

Fruit-Bearing, or the Vine and Its Branches

John 15

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon emphasizes the importance of abiding in Christ to bear fruit, love one another, and navigate the challenges of the world as true disciples.

Scripture: John 14:21, John 15:1-8, John 15:10-13, John 15:16-20, John 15:25-27

Topics: "Abiding in Christ", "Fruitfulness in Faith"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the significance of abiding in Christ as the true Vine, illustrating that our relationship with Him is foundational for bearing fruit in our lives. He explains that while we are clean through His word, our responsibility as branches is to remain connected to Him, which involves obedience and dependence on His will. Darby contrasts the true Vine with Israel, highlighting that Christ fulfills the role of the Servant and the Vine, calling believers to bear fruit that glorifies the Father. He also discusses the importance of love among believers, as Christ commands us to love one another as He has loved us, and warns of the world's hatred towards those who follow Him. Ultimately, Darby encourages believers to recognize their identity in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit to witness and bear fruit in a world that opposes them.

Transcript

The British Herald, pp. 136-139, 1875.

In John 14 responsibility is brought out, and in this part it is the path of the saint; our blessings in connection with the path of the saint. He puts our part in John 14:21, not "we love Him, because He first loved us," but "he that loveth Me, shall be loved of My Father." The relationship is established, but this is the way of getting the blessing. In every case obedience and dependence are the principles. The thing that people make a mess of is mixing it up with acceptance.

Our responsibility depends both on the position we are in and the advantages we have; you have no Christian responsibility until the man is a Christian. Then you get a much higher responsibility; but it is always our duty. Our duties are dependent on the relationship we are in. You cannot have them otherwise. You must be children of God before your duties begin as children. The moment you come to the blessing and enjoyment they begin. If I see a person habitually walking out of the relationship, of course I cannot say he has it. It is the moral government of the Father (v. 21).

In ch. 15 He comes to the relationship that they are already in. He does not say, I shall be the true vine when I am gone on high; but He was so already "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." Israel was not the true Vine -- God had brought a vine out of Egypt and planted it; Christ has taken the place and supplanted all that was put in the first Adam in any shape.

Christ is seen as the Servant in Isa. 49. From Isa. 50 all hung upon that term servant. You get up to ch. 49 their duties in connection with Jehovah, and this begins the question of their unfaithfulness in connection with Messiah. It was Lord up to the end of Isa. 48, now it is the Anointed. Verse 4,

Then I said, I have laboured in vain. I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain; yet surely any judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God.

That is Messiah. He puts Christ as the Servant in place of Israel; they failed utterly; but Christ takes it up in place of Israel. He takes the place of the Vine, He takes the place of Israel, He is the Servant, and you get the true Vine where we are now. am the true Vine." Having come as man into this world, He is the true Man that God owns, the true Servant, and the true Vine too. All that was put into man's hand, He takes up and accomplishes in true power. It is Christ on the earth. It is all responsibility; it is not the Head and members united in heaven; there is no fruit in heaven, and no pruning in heaven, all is perfect there.

Here you get "My Father is the Husbandman." The thought of a Jew would have been that they were the true Vine; and Messiah the best branch in it. It has nothing to do with the Church, for the Church is what is united by the Holy Ghost to Christ glorified; but here you have Christ on the earth; and the Holy Ghost not come. Discipline does not quite refer to bearing fruit, it applies to wickedness. Chastening is in order to purge us, either to discern some root in us that is likely to produce some evil, or a positive fault. If the branch bears no fruit it is taken away; it is a question of fruit and not of acceptance. The word was applied, "Now ye are clean, through the word which I have spoken unto you"; the word is water not blood.

Perfectionists drop out water altogether. You muddle the question of acceptance by continually repeating the blood-sprinkling. "The worshippers once purged, should have no more conscience of sins" {Heb. 10:2}. It is confounding the question of imputation with the state of my soul. We never really have holy affections until we are sure we are saved; we may have holy desires but not holy affections. When you come to conscience, our conscience is perfect -- "They could never makes the comers thereunto perfect," etc. If I go up to God I have no idea of imputation. That enables me to judge myself thoroughly, for everything that is not consistent to the place I have got into.

Here it is looked at as a question of fruit, because it is on the earth. As Christ bore fruit perfectly, we are called upon to bear fruit.

John 15:3. "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." This is another important truth, and that is, in order to bear fruit you must have a subjective work in your soul: you must have the branch clean, you must have your soul right in order to bear fruit. Still it is responsibility here.

John 15:4. "Abide in me and I in you." Christ's abiding in us comes second.

John 15:5. Here I get "I am the Vine and ye are the branches." He has laid aside the thought of the old vine. There is no fruit borne except by abiding in Christ. We are looked at as down here in all this: there the disciples were while He spoke to them. There is not so much difficulty in the heart in realizing it, but it is difficult to define what abiding in Christ is; it is not leaving Him any way; it is being constantly with Him --

it is continuity. It is a little difficult to define, though we know what it means -- it is never interrupted. The difficulty is in keeping with Him. Sometimes in singing that hymn --

"Each thought of Thee doth constant yield,

Unchanging fresh delight,"

we know it is true, but how often do these thoughts come. If he is a Christian it certainly does give delight; if not abiding in Christ, it may be a constant rebuke. In a way whenever a Christian does have a thought of Christ, it yields unchanging fresh delight; but Christians sing it as if they were always thinking of Him, and in that way it is not true. "The diligent soul shall be made fat." You must get the will broken and humbled to start with; it is the positive realization of the presence of Christ to the soul: that is the thing. Steadfastness in faith is the thing, and you will find that if you could only be half an hour with Christ, at once, you would find it an immense thing; and if you could stay there a quarter of an hour it would be rare. How far does one's mind remain in it continually, even when we set about it: for there are various things we have to be occupied with for Christ. It keeps the soul in a totally different state. There is always an autarcheia in the soul, if we are not in the realization of the presence of Christ in the heart; a self-sufficiency, dependence on self, I do not mean wilfulness. You never get out of the sense of Christ's presence that that does not spring up. A person who really knows he is dependent on Christ, yet if he is not actually realizing God's presence, would act and think from self. He might be intending to do right perhaps -- I do not mean anything bad.

"As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth Me, he shall live by Me," i.e., live on account of Me. "Because I live, ye shall live also"; that ought to be true in details, just as it is actually true as regards life itself. We are sanctified to Christ's obedience (1 Peter 1:2), not merely to bow; His obedience was, that He never had a will to do anything but His Father's will. Constantly our will has to be stopped; Christ never had a will that had to be checked; His motive for acting was His Father's will; that ought to be the way with us. If we are abiding in Christ, we get motives from Christ's will and mind, and there is a subduedness that you do not find in us naturally. Law supposed a will that had to be checked.

We come out of pitch darkness, and when the light comes in it dazzles us and we want some help. Doing right is of itself nothing right. If I did everything right, I should do nothing right yet; the principle of obedience must come in; for if I did everything right, and did not own God in His authority, it would be wrong. "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O my God." I like the word commandment, for there is the recognition of the authority of Christ over me, but I must have a nature that delights in these things.

Now, John 15:6, the language changes. When He comes to ruin, He does not say ye, for He says "ye are clean," but, "if a man abide not in me," etc. He takes the broad thing, He had told them that they were clean. Not as in ch. 13, "Ye are clean, but not all," for Judas was there; now he was gone out. He goes back in v. 7 to the "ye."

There is an additional element in John 15:7, "and my words abide in you." I have the mind and will directed by Christ's words; the words of Christ abide in me; that being the case, I ask what I will and it shall be done for me. Divine power is at my disposal if I am directed by Christ's will, if what He says is what I am doing and nothing else. Asking what we will is when these words have power, not asking amiss as in James; if He answers then, it is in chastisement like the quails. Still it is an immense thing, if I am doing God's will to have God's power at my disposal, to be able to wield His power in the path of obedience. It is a great thing in the sense of dependence to have God's power. If I find a difficulty in the way and my mind is in divine

order here, God takes it away. It is all fruit, not going above and thinking of Christ at God's right hand. In this I am down here on the earth, and it is a question of fruit.

John 15:8. "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." This is what He is looking for now. The character of the Master is stamped upon you if you are bearing much fruit, for that is what it means; you bear much fruit because Christ did. In v. 2, Judas was spoken of as "taken away," and the disciples who walked no more with him.

Another principle is given in John 15:9, that is, positive enjoyment; not merely abiding in Him, staying with Him in heart, in spirit; here it is having His love constantly with us; and then He tells us how (v. 10) we keep His commandments. So far as we walk acceptably we abide in Christ's love, so that the heart is always going out to Him. It does not say His love abides, for that never changes. The "commandments" are what Christ has taught us, and told us and the apostles too. I must take in every word, or I may have something wrong in my mind by leaving out.

John 15:10. "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love." This shows how practical it is. It is remarkable His comparing it with Christ. A father's love which is really drawn out more when his son is going on wretchedly than when he is going on well. "That your fruit should remain." We are their fruit, for we are profiting by John's truth now. If they had not kept their bodies under, their testimony would have been weakened. I may be blessed to a soul, and he may become more powerful in preaching to others, and so the fruit remains. If a man is not walking faithfully, of course there is no fruit.

John 15:11. "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." That is the joy, -- always what Christ is at -- is to put us in the same place with Himself. Now He had already said, "My peace I give unto you"; here it is, "that My joy might remain in you"; that is, that we are to have the same joy and peace as Christ had with His Father in going through this world. Christ gives, by bringing us into the enjoyment of all He has; He does not go out of it, or give it away. I do not think we ought to be satisfied. For instance, a person in Rom. 7 could not have Christ's joy abiding in him. It is all false this notion of perfection. The Christian having the life of Christ in him, has no perfection before him but Christ in glory, no object at all but Christ glorified. He looks at Christ in glory, and says, when I have that I shall be content; nothing short of that, and never before. A person who has realized Christ glorified, has laid hold of that which is his only true portion. These perfectionists have come down from the perfect man in glory, and are trying to make another perfect man down here to themselves. Always occupied with themselves is the sad effect. Some oppose it, and put this struggle with self under law after justification, and leave them in Rom. 7. If my mind is full of Christ I am not thinking about the flesh. "My joy fulfilled in themselves" is not very low down. If I have the joy that Christ had, it is putting me in wonderful liberty; for what was His joy with His Father? If I have the sense of being loved as He is loved, I get into His joy. In everything His love is bringing us into what He has Himself. He has put us into the place, and so He has also as to testimony.

"This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12). It is not merely that I have loved you as the Father loved Me, but ye are to "love one another as I have loved you." The Father loved Christ as from heaven, and also in His humanity here on earth. Christ loved His disciples in a Divine sense from above, but, at the same time, as a companion on earth. Infinitely above them, morally speaking, but, at the same time, He puts Himself on a level with them in their trials and difficulties. "I am among you as one that serveth." He had to bear with all their infirmities; so have we. Our love is to rise

above all the weakness of others and brothers without feeling their servant. I have to be in the infirmities of the saints, and yet so entirely above them that I can feel for others in them. I should be so out of it that I can understand them all, and yet feel for the person in them. It is a wonderfully perfect state to be able to do that -- to be in the things, but yet so entirely above them in the spirit and power of my mind, so as to be out of them and above them, to feel for others in them. That is the character of love one to another. (We had better all get into that as fast as we can!) If you walk after Christ, after all it is abiding in Him enables us to do it.

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). This is entirely a different thing to laying down His life for sinners; here it is for His friends; it is the intenseness of His love; I sacrifice Myself for him. He does not say, I am your Friend, but we are His friends, He was the Friend of sinners, when He gave His life for them. We are His friends when we enjoy His confidence. He is showing how we walk in and keep the place of friends, He has treated them as friends. If I have a friend I tell him what is in my mind that is not concerning him at all. I impart all my thoughts to one who is my friend. The obedient one is the depository of Jesus' thoughts. God told Abraham the things that concerned Sodom. And Abraham was called "The Friend of God" (James 2:23). The Lord always treated His disciples according to the place they were brought into; that is, as possessing it all. He speaks to His disciples as in possession of the things, though they had not realized them in the least. This was their own stupidity. Here the Lord comes to the source and certainty of grace in order that the practical responsibility under which He puts them should not cloud: for they were there. He had put them in the place of "friends," so He says, "If you want to walk in the place that is the way"; "ye are My friends, if ye do whatever I command you." He had chosen them for this.

Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you (John 15:16), the Divine grace which acted towards them and placed them there. He puts them everywhere in His place as regards the world, just as He does with the Father. The sense of this position and love go together. "These things I command you, that ye love one another." John gives us our individual place as connected with Him down here. The world's hatred sealed their association with Him.

If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you (John 15:17, 18).

The world loves that which is of the world: this is quite natural. The disciples were not of it; and besides, the Jesus whom it had rejected had chosen them and separated them from the world: therefore it would hate them because so chosen in grace. There was besides the moral reason, namely, that they were not of it (John 17:14); but this demonstrated their relationship to Christ, and His sovereign rights, by which He had taken them to Himself out of a rebellious world. They should have the same portion as their Master: it should be for His name's sake; because the world -- and He speaks specially of the Jews among whom He had laboured -- knew not the Father who had sent Him in love. To make their boast of Jehovah as their God suited them very well. They would have received the Messiah on that footing. To know the Father revealed in His true character by the Son was quite a different thing. Nevertheless the Son had revealed, and both by His words and His works had manifested the Father and His perfection.

Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also (John 15:20).

You had much better go and do on earth what Christ did on earth. If God had left anything undone, He would not have charged them with the guilt.

If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin (John 15:22).

It is a terrible thing when you think what the world is that people should be hankering after it. You see we go on living, taking for granted the things that our eyes see, whereas the world is really, every part and principle that is acting on it, positive enmity against God. God does not forget that the world crucified His Son; nor should we. If Christ had not come and spoken unto them God would not have to reproach them with sin. They might still drag on, even in an unpurged state, without any proof that they would not have God, would not even by mercy return. The fruit of a fallen nature was there, no doubt, but not the proof that that nature preferred sin to God while God was there in mercy, not imputing it. Grace was dealing with them, not imputing sin to them. Mercy had been treating them as fallen, not as wilful creatures. God was not taking the ground of the law, which imputes, or of judgment, but of grace in the revelation of the Father by the Son. The words and works of the Son, revealing the Father in grace, rejected, left them without hope (cp. John 16:9). Their real condition would not have been thoroughly tested. God would have had still a means to use: He loved them too much to condemn them while there was one left untried.

If the Lord had not done among them the works which no other man had done, they might have remained as they were, refused to believe in Him, and not have been guilty before God. They would have been still the object of Jehovah's long-suffering; but in fact they had seen and hated both the Son and the Father (John 15:24). The Father had been fully manifested in the Son -- in Jesus: and if, when God was fully manifested, and in grace, they rejected Him, what could be done except to leave them in sin, afar from God. If He had been manifested only in part, they would have had an excuse; they might have said, "Ah, if He had shown grace, if we had known Him as He is, we would not have rejected Him." They could not now say this. They had seen the Father and the Son in Jesus. Alas! They had seen and hated.

But this was only the fulfilment of that which was foretold them in their law -- they hated Me without a cause (John 15:25). As to the testimony borne to God by the people, and of a Messiah received by them, all was over. They had hated Him without a cause.

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceeds from the Father, He shall testify of me: And ye shall also bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning (John 15:26, 27).

The Lord now turns to the subject of the Holy Ghost, who should come to maintain His glory, which the people had cast down to the ground. The Jews had not known the Father manifested in the Son; the Holy Ghost should now come from the Father to bear witness of the Son. The Son should send Him from the Father. In John 14, the Father sends Him in Jesus' name for the personal relationship of the disciples with Jesus. Here Jesus gone on high sends Him, the witness of His exalted glory, His heavenly grace. This was the new testimony, and was to be rendered unto Jesus the Son of God ascended up to heaven. They could not be eye-witnesses of Christ's heavenly glory; they would be eye-witnesses of His earthly walk, of the manifestation of the Father in Him. The Holy Ghost was their strength in being witnesses, and came down revealing things that they had not seen -- to tell them the heavenly glory. John 16 is more the actual fact of His being come, not the sending. In ch. 14 they are brought into communion with what is above; here (ch. 15) it is the testimony and witness; for we have got into fruit-bearing and witness here. Christ the

exalted Man sent Him down. It is well we have such a pattern in the Scripture. I don't mean merely Christ, but Christ's ways, for it takes us to task as to how far we are living like Him, abiding in Him as those that are chosen out of the world. He leaves us in the middle of it all to exercise our hearts. We need to have purpose in the midst of it all to exercise our hearts by them. He leaves us here to be tested as to the state of our hearts and affections, whether we do live by faith or sight.

Malvern, 1873.

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