

GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN

15



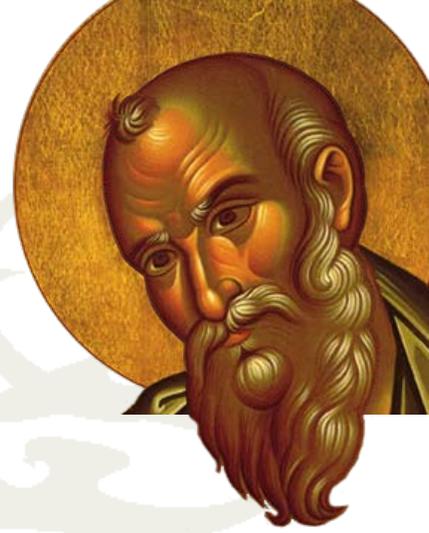
CHRYSOSTOM

Read St. John Chrysostom's homilies on John chapter 15.



PRACTICE QUIZ

Take a quiz to test your knowledge of John chapter 15.



GET THEM AT WWW.ORTHODOXYOUTH.ORG/JOHN

Chapter fifteen begins with one of the most famous metaphors in all of Holy Scripture: Christ is the true vine, God the Father is the true vinedresser (i.e., who tends to the vine), and Christians are branches growing from the vine (15:1, 5). Just as a vine branch cannot grow when it is cut off from the vine, so Christians cannot grow spiritually when we separate ourselves from Christ. If we try to “bear fruit” and become holy on our own, then we will spiritually wither and ultimately be destroyed (15:6). Such a person, Blessed Theophylact says, “is stripped of whatever spiritual grace he had; he is deprived of divine help and life; and as the final result, he is cast into the fire and burned.”

6:5). Christians can truly love others because we live in the love of Christ and thus bear the spiritual fruit of love (15:10, 12; see Galatians 5:22). Archimandrite Justin Popovich points out that such love is central to the Christian life:

At the end, everything comes back to this double commandment: the commandment of love of God and one's neighbor... We now know that the entire Gospel of Christ is contained in the single commandment on love: he who lives in love lives in Christ God. Thus, he who fulfills the Gospel of God is deserving of heaven and earth.

The person who lives in God's love, and through this loves others, is more than a servant of God: such a person is Christ's friend (15:15). A slave follows the commandments of God out of fear of punishment, but, as St. Gregory the Theologian says, “when wisdom bursts the bonds of fear and rises up to love, it makes us the friends of God and children instead of slaves.”

The chapter then makes a dramatic shift: while we are called to love others, there are those outside the Church who will hate us (15:18-25). These people—simply called “the world” (15:18)—would love us if we were like them, but because they hate Christ (which means they also hate God the Father (5:23)), they hate us for belonging to Him (15:19-21). Such hatred is far from innocent: one of the results of Christ's coming is that the people who reject Him cannot claim they knew nothing about Him (15:22). People who learn of Christ and then reject Him therefore fulfill Psalm 69:4 and reject Him without

a cause (15:25).

If people rejected Jesus' teachings when He was on the earth, what hope is there for people to become Christians now that He has ascended? Christ responded that He would send the Holy Spirit from the Father to testify of Him, and the disciples would also give their personal witness of their experience with Him (15:26-27).

Notice that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father (15:26), not the Father and the Son (as is said in the Western version of the Nicene Creed). St. Didymus the Blind says this is because “the Spirit of truth properly proceeds from God as the Father, the Begetter.”



LIFE TIP

Archimandrite Sophrony warns that Christians should expect to be unpopular: “Christ gave us the commandment to love others but did not make it a condition of salvation that they should love us. Indeed, we may positively be disliked for independence of spirit... Let the whole world dismiss us as unworthy of attention, trust or respect—it will not matter provided that the Lord accepts us.”



Notice the qualification in verse ten: we are only in Christ—we are only connected to the true vine—if we follow His commandments (see 14:21). The central commandment is to love others (15:12, 17)—Christ also said elsewhere that we should love God with all our heart, soul and mind (Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27; all these repeat Deuteronomy