

ABIDING IN CHRIST

John 15:1-15

Fellowship with Christ our Lord is essential to our spiritual well-being. We cannot grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord unless we have fellowship with Him. We can keep in close touch with Him through the study of His Word under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, by earnest prayer, and by obedience to His revealed will. Fellowship with Christ is the secret of a radiant personality, of the overcoming life, of the untroubled heart and of effective service.

Fellowship with Christ results in fruit-bearing for Him. Because Christ is the life-giving vine it is to be expected that believers, who are the branches, will perform their God-given function and bear fruit. The great purpose for which He has brought people into His Kingdom is that they shall bear fruit. They can only bear the fruit which He desires and will accept through union with Him. What fruit does He desire? It is the fruit of a Christ-like character. He expects us to win others to a saving knowledge in Him and then to build them up in knowledge, righteousness and holiness.

Pruning is necessary for better fruitage. He removes those things which mar the effectiveness of our lives. Whatever He takes away does not injure but rather improves the ability of the branch to do its intended work.

These words were spoken by the Master to His disciples on the night when He was betrayed. In His farewell message He presented to them a beautiful picture of the relationship existing between Himself and them. Although He was going to leave them, He wanted them to know that it would be their privilege to maintain an intimate fellowship with Him, which relationship was like unto the figure of the vine and its branches.

This chapter deals with fruit-bearing, or service, rather than with the way of salvation. It does not tell how to be saved, but it does teach us how to serve Christ after we have been saved. We are saved in order that we might bear fruit unto God. In the Christian's experience of fruit-bearing, after union with Christ has taken place, cleansing comes when the Word of God is applied to the life. To the extent that the Christian has his life to conform to the Word of God, he is enabled to fulfill Christ's purpose for him. In order to bear much fruit there is a real need for pruning and cleansing. While this process is not always pleasant, it is profitable. Let us thank God for the pruning knife when its work is needed. There is always room for improvement, and when the Christian thinks he has done his best, God comes along and cleanses the branch in order that it might bring forth more and better fruit. The real pathway to fruit-bearing is the cleansing by the Word, the pruning by the Lord, and the abiding by the disciples. He wants us to be cleansed in order that we may be more prolific fruit-bearers.

Christ's statement, "Without Me ye can do nothing," is the death blow to the pride of man. Natural man believes that he can do much without Christ. While it is true that without Christ man cannot do anything, it is encouraging to know that in Him there is power for all things that are harmonious with God's will. In the matter of fruit-bearing, without Christ's strength the Christian cannot do anything. It is equally true that without the Christian's surrender to Christ, He cannot do that which should be done. When Christ's strength and the Christian's surrender unite, proper fruit will always result. Thus the Christian will fulfill his purpose in the world.

Christian fruitfulness is dependent upon the bearer's constant abiding in Christ. For the best result there must be a regular study of God's Word, a frequent calling upon His Name in prayer, and a consistent dependence upon Him for the necessary strength for right living.

The Saviour emphasized the fact that one distinctive of believers in Him was their love for one another. Love is that deep and abiding respect for others which shows itself in a desire to help them to be and to do their best. It is a disposition which reveals itself in confidence, good will, and mutual helpfulness.

In speaking to His own, Christ declared that they were to love one another as He loved them. His love for them was simply a pattern of their love for others. His love was self-denying, gracious, condescending, bountiful, practical and endless. And one prominent characteristic of the early Christians was that they loved one another. According to Tertullian the enemies of Christianity said of the Christians, "See how they love one another." Can the enemies of Christ say as much for His followers today?

One purpose of this love for one another is to prove our Christian discipleship. Love for our brethren proves to the unsaved about us that we are the children of God. Without real love for one another we can never prove to others that we belong to Christ and are truly following Him. Genuine love between Christians is a most effective testimony for Christ.

It is somewhat surprising that our Lord spoke of His joy in that particular dark season through which He was passing, for He was about to be plunged into a sea of suffering the like of which never engulfed another. To be speaking of joy at that time was amazing. He stated that He wanted His people to be the possessors and exhibitors of His joy. Christ's joy did not consist of material possessions, physical enjoyment, or human approbation, but rather in a proper relationship to God the Father, and a redemptive ministry for others.

A striking purpose is expressed in these words, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (verse 11). The joy of Christ within us is a challenging thought. Yet, He wants His people to be the possessors and exhibitors of joy. Many believe that Christianity and joy are incompatible, that where the one is present the other is absent. A religion which wears grave-clothes begs to be buried, and the sooner the better. Christ came to bring and impart joy.

There are Christians who do not realize how much they are losing by the selfishness which they permit to lurk in their hearts. If, instead of thinking so much about themselves, their rights, their wants, etc., they would only forget themselves and live for Christ and others, they would find themselves in an entirely different world. They would get their frustrations, disappointments, and unkind feelings toward others out of their minds and hearts, and would live radiant and joyous lives in Christian service.

Love walks in the straight way of obedience to the commandments of our Lord. When we love Him enough to do things which He has commanded us, we shall enjoy His favor upon us. Fulness of joy comes from abiding in Christ and His love, and from doing the things

that are pleasing to Him. If we love Him, we shall strive diligently to do the things that He has commanded us to do. Our Lord is desirous of seeing in us a devotion that is willing to surrender, a love that is willing to sacrifice, and a loyalty that is ready to stand with Him under all circumstances.

True Christian joy comes through self-surrender to God and submission to His blessed will. A Christian cannot have true joy unless he is willing to say truthfully, "Thy will, O God, be done." Nobody can be full of joy who is out of harmony with God. There is no joy to be compared with that which issues from introducing people to Christ and influencing them to do His will.

It was truly gracious of Christ to call us "friends." The highest possible honor is to be a friend of Christ. Friendship is beautiful to perceive and wonderful to enjoy. Friendship with Christ has a sanctifying influence in our lives. The foundation of all friendship is laid in likeness of nature, character, mind, tastes, and pursuits. Being friends of Christ has a condition attached to it which makes us stop and think. "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."