

John 15:9-12

- Divine joy: loving Christian communities as a witness to the world -

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Introduction

- ❖ This world is in need of loving communities of Christians as witness to Christ and his salvation.
 - There are tensions between different groups within societies:
 - People of different cultural or tribal background.
 - The rich and the poor.
 - The strong and the weak.
 - In some cultures, women are regarded as inferior to men.
 - People suffer from sexual abuse, broken families, dissatisfaction, sickness and death.
- ❖ These loving communities will receive divine joy from Christ as a gift. This joy is divine joy. This joy surpasses all understanding.
- ❖ The reader should read this passage aloud slowly to become impressed by the words of Christ, impressed by its meaning and promise.

Context

- ❖ An overview of John 13-21:

John 13:1-30	The Last Supper
John 31:31-14:31	Final discourse – part I
John 15:1-16:33	Final discourse – part II
John 17:1-26	The “Last Prayer” of Jesus
John 18:1-19:42	The arrest, trial, crucifixion, and death of Jesus
John 20:1-29	The resurrection of Jesus and the first appearances

- ❖ John 15:9-12 is embedded in John 15:1-17, which belongs to the Final Discourse – part II:

John 15:1-8	<p>“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.” (Jn 15:1)</p> <p>In these passages the following words recur:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ “bear fruit” (4 times) ❖ “remain in me / you (vine)” (7 times) ❖ “ask” (1 time)
John 15:9-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ “loved” (4 times) ❖ “remain in my/his love” (3 times) ❖ “obey(ed)” (2 times) ❖ “My command is this: Love each other” (Jn 15:12)
John 15:13-15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ “friends” (3 times)
John 15:16-17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ “bear fruit” (1 time) ❖ “ask” (1 time) ❖ “This is my command: Love each other” (Jn 15:17)

- ❖ This overview makes clear that John 15:1-8 and 15:16-17 correspond with each other, as the highlighted texts show: “bear fruit” and “ask”. Jesus moves his thoughts forward step by step to end with his final admonishment: “remain in me” > “remain in my love.” And: “My command is this: Love each other” (12) > “This is my command: Love each other” (17).
- ❖ **IMPORTANT:**
 - Jesus is talking of joy to his disciples, just a few hours before He will be betrayed by Judas, sentenced to death on the cross by the Jewish high priest and Pontius Pilate. At this very moment, Jesus knows that He will suffer. His disciples will become anxious and full of grief. The next 48 hours will not be a time of joy, but of grief (Jn 16:22).

Form and structure

❖ John 15:9–12

Communion with God, Father, and Son: (v 9)	“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.
Call: (v 9-10)	Now remain in my love. (A) If you obey my commands, (B) you will remain in my love, (A) just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands (B) and remain in his love. (A)
Promise: (v 11)	I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.
Command: Communion with Each other: (v 12)	My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”

- ❖ Jesus has framed these words intricately. Verse 10 and 11 are encompassed by verse 9 and 12. This shows that love and only love is the basis for the true Christian community. Verse 9 and 10 are again a masterpiece of an argument. They show an ABABA-structure.

Technical notes and theological background

- ❖ Attention should be given to the following words in this passage:

○ Love

- To love = “ἀγαπάω”: 1. to have a warm regard for and interest in another, cherish, have affection for, love.¹
- Love = “ἀγάπη”: 1. the quality of warm regard for and interest in another, esteem, affection, regard, love (without limitation to very intimate relationships, and very seldom in general Greek of sexual attraction).²
 - The verb “to love” is used 37 times in this gospel and the substantive “love” 7 times. These words are also very prominent in the Letters of John: “love” is used 21 times and “to love” 31 times.

¹ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p.5).

² Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p.6).

- Remain = “μένω”: 1. **remain, stay** of someone who does not leave a certain realm or sphere: *remain, continue, abide*. The phrase “*remain in*” is a favorite of John, often used to denote an inward, enduring personal communion *of love*. Also used of God in his relation to Christ, *the Father, who abides in me* (Jn 14:10); of Christians in their relation to Christ (Jn 6:56; 15:4, 5–7); of Christ relating to Christians (Jn 15:4, 5); of Christians relating to God; of God relating to Christians.³
- Command = “έντολή”: 2. a mandate or ordinance, *command*.⁴ The commands of God to Jesus and the commands of Jesus to his disciples do not (primarily) refer to the commandments of the Old Testament, but to the sending of Jesus the Son into this world:⁵
 - “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. **This command I received from my Father**” (Jn 10:17-18).
 - “For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that **his command leads to eternal life**. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say” (Jn 12:49–50).
- Joy = “χαρά”: 1. the experience of gladness.⁶
 - The language of joy is prominent in the Gospels.⁷
 - The wise men “rejoiced with great joy” when they saw the star again (Mt 2:10).
 - The birth of John the Baptist will bring great joy to the people (Lk 1:14).
 - When the angel appeared to the shepherds, he said: “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people” (Lk 2:10).
 - In all cases, this joy is connected to salvation and the Kingdom of God (Mt 13:44; Mt 18:13; Lk 15:5-7; Lk 15:32 – the lost sheep and the lost son).

Exposition

Verse 9-12

- ❖ The loving community of Christians is rooted in the love and communion of the Father and the Son. This communion is made possible by the holy Spirit (Jn 14:15-17).

³ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 631).

⁴ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 340).

⁵ Michaels, J. Commandment. In: Green, J. (1992, p. 135).

⁶ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 1077).

⁷ Painter, J. Joy. In: Green, J. (1992, p. 394-396).

- **“If you love me, you will obey what I command.** And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—**the Spirit of truth.**”
- This love is the cause of the mission of Jesus Christ into this world:
 - “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).
 - This love is not an end in itself, but “they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity **to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me**” (Jn 17:22–23).
- His mission into this world is summarized by "my Father's commands". The connection with the love of God culminates in John 15:14: "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."
- Keeping the commands of Christ means: partaking into the mission of Christ into the world (Jn 17:18):
 - “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.”
- ❖ The joy of Christ. This joy is the divine joy of the resurrected Christ, who will fulfil the command of God.
 - Joy:
 - “You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I” (Jn 14:28).
 - “I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.
 - A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of **her joy that a child is born into the world.**
 - So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, **and no one will take away your joy.**
 - In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, **and your joy will be complete** (Jn 16:20-24).
 - Note that in John 16:24 the words “ask” and “joy” are used together again. “Ask” is also used in Jn 15:7 and 15:16, and “joy” in Jn 15:12.
 - After the resurrection:
 - “On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. **The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord**” (Jn 20:19-20).
 - This joy can only be understood and received by believers who, according to Paul:

- **“we too may live a new life.** If we have been united with him like this in his death, **we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection”** (Rm 6:4-5).
 - Due to this unity with Christ in his resurrection, it was possible for Christians who were persecuted to rejoice in Christ (1 Pet 4.13; Phil 4:4-6).
- This joy is rooted in the communion with the Father and the Son (Jn 15:9) and the communion with each other (Jn 15:12). This is eternal life.
- This joy will be experienced when people come to faith and receive the eternal life (Jn 17:2) and in the complete unity of the believers in communion with the Father and the Son:
 - “I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (Jn 17:22–23)

Application

- ❖ Jesus gathers his disciples into a new community, a community who lives in communion with the Father and the Son, through the Holy Spirit.
 - This community is characterized by (divine) love, the cause of the mission of Jesus into this world speaking the words of the Father, the Gospel, and doing the works of the Father (Jn 14:10).
 - These words and works are full of mercy, grace and righteousness.
- ❖ Joy is part of the fruit of the Spirit and is a gift of Christ:
 - “But the fruit of the Spirit is **love, joy**, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (Gal 5:22–23).
 - It is a gift of God and Jesus whom he has sent.
 - This joy can only be understood and experienced by a strong faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and his atoning death on the cross (Rom 6:4-5).
 - A loving community of Christians is of great importance for all people who are suffering, mourning, doubting or feeling guilty because of sins.
 - This joy is felt when someone experiences the new life, the eternal life in communion with God.
- ❖ A (divine) joyful life is characterized by faith, hope and love (1 Cor 13:13) and by prayer. “Ask”: John 15:7 and 16.
- ❖ A joyful life is a fruitful life, in which the community and the individual believer can enjoy the fruits of faith.

Quotes⁸

- ❖ “Let us be grateful to the people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom” (Marcel Proust).
- ❖ “Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God's kindness: kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile” (Mother Teresa).

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⁸ Goodreads. (n.d.). Retrieved April 05, 2016, from <http://www.goodreads.com>