

JOHN 15

JESUS, THE TRUE VINE

In order to comfort His disciples on the eve of His departure, our Lord had been assuring them that although He was indeed to go away, yet – by His Holy Spirit – He would still be an abiding presence with them; and through them, His work would be continued. This same truth, He further illustrated by the figure of a vine and its branches (verses 1-17). The disciples were to be in vital union with their unseen Lord; and through them, His life was to be manifested and His purposes accomplished – just as the branches are in living connection with the vine, which only bears its fruit upon those branches. The last chapter bore witness to Christ as a Divine Being, Who would always abide in His followers; and here, stress is laid upon the necessity of faith in Him as the absolute condition of the everlasting life which He would impart. Faith is here pictured as an abiding in Christ, which is to be as inseparable as the union of a living branch and its vine. And the result will be rich fruit of spiritual experience, of Christian virtues, and of souls that are saved.

Jesus begins by expressing the displeasure of His Father toward those who claim to follow Him; but who are, in reality, faithless. “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit,” He explains, “he taketh it away.” And then He mentions the provision for strengthening the spiritual life of true believers: “Every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.” Both figures refer to the process of pruning. Dead wood is cut away; and even living shoots and fruit-bearing branches are cut back, in order that the clusters of grapes may be more rich and full. Similarly, the Lord trains and disciplines His children. It is necessary that our natural tendencies, actions, and desires must be restrained so that the virtues of our Lord may be manifested in us, and so that His work may be fulfilled through us.

The supreme condition of fruitfulness, however, is abiding in Christ! As the branches draw sap from the vine; so also, believers must derive their strength, wisdom, holiness, and power from their present and Divine Lord. “Abide in me, and I in you,” Jesus said. “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; so neither can ye, except ye abide in me.” This blessed union of the Vine and the branches – if characterized by a true submission to the will of Christ – is certain to result in fruitfulness! One who is united with Christ in trustful obedience, and who meditates upon His Word, and who is guided by His indwelling Spirit – such a person will be led to pray

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ *Christ speaks of Himself as the true Vine – verses 1-8*
- ❖ *He speaks of His love to His disciples and enjoins them to love likewise – verses 9-17*
- ❖ *He warns them of the hatred and persecution of the world – verses 18-25*
- ❖ *He speaks again of the coming Comforter – verses 26-27*

for the success of the Divine work in his own experience and in the world; and for prayer that originates in such a manner, there is no limit to its power! Fruitfulness must result; God will be glorified, and believers will thus show themselves to be true disciples (verse 8).

As Jesus continues to urge His followers to abide in Him, He slightly changes the figure and declares that they must abide in His love. Hereby He emphasizes anew the element of obedience, as a characteristic of true faith; for it is only by obedience that we can know, appreciate, and abide in the love of Christ. "If ye keep my commandments," He tells us, "ye shall abide in my love." This will surely produce fruitfulness; this love is like sunlight to ripening fruit. And the result which Jesus specifies is joy: "These things have I spoken unto you ... that your joy may be made full" (verse 11). How frequently are we tempted to believe that sin will produce happiness! But real joy is the flower of righteousness; it is always and only the fruit of obedience to Christ; and in its essence, it is a consciousness of His approving love.

Last of all, Jesus concentrates all His commandments in the one law of love: "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, even as I have loved you" (verse 12). He illustrates this love by His own self-sacrifice, which was to be offered the very next day upon the cross; by His Divine friendship, which had led Him to confide in His disciples all His plans and gracious purposes; and by the very work to which He had called them – a work which would consist in revealing true virtues, and in laboring for the salvation of immortal souls; and a work which would be accomplished by prayer in His holy name. If we are wondering at our state of fruitlessness as followers of Christ, perhaps we need to pay special attention to this word of the Master: "These things I command you, that ye may love one another."

After the loving exhortation contained in the allegory of "the true vine," Jesus gives His disciples a word of warning and encouragement. In spite of the beautiful fruit of Christian character, the disciples would be hated by the world. Even while they offered eternal life in the name of Christ, the world would seek to put them to death. Nevertheless, in their persecution and peril, they would be sustained by the Holy Spirit – Who would triumph over the spirit of the world, and Who would give the disciples fuller revelation of truth. The disciples had just been exhorted to abide in Christ, so that they might bear fruit; and now they are encouraged by the assurance that abundant fruit would indeed be produced through their testimony for the Master, by the power of His indwelling Spirit – in spite of the hostility of the world.

Lord Jesus, we praise You for being our true Vine; for since we are united with You as Your branches, nothing can keep us from that blessed relationship which is the privilege of every believer! Amen.

