



FAMILY LIFE BAPTIST CHURCH

“The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 57”

August 16th, 2009

Pastor Darryl R. Curtis

Family Life Baptist Church

909 West Saginaw Street

Lansing, Michigan 48915

Phone: (517) 393-9399

Email: info@familylifebc.com

Website: <http://www.familylifebc.com>

Informed. Insightful. Intelligent.



The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 57

John 15:1-4

- 1 **“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.**
- 2 **Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.**
- 3 **You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.**
- 4 **Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.**

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

In Jesus' final discourse to His disciples, Jesus is no longer talking about the mundane concerns of this life, but about how His interaction with us fits into realities of our eternity. Let me explain. In the beginning, God designed a physical environment for us in which we could live eternally without worry. Everything that we needed was provided. Our food grew on trees. We had dominion over the animals and they posed no threat to us. and, since our diet was fruit, we posed no threat to them. The climate was so temperate that we did not need clothes or shelter. And God provided us with an attractive mate to love, one with the physicality to provide us with a renewable source of physical ecstasy as well as fulfilling emotional companionship.

God created us with the capacity to think and to choose, because He desired that His relationship with us be one of mutual love as well. To God, how we choose, rather than what we say, is the essence of our expression of love. After God placed us in this comprehensively supportive environment, He told us that we reciprocate, or return, love for Him by choosing to follow His instructions, which would also optimize our existence in the environment that He created for us. Jesus tells us, in **John 14:15**:

15 “If you love Me, keep My commandments.

And that is the bottom line.

Love is choosing to follow God's instructions and living within God's parameters. But since love is a choice, God also gives us the ability to choose to live contrary to His design. If we choose to live according to the design, we show our love for the Designer. If we choose to indulge our own ideas and endeavor to



FAMILY LIFE BAPTIST CHURCH

defeat the design, we show that we detest the design and disdain the designer. **John 14:15** says that the self-indulgence of disobedience shows a lack of love for God.

Let me give you a concrete example of endeavoring to change the design. I write my sermons using Microsoft Word. I can rarely write an entire sermon at one sitting, so I need to occasionally save my document so I can do something else. According to the design of Microsoft Word, I can save my document by holding down the control key and the S key simultaneously. The shortcut for remembering the keystroke is that the S key stands for “save”. But, the other day, I was thinking that I don’t really like using the S key for “save”. I think that the K key for “keep” would be a better choice.

So which is better, S for save or K for keep? I like K, but Microsoft Word won’t accept my preference because the person who designed the program chose S for save. I think that my idea is as good as his, but since he is the one that designed the program, he gets to pick. Millions of people have copies of Microsoft Word, and they aren’t going to change the way that they work because I have a different idea than the programmer.

Well, God is the programmer of the world. You may think that your ideas are as good as His, but God designed the program, so He is the one that gets to pick the keyboard shortcuts. We can choose to not follow the design but deviating from the design causes us to obtain unexpected results. I tried hitting control-K while using Microsoft Word and something does happen, but the program doesn’t save my document. Microsoft Word only works according to the design.

Jesus uses an agricultural metaphor to explain the roles in God’s design to us. **John 15:1-3** says:

1 “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.

2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

The job of a vinedresser is to clean the grapevine and trim branches from it to maximize grape production. Think of a grapevine as a horizontal tree, having a long wooden trunk with shorter branches growing from it at regular intervals. Research indicates that one year old sections of a branch with only two productive buds on them produce the best grapes. Grapes growing on older or younger wood with more than two productive buds on them are generally inferior to those growing on branch sections that are one year old with only two buds on them.

A well dressed vine will have branches protruding from the trunk at regular intervals, with two buds on the section of wood on the branch that is one year old. The vinedresser will remove the buds from the section of the branch older than one year that connects the one year old section to the vine. One section will



FAMILY LIFE BAPTIST CHURCH

be allowed to grow on the branch past the one year old section, which will be the section that is one year old the following year. Additionally, the vine has to be cleaned by removing bark from the branches close to the grape growing sections, because insects nest in bark and ruin the grapes.

Using Jesus' metaphor, God sent Jesus here to be the vine, and then attached us to Him as branches, so that we can produce fruit. God's Word, like pruning and cleaning the grapevine, configures our lives to optimize our fruit production. Jesus tells us, in **John 15:7**:

7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

Jesus makes it possible for us to produce copious quantities of the best fruit. Well, you might ask, what about those people that are not abiding in the vine? Their branches grow but produce wood rather than fruit, and when the vinedresser inspects the vine, He will take those branches away, as Jesus says in **John 15:6**:

6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.

Now the purpose of fruit, in any species of plant, is to provide seeds for reproduction. So what do we reproduce through our association with Jesus? The answer is found in **John 3:16**, which tells us:

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Everlasting life is the fruit that Jesus Christ has come to produce. God so loved us in the beginning that He created our environment so that we could live with Him forever. But, our eternality depended upon our choosing to stay within design parameters. In **Genesis 2:16-17**:

16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat;

17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

The man and the woman in the garden showed their disdain for God by violating His design parameters, but God still loved them and God loves us so much that He sent His Son Jesus with a new plan to give us everlasting life. We can obtain everlasting life by our attachment to the vine of the love of Jesus Christ and be restored to our original relationship with the vinedresser.

We produce this fruit of everlasting life by following the commandments of and emulating the example of Jesus Christ, who tells us, in **John 15:12-13**:

12 This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.



13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

In the garden, everlasting life initially depended on whether or not we chose to love God enough to obey Him, and we, through Jesus Christ, are back to that same choice to love. We produce the fruit of everlasting life by reproducing Jesus' example and obeying His command to love one another as Jesus loved us. Jesus showed His love for us by laying down His life for us on the Cross. He provided us with the sacrifice that we needed to atone for our sins. Jesus calls upon us to sacrifice ourselves for one another as He sacrificed Himself for us.

Since self-sacrifice is the key to everlasting life, the one thing that stands between us and the love of Christ is our self-centeredness. Many Christians are not aware of the fact that life with Christ is not about ceremonial perfection, not about following religious rules and regulations, and not about performing rituals correctly, but rather about how we maintain our relationships and sacrifice ourselves for one another.

Last week we reviewed the six denials of Peter. Jesus warned Peter that Satan was on his case, but Peter arrogantly maintained that he would remain steadfastly at Jesus' side throughout Jesus' passion. But, as Peter denied Jesus just as Jesus prophesied, in **Matthew 26:58, 69-75, Mark 14:54, 66-72, Luke 22:54-62, John 18:15-18, 25-27:**

The others standing there came close to Peter and said, "Certainly you're also one of [Jesus' disciples]! You're a Galilean—your speech betrays you!"

But Peter denied it again and began to curse and swear. "I don't know this fellow you're talking about," he shouted. "I don't know what you're saying!" (*This was Peter's sixth denial*)

While he was still speaking a rooster crowed a second time, and the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered what the Lord had told him: "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times," and, "Before it crows the second time, you will deny Me three times."

Peter denied Jesus after emphatically declaring that he would not do so. Peter was warned, Peter knew what was about to happen, Peter should have been prepared, but Peter failed the test. But Jesus knew that Peter would be weak when he had to stand on his own, because although Jesus told the disciples about His death and resurrection, none of them, including Peter, understood the message. Peter thought that he could stand with Jesus, because Peter determined that his destiny was in his own hands and that he had the ability to create his own keyboard shortcuts. And, like Peter, we become weak before trials when we fail to recognize that we need to draw our sustenance from the vine by listening to Jesus, rather than leaning on our own understanding.



FAMILY LIFE BAPTIST CHURCH

So Jesus is never surprised by our failures, because He, being the vine, knows whether we are abiding in Him or doing our own thing. But, as willful as we may be, Jesus actually loves us. Jesus loved us enough to die on the Cross for us, and He is not going to let a few betrayals change His love for us. Even after denying Jesus, Peter received Jesus' patient love, as Peter himself tells us, in **2Peter 3:9**:

9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Paul describes Jesus' love, in **1Corinthians 13:4-5, 7**:

4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;

5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;

7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love suffers long, cannot be provoked and does not think to do evil to us. Love bears, hopes and endures all things. God's definition of love is primarily a response to negative circumstances and disappointment. And, that makes sense, because, since Jesus Christ came to die for our sins, His ministry is a response to our negative circumstances to how we disappoint God.

Jesus deals with His disappointment in us by producing the fruit of restoration, as He shows us after rising from the dead. Jesus met His disciples fishing in the Sea of Tiberias, gave them a great catch, and then fixed them breakfast. Then Jesus talks to Simon Peter, as **John 21:15** records:

When they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," Peter replied. "You know I love You."

Peter, said Jesus, are you sure? After all, just a few days ago when the heat was on, you denied that you knew Me six times. I don't think you love me at all. You sound like a fair weather friend to me.

Actually, that's not what Jesus said. **John 3:17** tells us:

17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

Jesus did not meet the disciples at the lake so that He could condemn or chastise Peter, but so that He could restore Peter to his position as leader of the disciples. So Jesus told Peter, in **John 21:15-19**:

"Feed My lambs," Jesus told him.

A second time Jesus said, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?"

Peter replied, "Yes, Lord! You know I love You."

"Shepherd My sheep," Jesus said.

For the third time Jesus said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?"



Peter was grieved that Jesus asked the third time, “Do you love Me?” Peter answered, “Lord, You know all things. You know I love You.”

“**Feed My sheep!**” Jesus answered. “**I’m telling you the truth, when you were younger, you dressed yourself and walked wherever you wanted. But when you’re old, you’ll stretch out your hands and another will dress you and carry you where you don’t want to go.**” He said this to indicate what kind of death Peter would suffer to glorify God. Then Jesus told Peter, “**Follow Me.**”

After this meeting, it is clear that Peter and Jesus have fallen back in. This is not because of Peter, but because of Jesus, who consistently refuses to hold a grudge. Jesus did not come to figure out which of the disciples was worthy or to weak to be part of the vine, because they were all too weak. The fact of the matter is, as **Romans 3:23** tells us:

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

If Jesus was looking for someone good enough to be His disciple, He was looking on the wrong planet. Planet Earth is the wrong place to look for people who are good enough, because all of us here are sinners. But **Romans 5:8** tells us:

8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Go back to **1Corinthians 13:4-5, 7**. Love suffers long, cannot be provoked and does not anticipate evil. Love bears, hopes and endures all things.

My wife painted our bedroom last Thursday, and I was watching the football game while I was helping her. When the game ended, she changed the television to the Style channel, and we watched a reality show about a young woman named Chastity, who was the mother of nine illegitimate children. Since this channel is about style, the purpose of the show was to address Chastity’s inappropriate style, which could be described as early hoochie mamma. Her own teen-aged son repeatedly told her that he was embarrassed to have her come to the school that he attended because she dressed like a prostitute. The producers of the show sought out her friends and relatives, and everyone whom they asked, including the professional wardrobe designers, told her that she should cover up some flesh, but Chastity just wasn’t having it. She decided to let it all hang out.

Chastity was going to school herself to become a psychologist. To try to convince her that her wardrobe wouldn’t work with her chosen profession, the host of the show had Chastity stand on the street inside of an enclosure that allowed the passers-by to see her body but not her face. The host then stopped twenty men and women at random and asked them to write down whether they would consider consulting with the woman in the enclosure about a psychological problem if they had one. When Chastity read the written responses, she found that twenty out of twenty passers-by said, in various ways, that she looked like a



FAMILY LIFE BAPTIST CHURCH

prostitute rather than a psychologist, and that there was no way that they would ever consult with someone that dressed like her.

Chastity finally got the message, and agreed to try on the more appropriate clothes that her friends picked out for her. It took a lot of persuasion, but, by the end of the show, Chastity finally realized the truth of that which everyone was trying to tell her.

I hope that, when Chastity returns to her home environment, her new wardrobe will actually be a catalyst for a change in her morals. You can imagine that a woman with nine illegitimate children is not exactly a pillar of virtue. Chastity dressed like a prostitute, but there was this woman who was a real prostitute. She was tired of life on the street, and she heard that Jesus could help her change her situation. She found out that the Lord happened to be in her town for the day, and that the preacher was having an open house for Him. Although she was a prostitute and dressed like it, she wanted the Lord to give her the love, comfort, and most of all, forgiveness, that others received from Him. So, dressed in her working clothes, she went to the preacher's house, and received the same reaction from the people at the preacher's house that Chastity received from the people that saw her in the enclosure. But, on this day, the prostitute was not interested in how many men she could attract to make money or how many women were disgusted with her outfit, because she only had one person in mind. She ignored the remarks of the crowd and pressed through them to see Jesus. When she saw the Lord, she noticed that the preacher had not extended the courtesy of the house to Him by having His feet washed, a custom that we discussed a couple of weeks ago. She had the oil that she used to perfume herself between clients in her purse, and, since footwashing was the job of a servant, the prostitute decided that she would wash Jesus' feet and refresh them with her oil.

Now, this was certainly a scandal. When my wife and I are in the club, and a woman comes in that is showing too much skin, we generally look at each other and say, "Umph, umph, umph". Really holy people generally don't have anything to do with prostitutes, and a preacher like me that understands the difference in electrical potential between a man and a woman would not allow a prostitute to even touch him. But here was Jesus, in public, letting this prostitute kiss his toes, wrap her hair around his bare feet and rub His feet with her perfumed oil. Seeing what the folks wrote about Chastity, I'm sure you can imagine the conversations going on in the room about Jesus and this hooker.

Jesus did not say anything to her, but rather spoke to His host, as **Luke 7:40-47** records:

40 And Jesus answered and said to [His host], "Simon, I have something to say to you." So [Simon] said, "Teacher, say it."

41 "There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty."



42 And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?"

43 Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And [Jesus] said to him, "You have rightly judged."

44 Then [Jesus] turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head.

45 You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in.

46 You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil.

47 Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."

To whom little is forgiven, the same loves little. Jesus diagnosed the problem that Simon shared with the other really good people at the open house that were talking about the prostitute ministering to Jesus.

Their problem was that they were too good. They were so good that they really did not feel the need to have their sins forgiven. They were so good that they could look down on sinners like the prostitute. They were so good that they had no regard whatsoever for women dressed like the prostitute, and all they could say about them was "Umph, umph, umph". And they were so good that they couldn't figure out why Jesus would allow a prostitute to touch him.

But, in reality, Simon and his cohort weren't really that good, not nearly as good as they thought they were. **Ecclesiastes 12:14** tells us:

14 For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil.

The old preacher used to say, "There are two kinds of sinners, the caught and the uncaught". The reason that Simon and his cohort could think of themselves as good was because their sins had not been publicized as had those of the prostitute. Madoff was thought to be a really good guy until his sin was exposed. But our problem is that God can follow us home and see what we do in our secret closet, where no one else can see. God told Samuel that man looks on the outward appearance, but He looks on the heart. Neither you nor I want our heart secrets disclosed, because, as **Jeremiah 17:9** says:

9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?"

Just as Jesus told Peter about his cowardice and denials, God can tell us about our wickedness, as **Jeremiah 17:10** says:

10 I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings.

Right after I say "Umph, umph, umph" to my wife, I look around and say,



FAMILY LIFE BAPTIST CHURCH

“You know dear, I gotta stop thinking negatively about people. I’d better quit.”

1 Corinthians 10:12 says:

12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

I read the stories of Jesus interacting with Peter the Apostle and Simon the Pharisee, and I know that I need to quit. With all of the sin that I have done in my life that has never been exposed, all of the sin that Jesus has saved me from, I need to take “Umph, umph, umph” out of my vocabulary.

Abiding in the vine should not make us proud, but humble. Branches cannot bear grapes without the vine, and we should recognize that the reason that we have fruit in the Kingdom at all is because of that which we have received from Jesus Christ. Attached to the vine we have everlasting life. Without the vine, we might be looking up at the prostitute on Judgment Day rather than down on her.

Jesus tells us, in **John 15:12-13**:

12 This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.

Simon found out that Jesus has prostitutes for friends. **Luke 7:50** records:

50 Then Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.”

Jesus told the woman that because she had enough faith to brave the crowd and seek Him, she obtained salvation and peace. Jesus did not tell the woman to change her profession or her wardrobe, because, as **1 Samuel 16:7** says:

7 But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

Everyone that loves Jesus has just been promoted, as He tells His disciples, in **John 15:15-17**

15 No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.

16 You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

17 These things I command you, that you love one another.

So, here it is. In the garden, God told the man and the woman to leave the tree alone. From the Cross, Jesus tells us to become branches on the vine and love one another. Neither Chastity nor the prostitute at Simon’s house were good enough for the religious people to love, but those who love little will be forgiven little.



FAMILY LIFE BAPTIST CHURCH

Saints, let us think before we turn up our noses at people. Let us think before we decide that there are people with whom we cannot associate because they are too sinful. It is true that some of them are going to hell, but we would be too, if it wasn't for Jesus. God says that we ought not just look at their outward appearance, because we just might be able to put some fruit in their hearts. The point is not for us to be insulated from sin, but for us to bear fruit.

I know a church-going woman that was married to a drinking man. At first she begged and pleaded for him to stop staying out all night drinking, and then she nagged and punished him, as many women do. Finally she realized that nagging and punishing was not producing the desired effect. I don't know who came up with the idea that telling a man over and over again to do something that he doesn't want to do would make him do it, but obviously, it wasn't someone that had a great deal of information about motivational science. But after reading her Bible and finally figuring out that being punitive wasn't going to work, she made the choice to try a different tactic.

Every Sunday morning, her husband came home from a hard night of drinking and God knows what else as she was getting the children ready for church. Nagging hadn't helped change the situation, and being angry didn't seem to do any good, so she said to herself, "If I was loved him as Christ loved the church, I would fix him a nice breakfast when he came home." So she fixed her husband a nice breakfast, and put a glass of orange juice and two aspirin on the table, in case he had a hangover.

As he came in ready to exchange some harsh words with her, he looked suspiciously at the breakfast. Hmm, he thought, is there arsenic in the orange juice? What's the deal? But the breakfast smelled pretty good, so he decided to try it. It was delicious, and he felt much better after he ate. Pretty soon, his wife and children came downstairs, all dressed up and ready for church. The kids all greeted him cheerfully, and his wife kissed him, gave him a full body hug, and welcomed him home. "See you later. We'll be back after church", she smiled as she herded the kids out of the door.

After a few weekends of this type of pleasant interaction, the man began to think about that which he was doing. As he was coming home one Sunday, it finally dawned on him that his wife was actually treating him better than the women in the club, so why was he spending his time out there? When he got home, he found that the Sunday morning routine hadn't changed, and his breakfast, his orange juice, his aspirin, his kiss and his full body hug were waiting for him. After he ate, he went upstairs to get some sleep, but he found that he wasn't sleepy. He realized that he really wanted was to be with his wife and he knew where she was, so he cleaned up, put on a suit and came to the church.

I was reading the eighth chapter of Romans when he came in, then the choir sang a song and Reverend Flanagan preached his usual salvation sermon. When the invitation song started, the brother walked down the aisle and testified



FAMILY LIFE BAPTIST CHURCH

that he was joining the church, after all of his years of drinking and carousing, because his wife had drawn him in with her love.

The brother joined the usher board, but within a year or two, he had a stroke. He died after that, and if he went to heaven, it was not because of the church services that he had attended, the sermons that he had heard, or the people whom he served in the church, but it was because of the love of his wife, who decided to reject the teaching of the world that she should nag and get angry, and rather accept the teaching of Jesus Christ who forgave the prostitute and Peter. Jesus said, in **John 15:17**:

17 These things I command you, that you love one another.

John 3:16 tells us:

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Love is the fruit on Jesus' vine. Church activities like great sermons and miraculous healings are fine, but the true Fruit of the Spirit is Love. Do something extraordinarily loving for someone this week, because love is the reality of our eternity.

Pastor Darryl R. Curtis
Family Life Baptist Church