

Historic Commentary

(Sixth Sunday of Easter - Year B)



The Liturgy Letter

Commentary on John 15:9-17 from Selected Church Fathers and John Calvin

[Thomas Aquinas' curated commentary on John 15](#), from a 13th century document called the [Catena Aurea](#) that contains compiled verse by verse commentary on the Gospels from the Patristics and others.

[Basil the Great](#): Now, if observing the commandments is the essential sign of love, it is very greatly feared that without love even the most effective action of the glorious gifts of grace—even of the most sublime powers and even of faith itself and the commandment that make a person perfect—will not be of help.... It is evident, therefore, and undeniable that without charity—even though ordinances are obeyed and righteous acts are performed, even though the commandments of the Lord have been observed and great wonders of grace effected—they will be considered as works of iniquity ... because those who perform these acts have as their aim the gratification of their own will.

[Irenaeus](#): Whoever holds, without pride and boasting, to the true glory regarding created things and the Creator (who is the Almighty God of all and who has granted existence to all) and continues in his [i.e., God's] love and subjection and continues to give thanks shall also receive from [God] the greater glory of promotion, looking forward to the time when he shall become like him who died for him.

[Cyril of Alexandria](#): Here it is as though when Jesus says, "All this I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you," he's saying that those things which encourage me may give you encouragement as well. You can face danger bravely, fortifying yourselves with the hope of those who will be saved. And, if suffering comes upon you in this work, don't be brought down into the feebleness of apathy, but rejoice more abundantly when you fulfill the will of him that wills that all should be saved and come to the knowledge of truth. For I too rejoiced at this, [Jesus says], and thought my sufferings very sweet.

[Augustine](#): And what else is Christ's joy in us except that he is pleased to rejoice over us? And what is this joy of ours that he says is to be made full, but our having fellowship with him?...His joy, therefore, in us is the grace he has bestowed on us, and that is also our joy. But he rejoiced over this joy even from eternity when he chose us before the foundation of the world. Nor can we rightly say that his joy was not full. For God's joy was never at any time imperfect. But that joy of his was not in us. For we, in whom that joy could exist, had as yet no existence. And even when our existence commenced, it began not to

be in him. But in him it always was, who in the infallible truth of his own foreknowledge rejoiced that we should yet be his own. Accordingly, he had a joy over us that was already full when he rejoiced in foreknowing and foreordaining us. And there could hardly be any fear intermingling in that joy of his that might imply a possible failure in what he foreknew would be done by himself.

Cyprian: Discord cannot attain to the kingdom of heaven. The one who has done violence to the love of Christ by faithless dissension will not attain to the reward of Christ, who said, “This is my commandment, that you love one another.” Whoever does not have charity does not have God.

Basil the Great: Do we fail to love according to the commandment of the Lord? Then we lose the distinctive mark imprinted on us. Are we puffed up till almost bursting with empty pride and arrogance? Then we fall into the inevitable condemnation of the devil.

Augustine: But when he said in this way here, “This is my commandment,” as if there were no other, what are we to think? Is, then, the commandment about that love with which we love one another his only one? Is there not another that is still greater, that we should love God? Or did God in truth give to us such a commandment about love alone that we have no need of searching for others? There are three things at least that the apostle commends when he says, “But now abide faith, hope, charity, these three. But the greatest of these is charity.” And although in charity, that is, in love, the two commandments are contained, yet it is here declared to be the greatest, not the only one. Accordingly, what a host of commandments are given to us about faith, what a multitude about hope! Who is there that could collect them together or suffice to number them? But let us ponder the words of the same apostle: “Love is the fulfillment of the law.”⁴ And so, where there is love, what can be lacking? And where it is not, what is there that can possibly be profitable? The devil believes but does not love: no one loves who does not believe. One may, indeed, hope for pardon who does not love, but he hopes in vain. But no one can despair who loves. Therefore, where there is love, there will necessarily be faith and hope. And where there is the love of our neighbor, there also will necessarily be the love of God. For one that does not love God, how does he love his neighbor as himself, seeing that he does not even love himself? Such a person is both impious and iniquitous. And he who loves iniquity clearly does not love but hates his own soul. Let us, therefore, hold fast to this precept of the Lord, to love one another, and then we will be doing all else that is commanded, for we have all else contained in this.

Ephrem the Syrian: “This is my commandment.” Have you then only one precept? This is sufficient, even if it is unique and so great. Nevertheless he also said, “Do not kill,” because the one who loves does not kill. He said, “Do not steal,” because the one who loves does even more—he gives. He said, “Do not lie,” for the one who loves speaks the truth, against falsehood. “I give you a new commandment.” If you have not understood what “This is my commandment” means, let the apostle be summoned as interpreter and say, “The goal of his commandment is love.” What is its binding force? It is that of which [the Lord] spoke, “Whatever you want others to do to you, you should do also.” “Love one another” in accordance with this measure, “as I have loved you.” That is not possible, for

you are our Lord who loves your servants. But we who are equals, how can we love one another as you have loved us? Nevertheless, he has said it.... His love is that he has called us his friends. If we were to give our life for you, would our love be equal to yours?... How then can what he said be explained, “As I have loved you”? “Let us die for each other,” he said. As for us, we do not even want to live for one another! “If I, who am your Lord and God, die for you, how much more should you die for one another.”

John Chrysostom: “Love one another as I have loved you.” Do you see that the love of God is intertwined with our own and connected like a sort of chain? Thus, it sometimes says that there are two commandments, sometimes only one. For it is not possible that the one who has taken hold of the first should not possess the second also.

Gregory the Great: The unique, the highest proof of love is this, to love the person who is against us. This is why Truth himself bore the suffering of the cross and yet bestowed his love on his persecutors, saying, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” Why should we wonder that his living disciples loved their enemies, when their dying master loved his? He expressed the depth of his love when he said, “No one has greater love than this, than that he lay down his life for his friends.” The Lord had come to die even for his enemies, and yet he said he would lay down his life for his friends to show us that when we are able to win over our enemies by loving them, even our persecutors are our friends.

Augustine: But “greater love has no one than this, that he should lay down his life for his friends.” No one, you think? Absolutely no one. It is true; Christ said it. Let us question the apostle, and let him answer us: “Christ,” he says, “died for the ungodly.” And again he says, “While we were enemies, we were reconciled with God through the death of his Son.” So there you are. In Christ we do find greater love, seeing that he gave up his life not for his friends but for his enemies. How great must be God’s love for humanity and what extraordinary affection, so to love even sinners that he would die for love of them! “For God emphasizes his love toward us”—they are the apostle’s words—“because while we were still sinners Christ died for us.”

Gregory the Great: Cultivate the virtue of love in tranquil times by showing mercy, so that it will be unconquerable in times of disorder. Learn first to give up your possessions for almighty God, and then yourself.

Clement of Alexandria: Now sinners are called enemies of God—enemies, that is, of the commands that they do not obey, just as those who obey become friends. The latter are named so from their fellowship; the former from their estrangement, which is freely chosen. For there is neither enmity nor sin without the enemy and the sinner.

John Cassian: “The one who fears is not yet perfect in love.” And again, though it is a grand thing to serve God, and it is said, “Serve the Lord in fear,” and “It is a great thing for you to be called my servant,” and “Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when he comes, shall find working,” yet it is said to the apostles, “I no longer call you servants, for the servant does not know what his Lord does. But I call you friends, for everything I have

heard from my Father I have made known to you.” And once more, “You are my friends if you do what I command you.” You see then that there are different stages of perfection and that we are called by the Lord from high things to still higher in such a way that he who has become blessed and perfect in the fear of God—going, as it is written, “from strength to strength” and from one perfection to another, that is, mounting with an eager soul from fear to hope—is summoned in the end to that still more blessed stage, which is love. And whoever has been “a faithful and wise servant” will pass to the companionship of friendship and to the adoption of sons.

Irenaeus: Inasmuch as all natural commandments are common to both Christians and Jews, the Jews indeed had the beginning and origin of the commandments, but [those commandments] received their growth and completion in us. For to yield assent to God, and to follow his Word, and to love him above all and one’s neighbor as one’s self (now people are neighbors to one another), and to abstain from every evil deed, and all other things of a similar nature that are common to both [covenants]—all of this reveals one and the same God. But this is our Lord, the Word of God, who in the first instance certainly drew slaves to God, but afterward he set those free who were subject to him, as he himself declares to his disciples, “I will not now call you servants, for the servant does not know what his lord does. But I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from my Father I have made known.” For when he says, “I will not now call you servants,” he indicates in the most marked manner that it was he who originally appointed for men and women that bondage with respect to God through the law and then afterward conferred on them freedom. And, in that he says, “For the servant does not know what his lord does,” he points out, by means of his own advent, the ignorance of a people in a servile condition. But when he terms his disciples “the friends of God,” he plainly declares himself to be the Word of God whom Abraham also followed voluntarily and under no compulsion because of the noble nature of his faith—and who thus became “the friend of God.”

Augustine: Just as there are two kinds of fear that produce two classes of fearers, so there are two kinds of servitude that produce two classes of servants. There is a fear that perfect love casts out, and there is another fear, which is virtuous and endures forever. ... In that fear that love casts out, servitude also needs to be cast out along with it. For both were joined together by the apostle, that is, the servitude and the fear, when he said, “For you have not received the spirit of servitude again to fear.” ... Since, therefore, he has given us power to become the children of God, let us not be servants but children, so that, in some wonderful and indescribable but real way, we may as servants have the power not to be servants. Let us be servants, indeed, with that virtuous fear that distinguishes the servant that enters into the joy of his lord, but not servants with the fear that has to be cast out and that characterizes one who does not abide in the house forever.

Gregory of Nazianzus: The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and, so to say, its first swathing band. But, when wisdom bursts the bonds of fear and rises up to love, it makes us friends of God and children instead of slaves.

Gregory the Great: How great is our Creator's mercy! We were unworthy servants, and he calls us friends. How great is our human value, that we should be friends of God! You have heard your glorious dignity—now listen to what the struggle costs: "If you do whatever I command you."

Ambrose: God himself made us friends instead of servants.... He gave us a pattern of friendship to follow. We are to fulfill the wish of a friend, to unfold to him our secrets that we hold in our own hearts, and are not to disregard his confidences. Let us show him our heart, and he will open his to us.... A friend, then, if he is a true one, hides nothing. He pours forth his soul as the Lord Jesus poured forth the mysteries of his Father.

Gregory the Great: But let one who has attained the dignity of being called a friend of God observe that the gifts he perceives in himself are beyond him. Let him attribute nothing to his own merits so that he becomes an enemy. The Lord adds, "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and appointed you to go and bring forth fruit. I have appointed you for grace. I have planted you to go willingly and bring forth fruit by your works."

Augustine: "You did not choose me, but I chose you." That is amazing grace!... For what were we before Christ had chosen us besides being wicked and lost? We did not believe in him, so as to be chosen by him. For if he chose those who already believed, then he was [in effect] chosen himself prior to his choosing [them].... This passage refutes the vain opinion of those who say that we were chosen before the foundation of the world because God foreknew that we should be good, not that he himself would make us good. For if he had chosen us because he foreknew that we should be good, he would have foreknown also that we should first choose him. For without choosing him we cannot be good, unless indeed someone can be called good who has not chosen good. What then has he chosen in those who are not good?... You cannot say, I am chosen because I believed. For if you believed in him, you had already chosen him. Nor can you say, Before I believed I did good works and therefore was chosen. For what good work is there before faith when the apostle says, "Whatever is not of faith is sin"? What is there for us to say, then, but that we were wicked and were chosen, that by the grace of having been chosen we might become good?

Irenaeus: As much as God lacks nothing, so much do we stand in need of fellowship with God. For this is the glory of humanity: to continue and remain permanently in God's service. This is also why the Lord said to his disciples, "You did not choose me, but I chose you," indicating that they did not glorify him when they followed him but that, in following the Son of God, they were glorified by him.

Gregory the Great: I have appointed you for grace. I have planted you to go willingly and bring forth fruit by your works. I have said that you should go willingly, since to will to do something is already to go in your heart. Then he adds the quality their fruit is to have: "And your fruit is to endure." Everything we labor for in this present world scarcely lasts until death. Death intervenes and cuts off the fruit of our labor. But what we do for eternal life remains even after death. It begins to appear only when the fruits of our physical labors cease to be visible. The reward of the one begins when the other is ended.

Let one who recognizes that he now bears eternal fruit within his soul think little of the temporal fruits of his labors. Let us work for the fruit that endures; let us work for the fruit that begins at death since death destroys all others.

Cyril of Alexandria: Since therefore you follow in the path of my words and ministry and have the mind that my true disciples should have, it follows that you should not, by your own delay, throw obstacles in the way of someone who of his own will seeks the faith and is self-called to a life of piety. Rather, you should attach yourselves as guides to those who are still ignorant and wandering and bring the gospel of salvation to those who do not yet want to learn it and eagerly encourage them to attain to the true knowledge of God, even though the mind of your hearers may be hardened into disobedience. In other words, bring them more in line with your own condition so they will advance and return to fruit bearing in God by gradually growing in what is better for them. Then they too can have fruit that always remains and is preserved, and they can also have that most desirable object of prayer—the bestowal of whatever they wish, if only they “ask in my name.”

Augustine: This [love] is our fruit about which he said, “I have chosen you, that you should go and bring forth fruit and that your fruit should remain.” And what he added, “That whatever you shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you,” he will certainly give us if we love one another, seeing that this is the very thing he has also given us in choosing us when we had no fruit, because we had not chosen him. He appointed us that we should bring forth fruit—that is, that we should love one another—a fruit that we cannot have apart from him, just as the branches can do nothing apart from the vine.

Our fruit, therefore, is charity, which the apostle explains to be “out of a pure heart, and a good conscience and sincere faith.” When we love one another, we love God. For it would be with no true love that we loved one another, if we did not love God. For everyone loves his neighbor as himself if he loves God. And if he does not love God, he does not love himself. For on these two commandments of love hang all the law and the prophets:⁵⁸ this is our fruit. And it is in reference, therefore, to such fruit that he gives us this commandment when he says, “These things I command you, that you love one another.” In the same way also the apostle Paul, when wishing to commend the fruit of the Spirit in opposition to the deeds of the flesh, posited this as his principle, saying, “The fruit of the Spirit is love.” And then, as if springing from and bound up in this principle, he wove the others together, which are “joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.”

For who can truly rejoice who does not love the good as the source of his joy? Who can have true peace, if he does not have it with one whom he truly loves? Who can be long-enduring through persevering continually in good, except through fervent love? Who can be kind, if he does not love the person he is helping? Who can be good, if he is not made so by loving? Who can be sound in the faith without that faith that works by love? Whose meekness can be beneficial in character, if not regulated by love? And who will abstain from that which is debasing, if he does not love that which dignifies? Appropriately, therefore, the good Master frequently commends love as the only thing needing to be commended. Without love, everything else that is good is no help, and you

cannot have love without bringing with it all those other good things that make a person truly good.

John Calvin:

Vs 9. As the Father hath loved me.

He intended to express something far greater than is commonly supposed; for they who think that he now speaks of the sacred love of God the Father, which he always had towards the Son, philosophize away from the subject; for it was rather the design of Christ to lay, as it were, in our bosom a sure pledge of God's love towards us. That abstruse inquiry, as to the manner in which the Father always loved himself in the Son, has nothing to do with the present passage. But the love which is here mentioned must be understood as referring to us, because Christ testifies that the Father loves him, as he is the Head of the Church. And this is highly necessary for us; for he who without a Mediator, inquires how he is loved by God, involves him in a labyrinth, in which he will neither discover the entrance, nor the means of extricating himself. We ought therefore to cast our eyes on Christ, in whom will be found the testimony and pledge of the love of God; for the love of God was fully poured out on him, that from him it might flow to his members. He is distinguished by this title, that he is the beloved Son, in whom the will of the Father is satisfied, (Matthew 3:17.) But we ought to observe the end, which is, that God may accept us in him. So, then, we may contemplate in him, as in a mirror, God's paternal love towards us all; because he is not loved apart, or for his own private advantage, but that he may unite us with him to the Father.

Abide in my love.

Some explain this to mean, that Christ demands from his disciples mutual love; but others explain it better, who understand it to mean the love of Christ towards us. He means that we should continually enjoy that love with which he once loved us, and, therefore, that we ought to take care not to deprive ourselves of it; for many reject the grace which is offered to them, and many throw away what they once had in their hands. So, then, since we have been once received into the grace of Christ, we must see that we do not fall from it through our own fault.

The conclusion which some draw from these words, that there is no efficacy in the grace of God. unless it be aided by our steadfastness, is frivolous. For I do not admit that the Spirit demands from us no more than what is in our own power, but he shows us what we ought to do, that, if our strength be deficient, we may seek it from some other quarter. In like manner, when Christ exhorts us, in this passage, to perseverance, we must; not rely on our own strength and industry, but we ought to pray to him who commands us, that he would confirm us in his love.

Vs 10. If you keep my commandments.

He points out to us the method of perseverance. his, to follow where he calls, for, as Paul says, They who are in Christ walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit, (Romans 8:1.) For these two things are continually united, that faith which perceives the undeserved love of Christ toward us, and a good conscience and newness of life. And, indeed, Christ does not reconcile believers to the Father, that they may indulge in

wickedness without reserve, and without punishment; but that, governing them by his Spirit, he may keep them under the authority and dominion of his Father. Hence it follows, that the love of Christ is rejected by those who do not prove, by true obedience, that they are his disciples.

If any one object that, in that case, the security of our salvation depends on ourselves, I reply, it is wrong to give such a meaning to Christ's words; for the obedience which believers render to him is not the cause why he continues his love toward us, but is rather the effect of his love. For whence comes it that they answer to their calling, but because they are led by the Spirit of adoption of free grace?

But again, it may be thought that the condition imposed on us is too difficult, that we should keep the commandments of Christ, which contain the absolute perfection of righteousness, – a perfection which far exceeds our capacity, – for hence it follows, that the love of Christ will be useless, if we be not endued with angelical purity. The answer is easy; for when Christ speaks of the desire of living a good and holy life, he does not exclude what is the chief article in his doctrine, namely, that which alludes to righteousness being freely imputed, in consequence of which, through a free pardon, our duties are acceptable to God, which in themselves deserved to be rejected as imperfect and unholy. Believers, therefore, are reckoned as keeping the commandments of Christ when they apply their earnest attention to them, though they be far distant from the object at which they aim; for they are delivered from that rigorous sentence of the law, Cursed be he that hath not confirmed all the words of this law to do them (Deuteronomy 27:26).

As I also have kept my Father's commandments.

As we have been elected in Christ, so in him the image of our calling is exhibited to us in a lively manner; and therefore he justly holds himself out to us as a pattern, to the imitation of which all the godly ought to be conformed. "In me," says he, "is brightly displayed the resemblance of those things which I demand from you; for you see how sincerely I am devoted to obedience to my Father, and how I persevere in this course. My Father, too, hath loved me, not for a moment, or for a short time, but his love toward me is constant." This conformity between the Head and the members ought to be always placed before our eyes, not only that believers may form themselves after the example of Christ, but that, they may entertain a confident hope that his Spirit will every day form them anew to be better and better, that they may walk to the end in newness of life.

Vs 11. These things I have spoken to you.

He adds, that his love is far from being unknown to the godly, but that it is perceived by faith, so that they enjoy blessed peace of conscience; for the joy which he mentions springs from that peace with God which is possessed by all that have been justified by free grace. As often, then, as God's fatherly love towards us is preached, let us know that there is given to us ground for true joy, that, with peaceable consciences, we may be certain of our salvation.

My joy and your joy.

It is called Christ's joy and our joy in various respects. It is Christ's, because it is given to us by him; for he is both the Author and the Cause of it. I say that he is the Cause of it, because we were freed from guilt, when the chastisement of our peace was laid on him, (Isaiah 53:5.) I call him also the Author of it, because by his Spirit he drives away dread and anxiety in our hearts, and then arises that calm cheerfulness. It is said to be ours for a different reason; because we enjoy it since it has been given to us. Now since Christ declares that he spake these things, that the disciples might have joy, we conclude from these words, that all who have duly profited by this sermon have something on which they can rest.

That my joy may abide in you.

By the word abide he means, that it is not a fleeting or temporary joy of which he speaks, but a joy which never fails or passes away. Let us therefore learn that we ought to seek in the doctrine of Christ the assurance of salvation, which retains its vigor both in life and in death.

That your joy may be full.

He adds, that this joy will be solid and full; not that believers will be entirely free from all sadness, but that the ground for joy will be far greater, so that no dread, no anxiety, no grief, will swallow them up; for those to whom it has been given to glory in Christ will not be prevented, either by life, or by death, or by any distresses, from bidding defiance to sadness.

Vs 12. This is my commandment.

Since it is proper that we regulate our life according to the commandment of Christ, it is necessary, first of all, that we should understand what it is that he wills or commands. He now therefore repeats what he had formerly said, that it is his will, above all things, that believers should cherish mutual love among themselves. True, the love and reverence for God comes first in order, but as the true proof of it is love toward our neighbors, he dwells chiefly on this point. Besides, as he formerly held himself out for a pattern in maintaining the general doctrine, so he now holds himself out for a pattern in a particular instance; for he loved all his people, that they may love each other. Of the reason why he lays down no express rule, in this passage, about loving unbelievers, we have spoken under the former chapter.

Vs 13. Greater love hath no one than this.

Christ sometimes proclaims the greatness of his love to us, that he may more fully confirm our confidence in our salvation; but now he proceeds further, in order to inflame us, by his example, to love the brethren. Yet he joins both together; for he means that we should taste by faith how inestimably delightful his goodness is, and next he allures us, in this way, to cultivate brotherly love. Thus Paul writes: Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and sacrifice to God of a sweet-smelling savor, (Ephesians 5:2.) God might have redeemed us by a single word, or by a mere act of his will, if he had not thought it better to do otherwise for our own benefit, that, by not sparing his own well-beloved Son, he might testify in his person how much he cares for our

salvation. But now our hearts, if they are not softened by the inestimable sweetness of Divine love, must be harder than stone or iron. But a question is put. How did Christ die for friends, since we were enemies, before he reconciled us, (Romans 5:10;) for, by expiating our sins through the sacrifice of his death, he destroyed the enmity that was between God and us? The answer to this question will be found under the third chapter, where we said that, in reference to us, there is a state of variance between us and God, till our sins are blotted out by the death of Christ; but that the cause of this grace, which has been manifested in Christ, was the In this way, too, Christ laid down his life for those who were strangers, but whom, even while they were strangers, he loved, otherwise he would not have died for them.

Vs 14. You are my friends.

He does not mean that we obtain so great an honor by our own merit, but only reminds them of the condition on which he receives us into favor, and deigns to reckon us among his friends; as he said a little before, If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, (John 15:10.) For the grace of God our Savior hath appeared, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly desires, we should live soberly, and righteously, and piously, in this world, (Titus 2:11.) But ungodly men, who, through wicked contempt of the Gospel, want only oppose Christ, renounce his friendship.

Vs 15. Henceforth I will not call you servants.

By another argument he shows his love toward the disciples, which was, that he opened his mind fully to them, as familiar communication is maintained among friends. "I have condescended," he says, "far more to you than a mortal man is wont to condescend to his servants Let this be regarded by you, therefore, as a pledge of my love toward you, that I have, in a kind and friendly manner, explained to you the secrets of heavenly wisdom which I had heard from the Father." It is indeed a noble commendation of the Gospel, that we have the heart of Christ opened (so to speak) in it, so that we can no longer doubt of it or perceive it slightly. We have no reason for desiring to rise above the clouds, or to penetrate into the deep, (Romans 10:6, 7) to obtain the certainty of our salvation. Let us be satisfied with this testimony of his love toward us which is contained in the Gospel, for it will never deceive us. Moses said to the ancient people, What nation under heaven is so highly favored as to have God near to them, as God talked, with you this day? (Deuteronomy 4:7.) But far higher is the distinction which God hath conferred on us, since God hath entirely conveyed himself to us in his Son. So much the greater is the ingratitude and wickedness of those who, not satisfied with the admirable wisdom of the Gospel, fly with proud eagerness to new speculations. All that I have heard from my Father. It is certain that the disciples did not know all that Christ knew, and indeed it was impossible that they should attain to so great a height; and because the wisdom of God is incomprehensible, he distributed to each of them a certain measure of knowledge, according as he judged to be necessary. Why then does he say that he revealed all things? I answer, this is limited to the person and office of the Mediator. He places himself between God and us, having received out of the secret sanctuary of God those things which he should deliver to us – as the phrase is – from hand to hand. Not one of those things, therefore, which related to our salvation, and which it was of importance for us to know was omitted by Christ in the instructions given to his disciples. Thus, so far as he was

appointed to be the Master and Teacher of the Church, he heard nothing from the Father which he did not faithfully teach his disciples. Let us only have an humble desire and readiness to learn, and we shall feel that Paul has justly called the Gospel wisdom to make men perfect, (Colossians 1:28.)

Vs 16. You have not chosen me.

He declares still more clearly that it must not be ascribed to their own merit, but to his grace, that they have arrived at so great an honor; for when he says that he was not chosen by them, it is as if he had said, that whatever they have they did not obtain by their own skill or industry. Men commonly imagine some kind of concurrence to take place between the grace of God and the will of man; but that contrast, I chose you, I was not chosen by you, claims, exclusively, for Christ alone what is usually divided between Christ and man; as if he had said, that a man is not moved of his own accord to seek Christ, until he has been sought by him.

True, the subject now in hand is not the ordinary election of believers, by which they are adopted to be the children of God, but that special election, by which he set apart his disciples to the office of preaching the Gospel. But if it was by free gift, and not by their own merit, that they were chosen to the apostolic office, much more is it certain that the election, by which, from being the children of wrath and an accursed seed, we become the children of God, is of free grace. Besides, in this passage Christ magnifies his grace, by which they had been chosen to be Apostles, so as to join with it that former election by which they had been engrafted into the body of the Church; or rather, he includes in these words all the dignity and honor which he had conferred on them. Yet I acknowledge that Christ treats expressly of the apostleship; for his design is, to excite the disciples to execute their office diligently and faithfully.

He takes, as the ground of his exhortation, the undeserved favor which he had bestowed on them; for the greater our obligations to the Lord, the more earnest ought we to be in performing the duties which he demands from us; otherwise it will be impossible for us to avoid the charge of base ingratitude. Hence it appears that there is nothing which ought more powerfully to kindle in us the desire of a holy and religious life, than when we acknowledge that we owe everything to God, and that we have nothing that is our own; that both the commencement of our salvation, and all the parts which follow from it, flow from his undeserved mercy. Besides, how true this statement of Christ is, may be clearly perceived from the fact, that Christ chose to be his apostles those who might have been thought to be the most unfit of all for the office; though in their person he intended to preserve an enduring monument of his grace. For, as Paul says, (1 Corinthians 2:16,) who among men shall be found fit for discharging the embassy by which God reconciles mankind to himself? Or rather, what mortal is able to represent the person of God? It is Christ alone who makes them fit by his election. Thus Paul ascribes his apostleship to grace, (Romans 1:5,) and again mentions that he had been separated from his mother's womb, (Galatians 1:15.) Nay more, since we are altogether useless servants, those who appear to be the most excellent of all will not be fit for the smallest calling, till they have been chosen. Yet the higher the degree of honor to which any one has been raised, let him remember that he is under the deeper obligations to God. And I have appointed you. The

election is hidden till it is actually made known, when a man receives an office to which he had been appointed; as Paul, in the passage which I quoted a little ago, where he says that he had been separated from his mother's womb, adds, that he was created an apostle, because it so pleased God His words are: When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, (Galatians 1:15.) Thus also the Lord testifies that he knew Jeremiah before he was in his mother's womb, (Jeremiah 1:5,) though he calls him to the prophetic office at the proper and appointed time. It may happen, no doubt, that one who is duly qualified enters into the office of teaching; or rather, it usually happens in the Church that no one is called till he be endued and furnished with the necessary qualifications. That Christ declares himself to be the Author of both is not wonderful; since it is only by him that God acts, and he acts along with the Father. So then, both election and ordination belong equally to both.

That you may go. He now points out the reason why he mentioned his grace. It was, to make them apply more earnestly to the work. The apostleship was not a place of honor without toil, but they had to contend with very great difficulties; and therefore Christ encourages them not to shrink from labors, and annoyances, and dangers. This argument is drawn from the end which they ought to have in view; but Christ reasons from the effect, when he says, That you may bear fruit; for it is hardly possible that any one would devote himself earnestly and diligently to the work, if he did not expect that the labor would bring some advantage. Christ, therefore, declares that their efforts will not be useless or unsuccessful, provided that they are ready to obey and follow when he calls them. For he not only enjoins on the apostles what their calling involves and demands, but promises to them also prosperity and success, that they may not be cold or indifferent. It is hardly possible to tell how great is the value of this consolation against those numerous temptations which daily befall the ministers of Christ. Whenever, then, we see that we are losing our pains, let us call to remembrance that Christ will, at length, prevent our exertions from being vain or unproductive; for the chief accomplishment of this promise is at the very time when there is no appearance of fruit. Scorners, and those whom the world looks upon as wise men, ridicule our attempts as foolish, and tell us that it is in vain for us to attempt to mingle heaven and earth; because the fruit does not yet correspond to our wishes. But since Christ, on the contrary, has promised that the happy result, though concealed for a time, will follow, let us labor diligently in the discharge of our duty amidst the mockeries of the world.

And that your fruit may abide.

A question now arises, why does Christ say that this fruit will be perpetual? As the doctrine of the Gospel obtains souls to Christ for eternal salvation, many think that this is the perpetuity of the fruit But I extend the statement much farther, as meaning that the Church will last to the very end of the world; for the labor of the apostles yields fruit even in the present day, and our preaching is not for a single age only, but will enlarge the Church, so that new fruit will be seen to spring up after our death. When he says, your fruit, he speaks as if it had been obtained by their own industry, though Paul teaches that they who plant or water are nothing, (1 Corinthians 3:7.) And, indeed, the formation of the Church is so excellent a work of God, that the glory of it ought not to be ascribed to men. But as the Lord displays his power by the agency of men, that they may not labor in

vain, he is wont to transfer to them even that which belongs peculiarly to himself. Yet let us remember that, when he so graciously commends his disciples, it is to encourage, and not to puff them up.

That your Father may give you all that you ask in my name.

This clause was not added abruptly, as many might suppose; for, since the office of teaching far exceeds the power of men, there are added to it innumerable attacks of Satan, which never could be warded off but by the power of God. That the apostles may not be discouraged, Christ meets them with the most valuable aid; as if he had said, "If the work assigned to you be so great that you are unable to fulfill the duties of your office, my Father will not forsake you; for I have appointed you to be ministers of the Gospel on this condition, that my Father will have his hand stretched out to assist you, whenever you pray to him, in my name, to grant you assistance." And, indeed, that the greater part of teachers either languish through indolence, or utterly give way through despair, arises from nothing else than that they are sluggish in the duty of prayer.

This promise of Christ, therefore, arouses us to call upon God; for whoever acknowledges that the success of his work depends on God alone, will offer his labor to him with fear and trembling. On the other hand, if any one, relying on his own industry, disregard the assistance of God, he will either throw away his spear and shield, when he comes to the trial, or he will be busily employed, but without any advantage. Now, we must here guard against two faults, pride and distrust; for, as the assistance of God is fearlessly disregarded by those who think that the matter is already in their own power, so many yield to difficulties, because they do not consider that they fight through the power and protection of God, under whose banner they go forth to war.

Vs 17. These things I command you.

This too, was appropriately added, that the Apostles might know that mutual love among ministers is demanded above all things, that they may be employed, with one accord, in building up the Church of God; for there is no greater hindrance than when everyone labors apart, and when all do not direct their exertions to the common good. If, then, ministers do not maintain brotherly intercourse with each other, they may possibly erect some large heaps, but latterly disjointed and confused; and, all the while, there will be no building of a Church.