayings of Jesus. The better we understand them, the harder they are to take. (Perhaps, similarly, this is why some religious people show such hostility to modern versions of the Bible: these versions make the meaning plain, and the plain meaning is unacceptable.)

If in the following pages I explain the hard sayings of Jesus in such a way as to make them more acceptable, less challenging, then the probability is that the explanation is wrong. Jesus did not go about mouthing pious platitudes; had he done so, he would not have made as many enemies as he did. “The common people heard him gladly,” we are told—more gladly, at any rate, than members of the religious establishment did—but even among the common people many were disillusioned when he turned out not to be the kind of leader they hoped he would be.

- F.F. Bruce, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Preface)

Sermon Outline

Fruitful Abiding
John 15:1-17

Table Talk in an Upper Room
Brad Anderson

These things I command you, so that you will love one another... (John 15:17)

How does Jesus graciously lead us deeper into “these things” through such challenging statements?

Abiding: “Apart from me you can do nothing...” (John 15:1-11)

Befriending: “You are my friends if you do what I command...” (John 15:12-15)

Trusting: “You did not choose me, but I chose you...” (John 15:16)

Reflection Questions (taken in part from the *Serendipity Study Bible for Groups*)

- What is the most difficult signage for you to obey? Speed Limit? Do not enter? Exit only? Other?
- If you could plant an orchard, what fruit trees or vines would you plant? What experience have you had with pruning trees or vines?
- Imagine yourself as a branch on a vine. How would you feel as you saw the gardener approaching you with a knife?
- What does the Father use as his pruning tools? How would what the disciples are experiencing right now (in John 13:18-21, 13:36-38, 14:5-6) be an example of this process?
- “Remain in me”, “love” and “bearing fruit” are all phrases repeated several times in this passage. What are some of the relationships between these words?
- How does this call to love relate to Jesus’ statement in John 15:15? How does our relationship with Jesus change once we start practicing this example of love?