

John 15:8–11

A Ministry in the Word

Scripture Reading

Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. 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. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

Communion, Not Life — What Flows Through the Vine

The image of vine and branches can be read as if what flows through them is life in the abstract — the divine life imparted at new birth communicating itself outward into fruit-bearing. But that reading leads into difficulties. It does not comfortably account for branches being taken away and burned. And it does not match the particular section of John's Gospel in which this chapter stands.

Chapters 13 through 17 are about love — divine love. The passage begins with the Lord loving His own to the end, and closes with the Father's love for Him dwelling in those who are His. That is the theme. And Darby notes that what abiding in the vine produces is communion — sustained through an activity of the soul, a living dependence — and from that communion comes fruit. What flows from vine to branch is not to be thought of primarily as life but as love. Verse 9 shows it plainly: *as the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you*. That is what the vine says to the branches.

Herein Is My Father Glorified — Adding to Infinity

Verse 8 contains a statement that is astonishing in its proportions. The glory of the Father is infinite and immeasurable. And yet the Lord Jesus says: *herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit*. The bearing of fruit by branches on the vine is connected with the glory of the infinite God. A kind of pseudo-humility would say, what could I possibly add to that? But that is not the temper this verse calls for. The verse says it plainly: the Father is glorified in much fruit. The Lord Jesus as Son of Man glorified God — chapter 13:31 says so, and specifically names the Son of Man, His title of rejection. He is the pattern of this fruit-bearing that brings glory to the Father.

Darby's marginal note on verse 8 is illuminating: *in this will my Father have been glorified, that ye have borne much fruit, and ye will have become my disciples*. Discipleship is not the starting point — it is the outcome. You do not sign on as a disciple and then go about bearing fruit. You bear much fruit, and the result is that you have proved yourself to be a disciple. It is manifested, not enacted. And disciple is an earthly title — there are no disciples in heaven. It belongs to those who are in the position of branches on the vine in the earth, learning from and following the one who leads.

As the Father Hath Loved Me — The Measure of Love

Verse 9 gives the measure of the love with which the Lord has loved His own. Not a measure from any earthly comparison — none would be adequate — but the only measure that is truly commensurate: *as the Father hath loved me*. John 17:23 uses the same measure in the mouth of the Father: *thou hast loved them as thou hast loved me*. So it is not only the Son who loves us with that measure — the Father loves us with the same measure with which He loves His Son. That is the love in which we are called to continue.

And the way to continue in that love — the practical means — is given in verse 9 itself by Darby's rendering: *abide ye in my love*. It is the same word as verse 4: abide in me. And it is the first close hint in the context of what abiding in Him means. Abide in my love — occupy yourself with the love I have for you, stay in the good of it, let it be the atmosphere your soul lives in. The more the soul is occupied with the love of the Lord Jesus, the more true fruit will appear elsewhere. Fruit is a result of that occupation, not its substitute.

Commandments — The Second Strand of the Cord

If the subject of this section were only love, verse 10 would not be here. But it is: *if ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love*. Love is not the whole. There are also commandments. And the two are inseparably bound together. To claim communion with one whose commandments are not being kept is to claim a communion that does not exist. Can two walk together except they be agreed? The Lord asks this question in another way: *why do ye call me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*

But the commandments come from the vine to the branches — not from the branches to the vine. It is not the branch that directs; it is the vine. And the model is the Lord Jesus Himself: *even as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love*. His was unbroken dependence on the Father for all direction. He did what He saw the Father doing. He did nothing of Himself. That is the pattern of the obedience to which the branches are called — not a legalistic keeping of rules, but the natural and glad response of one who loves the vine and finds the commandments not grievous.

My Joy — A Threefold Cord

Verse 11 names joy as the third thing that comes from the vine to the branches: *these things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that*

your joy might be full. It is my joy — the Lord's own joy, the joy He had in His pathway here. And it is to remain in us and be full. Three things proceed from the vine into the branches in these verses: love (verse 9), commandments to be obeyed (verse 10), and joy (verse 11). A threefold cord is not easily broken. And these three cannot be taken separately — those who want the love and the joy but not the obedience will have none of the three in their fullness.

The love, joy, and peace that head the list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5 are not unconnected with these three. Love flows from the vine. Joy flows from the vine. And peace — the peace that is the fruit of obedience, of keeping the commandments — is itself connected with the middle term. The fruit of righteousness is peace. A disobedient heart is not a peaceful heart. But when these three are in their place — love received, commandments kept, joy dwelling — the soul is in the fullness of what the vine has to give.

— *Study ends* —