

Dr. David Turner, Gospel of John, Session 17, John 15:1-16:15

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This is Dr. David Turner and his teaching on the Gospel of John. This is session 17, the Farewell Discourse, Abiding in Christ and Witnessing to the World. John 15:1-16:15.

Hello, we've been studying the Farewell Discourse of Jesus, and so far we've looked into chapters 13 and 14, trying to get into the flow of Jesus' thought here. Having washed the disciples' feet, he begins to teach them about his ongoing presence with them, which will be true despite the fact that he's spiritually absent from them. So having taught them in chapter 13, by example, to be humble servants of one another, he teaches them in chapter 14 about the coming spirit who will transform his presence with them.

So, he makes it very clear that he's not leaving them alone, he's leaving them with the Spirit who will enable them to continue to have fellowship with him and with the Father and continue to know his teaching. Keep in mind this was before the canonical scriptures were, even the canonical New Testament, I should say, had begun to be produced. So, it wasn't like they could run to the Bible to find out what Jesus had said at this point.

They were totally dependent upon the Holy Spirit to remind them of what Jesus had said. I take it then that those of us who spend much of our lives in the Bible, some of us as part of our vocation we receive from God, should nevertheless remind ourselves that as we look at the words of scripture, we need to be dependent upon the spirit of God who actually was involved in giving us those scriptures, to begin with through the way he moved with the apostolic group who gave us the scriptures. So, after looking at chapter 14 last time, we're now moving into chapter 15, and it's difficult to give a precise outline, so to speak, of the farewell discourse.

We sort of follow the flow of thought. Chapter 14 was rather dialogical with Jesus answering questions and going off on tangents based on those questions. Chapter 15 is a bit more direct teaching of Jesus without interruptions or interjections from the disciples.

And it's interesting to take it, I think, as a text that stresses their responsibility. He has spoken to them about the way in which they will receive the spirit, and the spirit will be their teacher and will maintain his presence with them. But they are not to be taking all of this as an excuse to just sit back and wait for this to happen.

They have a job to do as well, and their job is termed as remaining or abiding. And of course, we have this beautiful analogy here in chapter 15, like the one we had in

chapter 10 of Jesus the Good Shepherd. Here we have Jesus in chapter 15 as the true vine.

So, let's first look at the narrative flow of the passage, and then as we've done before, we'll try to look at some important things in the chapter and get a better handle on them. First, we see the narrative flow that we have, this figurative discourse. I'm calling it an allegory here.

I don't make a technical distinction between what we might call a parable or an allegory. These are both whatever terms we use. These are extended analogies, extended similes, and extended metaphors that go beyond just a simple statement into an extension of the imagery into the details.

So, we have Jesus speaking of the vine and the branches, and how the Father is the farmer, Jesus is the vine, and the disciples are the branches. Branches are expected to bear fruit. The farmer will prune the branches so that they will bear more fruit.

Branches that do not respond to the guidance of the farmer to bear fruit are cut off and burnt, and those that bear fruit hopefully will continue to do so and bear more fruit. So, Jesus is drawing this analogy between himself and the disciples. It seems that in 15:9-17, which leaves the vine and branches allegory behind in a sense, to go back and pick up the new commandment teaching.

So, there's a great deal in 15:9-17 that sort of reiterates and contextualizes the love command, but does so using imagery from the vine and the branches allegory that has just been given. So, you find the emphasis in 15:9-17 about abiding in love and about bearing fruit by loving, and loving and obeying together are ways in which we bear fruit for God. So, one of the main questions I guess we'd have as we read this allegory about being the vine, being the branches I should say, Jesus is the vine, is that we wonder how we abide, and I think verses 9-17 basically tell us that and explain what it means to abide in that sense.

So, in Jesus' absence, he does send the Spirit to maintain his presence with the disciples, and he requires them then to remain with him, and the reason why that is so important is because there will be opposition. So, after discussing the matter of the necessity of abiding in the vine, Jesus speaks very realistically in verses 18-25 about the hatred of the world. He says, don't be surprised if the world hates you because it hates me as well, and it's not that they have anything personally against you, they don't like my message, and if you stand up for me, then you'll receive the same sort of treatment that I received.

So, you'll need to abide in me all the more in light of this negativism and wind blowing in the opposite direction. You'll receive some friction and you'll receive some opposition in the world, and Jesus speaks very realistically and frankly about that in

the last part of chapter 15. At the very end of chapter 15, he speaks about the way in which the Holy Spirit comes along to the disciples' side to help them during this time of opposition and to enable them to have a more effective testimony.

So, it's quite important, I think, to notice that Jesus says in 15:26 and 27 that the Spirit will testify about me and you also will testify. Perhaps we ought to be thinking a little bit differently than we typically do about Christian witness, that it's all up to us and we do it, and by the way, the Holy Spirit comes along and helps us. Perhaps we should be thinking about it as the Holy Spirit is witnessing and we come along and help the Holy Spirit because Jesus does place the priority here at the end of chapter 15 on the work of the Holy Spirit.

So, this is the way in which John 15 and 16 develop. We're trying to understand then how chapter 16 begins by talking more and more about the opposition, about the way in which the Holy Spirit is the one who will enable the disciples to deal with the opposition. So, the text sort of alternates back and forth, 15:18 through 25, about persecution and difficulty, then reference to the Spirit as the one who enables the disciples to deal with it, then reiterating what's already been said about the world's hatred and the persecution that relates to it, but following that warning once again, a reference to the Holy Spirit's ministry.

So the text, after we get through the vine and branches allegory and its explanation, becomes a text that speaks about the reality of opposition and the boon that we have through the Spirit to deal with the opposition that we receive and the confidence that we can have that despite all the forces of hell being directed against us if we want to get that poetic about it, we still have all the forces of heaven on our side through the work of the Holy Spirit. So, let's go back then and think about some of the matters for interpretation here in John 15. I want first of all to think about the role of the vineyard in the Bible and how that helps us to understand what Jesus has been talking about here.

We remind ourselves in John chapter 15, verse 1, that Jesus said, I am the true vine, and I think he's using the word true because as we look at the imagery of the vine throughout the Hebrew Bible, we find that there are many times where Israel, when it's described as the vine of God and God's providential blessing to Israel and his covenantal love to them, unfortunately, does not always result in a bumper crop of grapes. Often just the opposite is the result. So, Israel does not always prove to be a bumper crop for God.

And so, Jesus is now saying, I am the true vine. He seems to be saying that I am the true Israel. I personify all the virtues and all the fruit-bearing that should have been produced by Israel originally.

So, there's a bit of a corporate personality image here perhaps that Jesus is using to say that myself, in me, the people of God will find the destiny, the fruit, the characteristics, the blessings to the world that God originally had intended for Israel. But it's not simply, of course, Jesus because he says, I am the vine. He says you are my branches.

So, through Jesus as the true vine and we as his branches, the divine purpose for Israel as the people of God on earth is going to be fulfilled. So, let's go back and think about some of these passages from the Old Testament. We can follow it out in the narrative here of Genesis chapter 9 where Noah becomes a vineyard keeper.

And there are some difficulties from that because Noah imbibes a bit too much and the result is not good. We have many other texts in the rest of the Torah about wine. We've just mentioned a few of them here.

And essentially wine can be something that will show the blessing of God in the people's lives and part of the normal agricultural cycle. And just as the Israelis would harvest grain and harvest figs and harvest all these other matters, they would harvest grapes. They would not be able to eat them all and so they would tend to preserve the grapes as wine.

They would take the wine, and put it into skins, as we know from the synoptic gospels, and it would naturally ferment so it wouldn't stay non-alcoholic. It would become an alcoholic beverage. Typically, it would be used when drunk to be mixed with water at meals.

And so, we have many texts which speak about the mixture of wine and water. You may recall that there are a couple of texts in the book of Revelation that speak of the wrath of God as God mixing wine unmixed, literally, in the cup of his wrath. So to drink wine unmixed was to be sort of a barbaric thing, and in that day only barbarians would do such a thing as that.

And then to talk about God's full wrath as wine would be to say he's not even going to mix it with water. He's going to pour it out in all his fury. So, we have texts then in the prophets that speak of Israel as God's vineyard.

Isaiah chapter 2 and perhaps a central text that becomes important for the New Testament is Isaiah chapter 5, verses 1 through 7. So, let's go back and look at that one just briefly. In Isaiah 5, verses 1 through 7, there is a beautiful song of the vineyard. 5-1, I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard.

My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones, planted it with the choicest vines, built a watchtower in it, cut out a

winepress as well, and looked for a crop of good grapes. So, everything is hunky-dory at this point.

It's a beautiful pastoral scene where a person has gone into a rugged area and created a beautiful farm and a beautiful vineyard, and everything has been put in place to secure a bumper crop. So, it's just like perhaps where you live, you can drive out into the countryside in the middle of the summer and see the fields ripened to harvest if you will, and everything looks good and it just sort of gives you a good feeling and you thank God for the way he's blessed humanity with crops. So that's a beautiful image up to the middle of verse 2 here, but as you probably already know, things take a bad turn in the middle of verse 2. He looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.

So, this is somewhat ironic. After all the wonderful things that the Beloved has done for the vineyard, what you expect would be a bumper crop, but you don't get what you expect. Same sort of thing we might draw an analogy to the way in which John 1 speaks of Jesus.

After creating the world and blessing the world and sending light to the world, he came into his own and instead of receiving him with open arms, his own shoved him aside. They didn't want him. How ironic is that? How unexpected? How could that happen? So, after telling the story in verses 1 through 5, excuse me, verses 1 and 2 in Isaiah 5, verse 3 then applies the story.

Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and you people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more could I have done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I'm going to tell you what I'm going to do with my vineyard. So, there's sort of an appeal for justice in verses 3 and 4, and then the verdict comes down about the only thing that can be done with a vineyard like this.

I'll tell you what I'm going to do with my vineyard, verse 5. I'll take away its hedge and it will be destroyed. I'll break down its wall and it will be trampled. I'll make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated.

Briars and thorns will grow there. I'll command the clouds not to rain upon it. All this, again, is a very vivid picture of what God, the owner of the vineyard, is going to do.

But what does all this vineyard imagery mean? Verse 7 puts it in, takes all the imagery, the allegory, and the details, and turns it into a propositional statement. The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the nation of Israel. And the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in, and they looked for justice but saw bloodshed for righteousness and heard cries of distress.

So, we have this emphasis on the way in which things did not turn out the way they should have. So, after all the covenantal love that God showed to his people Israel, and all the blessings that he gave them, they did not respond to his covenantal stipulations, to his will for their lives, the law of Moses, and so there was nothing left for him to do but to pronounce judgment upon them. So, we have the history of the Old Testament in which the kingdom of Israel and Judah split, and God judged Israel by the Assyrians and Judah by the Babylonians.

And you have texts like 2 Chronicles 36 that essentially lament over God and Israel and say what could God have done for them more? They didn't listen to his messengers, they stoned his prophets. What was God going to do? All he could do was send judgment. So, the vineyard imagery here in texts like this is a very sad one.

If we look further into Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, we won't take the time to do it, you can follow through these texts, but you will see that at times Israel's famine, that is to say, the judgment that God pours out upon them and the lack of the knowledge of God, is also shown by the lack of food and drink in the land, the lack of agricultural produce. So the vineyard imagery is often used as an image of judgment in these texts. But it's also used as an image of blessing.

If Israel repents, they'll receive bumper crops once again. They'll have plenty of grapes, they'll have plenty of wine, and God will cause new wine to flow forth from them. And so, the lack of wine is an indication of the absence of God's blessing.

The presence of wine is an indication that Israel is right with God, and God is blessing them with all of his loving-kindness. So then when we come to the New Testament, we find the New Testament and teaching of Jesus picking up on this. So, we find vineyard parables in Matthew chapter 20, the parable of the vineyard in Matthew 21:28, parable of the tenant farmers who do not properly return the fruit to the owner, in Matthew 21:23.

Jesus speaks of the fruit of the vine as he drinks it at the Passover meal and he institutes the Lord's table. He says I will not drink of this until I'm in my kingdom. And of course, the fruit of the vine becomes a symbol of his blood, which is the blood of the new covenant.

So, these and many other synoptic parallels, these texts in Matthew. We can think of wine in many other texts in Paul, we won't get into the details of it, but it's an important way of showing how God can bless his people if they respond to him in obedience. But at the same time, these texts will often talk about how God does not bless Israel when they're disobedient.

So, they have no crops, they have no grapes, they have no wine. We've not been listening here or talking about the texts that clearly speak about the abuse of wine.

We have texts in the Old Testament, particularly the book of Proverbs, which warn us against the misuse of wine.

We have texts in the New Testament which speak of the perils of overdoing wine. Texts like Ephesians 5:18, tell us to find our fullness in the spirit of God, not in the consumption of alcohol. So, we're not trying to ignore the moral implications of wine in the Bible, but we're just trying to understand the imagery that Jesus is using here, which is not so much directed toward the ethical issues that revolve around it.

So, some background testimony here in the world of the Bible and in our modern world to vineyards might help us understand it better and help us visualize what it means to either be fruitful in obedience to God or failing to be fruitful by disobeying God. Jesus himself, of course, is the one who is the most fruitful vineyard in God's economy, and we find our fruitfulness through him. So, at Sepphoris, just near Nazareth, not that far away from Galilee, there are quite some great archaeological remains, and one of them shows a bumper crop of grapes in the vineyard in a floor mosaic there at Sepphoris.

You will find if you go to Israel, many places where there are remnants of wine presses. So, grapes would be brought in from the vines and dumped into these vats that have been hewn out of stone, and they would be trampled usually, I suppose, by people walking over them or using some sort of tools to help the process. And as the wine is—the liquid is squeezed out, you can't see it too well in this picture.

Perhaps it's this part of the installation. The liquid flows down through the crack. Perhaps this would have been just a whole board through this wall originally into a vat, and then from the vat, skins would have been filled with it.

This picture pictures this a little bit better, and you can see then where the grapes would have been dumped in, where they would have been crushed. The liquid would have evidently flown here into depressions, here as well, where the liquid would have been collected. Today in Israel, in the Hefer Valley, this picture was taken near the coast between Tel Aviv and Haifa.

In the Golan, they're also growing grapes today. I'm not sure where this gentleman received his grapes, but it appears to be an Israeli farmer who is checking the quality of the grapes. I live in Michigan, and wine is big business here in Michigan.

Some beautiful areas in northern Michigan, particularly, where grapes are grown. This is Chateau Grand Traverse on the Mission Peninsula north of Traverse City in Michigan, looking out over the West Traverse Bay. A close-up of the grapes.

You can see that they're stretching some netting there to keep the birds off the grapes so that they get to use all the grapes in the crop. Another beautiful vineyard

up there is called Chateau Chantal, and you can see the vines there in the foreground. The owners of that vineyard have actually memorialized the chapter that we're looking at just now with a metal sculpture that is a sculpture of the vine and the branches, and the text, of course, relates to that.

Christian artists have made much of the vine and branches imagery, and they have gone so far as to seat the apostles on the vine with Jesus at the center. As I was adding these up, I think we have more than 12, however. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

I guess we just have 12 there. This one, however, there are more than 12, and I'm not exactly sure who all these people are. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15.

So, I don't know what's up with that. Whether we have Moses and Elijah there, or whether we have not only the 12 minus 1 makes 11, but then we have Matthias, and we have Paul, so maybe they're involved there, but that's only 13. So, maybe we got Moses and Elijah in there for good measure.

I'm not sure. The imagery is quite interesting. I think in this one, if we had a better resolution on the book, this is a Greek text which actually has, *Ego eimi he ampelos, I am the vine.*

Ego eimi he ampelos he alethine, the genuine vine. This piece, however, is, I think, pointing out that it is by dying and by shedding his blood that Jesus inaugurates the new covenant, symbolized by the bread and the cup. So, it is by his being crucified that life comes to the world, paradoxically.

So, this piece on the right, whose source escapes me, trying to find out where that was originally published, is not able to do so. Probably when we are confronted by the imagery of the vine, one of the major questions that we continually hear about is, what about all these unfruitful branches? I guess that shows something about the nature of humanity and even Christians who are human. We spend more time worrying about what if this bad thing happens than being the kind of people we need to be so that it doesn't.

But in any event, there is a huge amount of speculation and discussion and exegesis and argumentation about who the unfruitful burnt branches are from chapter 15 and verse 6. One would think in the immediate context with Judas having only departed recently that we are to think about someone like Judas as a branch that isn't bearing fruit, which will be cut off and be burnt. Amongst evangelical Christians, there are those who are of the opinion that genuine Christians may ultimately fall away and backslide and be subject to eternal punishment. Apostasy is a horrible thing, something that I would never want to make light of.

I'm not so sure that that's what this text is teaching. I guess it's a matter of what we mean by the term genuine. I think there are certainly people in the church who are convinced in their own minds that they are true followers of Jesus.

They're not just being hypocrites. They're not just trying to put on an act. In their minds, they are truly following him.

In this sense, there are people who were once wholeheartedly serving Jesus Christ who have wholeheartedly turned against him. I think in that sense of the word genuine, there are indeed people who were former Christians who are now no longer Christians, and this text perhaps is describing people like that. On the other hand, there are those who think that genuine Christians are only those who have received the internal work of the Holy Spirit.

Those of a Calvinistic bent will speak about the doctrine of election and how those who have come to Christ he will in no wise cast out. He knows his sheep, and no one can snatch them out of his father's hand. We read recently in John 10, and I'm all in favor of that doctrine.

My own personal theological background and belief presently is Calvinistic. However, I think we need to look at a text like this in light of what we might call the doctrine of perseverance. I think true Calvinists and Arminians would agree that God's people act like it and true Christians do persevere in the faith.

To say otherwise is to hold to perhaps a doctrine of eternal security, but a doctrine of eternal security without any responsibility for perseverance is actually a doctrine of antinomianism. So, there is this group in evangelicalism today that is so convinced that once saved, always saved, no matter what, they take any real motivation for persevering away because you're going to end up in God's presence whether you do or not. I don't think that this should be understood in any way as a historic teaching of the church.

I think that is a real problem. So, apostasy is the most serious manner, and we're not talking about people who make just a superficial profession of faith, and then you worry about whether they're truly believers. But I think this is talking about someone who is truly involved and engaged with the vine, with Jesus, and who nevertheless does not bear any fruit whatsoever.

Instead of trying to coddle folks like that and saying to them, don't worry, you'll be okay, you're a Christian even though you're a carnal Christian, we'd like you to be more spiritual, but you're still okay even if you're not. I don't think we're doing people a favor pastorally if we treat them like that. I think we have to put the ball in their court and say, you know, the Bible tells us that as branches in the vine we

should be bearing fruit, and you need to be more serious about your relationship with Jesus whether you really have a relationship.

So, it's not about a legalistic way of setting human standards that people either fit or don't, and we make pronouncements based on that. It's a matter of reminding people of the biblical imagery that the vine, the branches receive life from the vine, and the father is tending the vine and the vineyard, and the folks in the vineyard who aren't bearing any real grapes but are rather perhaps bearing briars and thorns, we as leaders in the church cannot coddle such people and tell them that it's okay, you'll be all right even though you're not doing anything spiritual. Maybe you should do more spiritual things, but you'll be okay.

This imagery does not permit us to do any such thing, and if anything the history of the Old Testament and the way it shows how Israel was judged for its lack of faithfulness to God and everything that came upon them, we have no real biblical basis to tell people once saved, always saved, no matter what. No matter what is the problem. You may recall we had the cartoon from Agnes Day about the sheep who was saying how wonderful it is to be one in Christ's flock and no one can snatch us out of his hand, so no need to go to church or anything like that anymore.

And then the other sheep says, well, I think you're jumping out of his hand. It's not that someone is snatching you, you're jumping out. And so that's what a text like John chapter 15 reminds us of, and I think we err if we try to water down the imagery here and turn it into something that allows people to be nonchalant about their relationship with the Lord.

Another question we might ask about this passage is what is the fruit of which Jesus is speaking here in verses 2, 4, 5, and 8? What specifically is going on in this text? Is he talking about making new converts? Is that the fruit he's talking about, the fruit of the gospel in the sense of new converts? I think Paul spoke that way in Colossians, and I think Jesus is even using similar imagery, though not exactly the same, in John chapter 4, where a harvest of souls, if you will, is in the background when he talks about the fields being white unto harvest. So, you'll find fruit in the Bible sometimes spoken of as new believers, but also spoken of as Christ-like character. John the Baptist told the folks who were coming to him for baptism to produce the fruit of righteousness in their lives.

In other words, show me some Torah observance. Later on, the apostle Paul spoke of those who were related to Christ through the Spirit as manifesting the fruit of the Spirit, and that has to do with Christ-like character, as you know, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, etc. So, what was Jesus speaking of in this context? Was he speaking of winning souls to Jesus and being evangelistically fruitful, or was he speaking of a Christ-like character? And I want to tell you, I think the answer to that is a firm yes.

He was speaking of everything that we would do as a Christian, not simply one or the other. Jesus has taught us in this discourse, that without me you can do nothing. So, if we cannot do anything apart from Christ, to do what would be called, I guess, the logical converse of that, we're not able to do anything apart from him, then anything we do with him would be fruit from him.

So, whether we want to think primarily of this in evangelistic terms or in terms of sanctification or Christ-like character, I think it would be a mistake to limit it to one or the other, since anything of good that comes out of us as followers of Christ can only come to the extent that we're dependent upon him and his work within us, then anything that's produced from that has to be called fruit. So, this is a debate that I think is one that is a bit silly when it comes right down to it because anything that we do as followers of Christ is the fruit of his work within us. A very practical question might be, how is it that we abide in Christ? Well and good to talk about abiding, remaining in Christ, so how do we do that? We're probably mistaken if we turn this into a checklist and say that if you do this and you do this and you do this and you've got all your boxes checked you are an abider in Christ.

I would think rather that just as the vine and the branches are organically connected and when the rain comes down and the farmer is tending the vines, there is a natural way in which the plant produces fruit. So, there is a natural way in which we, as we are in Christ through faith and his Spirit come into our lives and give us new life, that we naturally are fruitful in his service. But I think as you think about it, obviously, the organic unity of the branches with the vine speaks to us of our unity with Christ through the spirit and that we simply want to depend upon Christ to give us fruit in our lives through the spirit.

So, I think this is teaching us that we are certainly not going to bear fruit just by our own effort, just by our own work, just by being active. We are going to be bearing fruit as we are active in dependence upon Christ. Not independent of him, but in dependence on him.

So, if we are not depending on Christ as a branch certainly depends upon its connection to the vine and the rooting of the vine. If we are not just naturally every day of our lives, our fallback position is to realize that unless we are totally depending upon Christ that day, nothing good is going to come of it. I don't think we are going to be abiding in Christ.

But as we read what it means to abide in Christ in the contextual setting that follows, where Jesus begins to speak about the love command in light of abiding in Christ, it comes down to the matter of obedience. If we know the will of God and the teaching of Jesus and we choose to neglect it or to disobey it or to be lackadaisical about it and not really learn what it means to be a follower of Jesus, we are not really

obeying him. And we can't really speak of love as John speaks of it, apart from keeping Christ's commandments.

We often hear today in our current culture people will speak about how much they love God, but they are not too interested in his commandments. And people who are perhaps sometimes talking all about obedience never talk a whole lot about love. This sort of thing can't be sustained from John's theology as we notice here in chapter 15, verse 10.

He says in verse 9, As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Remain or abide in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.

So, it's not simply a matter of us needing to remain in the love of God by doing what he says. Jesus said this is exactly what I have done. So, we can't speak of love unless we speak about obeying commands.

We can't speak about obeying commands unless we apply ourselves to understand the truth of scripture. So, if we are not students of the Bible and understand what Jesus is teaching us to do, it's fruitless to talk about love and how much we feel love or how much we gush about love with other people or how much we feel like God has loved us. If our minds are not attentive to the teaching of Jesus, we're not going to be any more following what our Father wants us than he would have been had he not paid attention to the will of God in his life.

So just as Jesus depended upon the Spirit, just as Jesus obeyed the Father in everything, we, following his example, are to obey him in everything and to follow him and to know what he says and to love God more fully as we know God more fully by obeying his commands. Obeying Christ, then, is a matter not only of dependence, which sort of speaks of the Spirit's work in our lives, but it also speaks of obeying him, which speaks of our work in studying the Bible. So, you may know folks who talk a lot about depending upon the Spirit.

You may know folks who talk a lot about reading the Bible and studying it. For us to be fully remaining or abiding in Christ, we will be persevering in the faith through the internal working of the Spirit, to be sure, but it will be an internal working that is qualified to a great extent by how much we are learning about God in his word. Some final key themes in John's theology that we need to think about and notice in the chapter would be the linkage of love and obedience.

We've just been speaking about that pretty much, that it's fruitless to talk about love for God apart from obedience and obedience apart from love. We have very solemn words in this material about persecution as hatred that is totally unmerited. So, if we

are hated by the world because of our connection to Jesus, then it's not really something that we have done or he has done.

It's unmerited hatred, and so we have to accept that if we're followers of Jesus. That's part of what comes. We have ongoing teaching here, obviously, about the Spirit and Jesus.

We've already spoken a great deal about that in the previous video. Finally, the reality of persecution, the work of the helper is stressed here in the sense of in a persecution setting where the world is not at all on our side but is working against us. We can be confident that the Holy Spirit will be convicting the world.

Just as Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about the Spirit blowing as wind which can't be programmed, just as Jesus told the people in the so-called Bread of Life discourse in chapter 6 that the Spirit is working through the words that he spoke, and just as Jesus continues to teach us here that the Spirit will guide us into all the truth even during the times of persecution, the work of the Spirit is maintained there in a very strong way. So, then we're left in John chapter 15, finally, with this matter of being simply the branches. I guess we need to make sure that we understand that a branch is of no value whatsoever unless it's connected to the vine.

The vine is of no value unless it is receiving cultivation by the farmer. So, isn't it a beautiful picture of how we are dependent upon the Lord Jesus, dependent upon the Holy Spirit, dependent upon God the Father who tends the vine through all of his plan and all of his blessing to us? So, let's just keep in mind then that as followers of Jesus, in this image, we are simply branches.

We are not the root and we are not the fruit. We are the medium through which when we're related to God's care and the life we receive from Jesus through the Spirit, it's a beautiful thing and fruit can be produced. But first, we need to remind ourselves we are merely the branches.

This is Dr. David Turner and his teaching on the Gospel of John. This is session 17, the Farewell Discourse, Abiding in Christ and Witnessing to the World. John 15:1-16:15.