

## Fruit-bearing and Testimony

John 15: 18.

Hamilton Smith.

In John 13 there is presented to us the Lord's gracious service for His people, that, during the time of His absence, they may have communion, or "part," with Him where He is in the Father's house. In John 14. the Lord comforts our hearts by telling us of the coming of the Holy Spirit, whereby it will be possible for Christ to be with us, as He can say, of the one that keeps His commandments, "I will love Him and will manifest Myself to him." Again, speaking of the Father and Himself, "We will come unto him and make our abode with Him" (John 14: 21, 23). Our having part with Christ, where He is, and Christ having part with us where we are, prepares us for the fruit-bearing brought before us in John 15. The discourse opens with the presentation of the Lord as the true Vine, the Father as the Husbandman, and the disciples as the branches. To save any misconception as to the passage, it is important to remember that the discourse does not contemplate Christ as the Head, and believers as forming His body, as set forth in the Epistles of Paul. It presents Christ and those who profess to be His disciples on earth. Viewing believers as members of the body of Christ we think of their heavenly privileges as united to the Head in heaven. Into this body nothing unreal can come, and from this body no member can be taken away. If, however, we look at believers as disciples of the Lord we think of their responsibility to bear His character, and thus represent Him in the world from which He is absent. Amongst these disciples there may be found false professors, who are but dead branches fit only for the burning.

To follow the teaching of the passage we may ask ourselves three questions: (1) What is the fruit of which the Lord speaks? (2) What are the means taken that the true disciples may be fruitful? (3) What is the great end in view in fruit-bearing? What then does the Lord mean when He speaks of fruit? May we not say that fruit is all that in our lives which is agreeable to God? It follows that only that which is of Christ in us can be for the Father's delight. We may therefore say, that *fruit is the character of Christ reproduced in the lives of His disciples*. We read in Galatians 5: 22, that "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, self-control" (N. Tn.). These are the very qualities that marked Christ in His path down here, and that called forth the Father's expression of pleasure, for the voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I have found my delight." Fruit, then, is not simply preaching and teaching, or activity in different forms of service, or in this passage even souls won for Christ through the preaching, but rather the beautiful qualities of Christ seen in the souls that are won. Alas! it is possible to be very active in Christian service and yet exhibit very little of the character of Christ in the life, and, therefore, bring forth but little fruit for the delight of the Father. Moreover, let us remember that what goes up to God as fruit, goes out to man as testimony. These two thoughts are expressed by the Lord's words, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." The life that glorifies the Father and delights His heart becomes a testimony to the world that we are Christ's disciples. That we are truly His disciples will be far more manifest by a little meekness and gentleness, than by any amount of activity. Mary's quiet dependence upon the Lord, that led her to sit at His feet and hear His word, brought forth fruit that was far more pleasing to the heart of Christ than all Martha's sincere energy. We are not all called or gifted to take an active part in preaching or teaching, or many other forms of service; but it is open to all — the youngest as the oldest believer — to express in our life the beautiful traits of Christ, and thus bring forth fruit for the Father and testimony before men. Christ, personally, is no longer on earth; but God desires that Christ, morally, should still be seen in His people. In the measure in which this is true there

will be fruit and testimony.

How, then, is fruit produced in the lives of Christ's disciples? (V. 1). First, let us mark the Lord's words, "I am the true Vine." The fruit of the vine is found in the branches, and the branches can only be fruitful as they are livingly connected with the Vine. Christ is the source of the believer's life. Nature can, at times, exhibit many amiable qualities, but cannot produce the lovely character of the One Who made Himself of no reputation in order to serve others in love. Apart from Christ — the source of life — there can be no fruit for the Father. In order that we may bear fruit, "bring forth more fruit," and "much fruit," the Lord's words indicate that there is what the Father does; what He, Himself, does, and what we ourselves can do. (V. 2) First there are the Father's dealings in discipline and chastening. From the figure used, it would seem that it is possible to be a branch in vital link with the vine and yet be unfruitful. Such the husbandman "taketh away." This would be an extreme form of chastening of which, perhaps, the New Testament gives us a solemn example in the case of some in the Assembly at Corinth whose lives were so dishonouring to the Lord that they were taken away by death, as we read, "many are weak and sickly among you and *many sleep*" (1 Cor. 11: 30-32). There are, moreover, the dealings of the Father with those who bear fruit that they may "bring forth more fruit." Of such the Lord says, "every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it." Thus we read, in Hebrews 12, that if the Father chastens us it is "for our profit that we might be partakers of His holiness." The trials that we pass through, the sorrows by the way, the sicknesses that are allowed to come upon us, the bereavements that break our hearts, and the insults that we may have to meet are all allowed by a Father who loves us, in order that we may detect and judge all that is wrong in our thoughts and words and ways, so that Christ may be formed in us, and that we may bring forth fruit by exhibiting something of the lovely character of Christ.

(V.3) Secondly, there is that which the Lord, Himself, does in order that we may bear fruit. Already He had washed His disciples' feet; as He can say, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." This would indicate that the feet-washing of John 13: that enables us to have communion with Christ, prepares us to set forth in our lives the excellencies of Christ. (Vv. 4, 5) Thirdly, there is not only the Father's dealings with us, and the Lord's gracious service for us, but our own part in leading to a fruitful life. Do we desire that our lives may become beautiful by expressing in some little measure the loveliness of Christ, then we do well to heed the Lord's words, "Abide in Me." What is the significance of these words, repeated in these verses so many times? Do they not imply a loving and personal dependence upon Christ that would keep us close to Himself, living in the sunshine of His love? Very blessed it is to help, and minister to one another; but abiding in Christ is not dependence upon ministry, or looking to a servant of the Lord, however right at times. It is personal dependence upon the Lord, and looking to Himself. Thus the bride, in the Song of Songs, can say "I sat down under *His shadow* with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste." Seeing the lovely traits set forth in perfection in Christ, we shall delight in this excellent fruit; and, occupied with Him we shall become marked by that which we find sweet to our taste. Beholding the glory of the Lord we "are changed into the same image from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3: 18). Then let us mark well the Lord's words, "Without Me ye can do nothing." A truth we all acknowledge but often forget. We need one another as this discourse, and many another precious Scripture plainly indicates, but above all we need Christ, for, in the matter of bearing fruit, without Him we can do nothing. (V. 6) The Lord's words present the solemn case of a dead branch — a mere lifeless professor, one who may profess great activity but have no vital link with Christ, and therefore bear no fruit for the Father. Nothing of the character of Christ is seen in such. He is not simply "taken away" as in the case supposed in v. 2, but he is "cast forth" as a dead and withered branch and burned. Was not Judas a solemn example of one who made a fair profession before men, but in whom there was no vital link with Christ? (Vv. 7, 8) Finally,

the Lord encourages by setting before us the blessedness of bearing fruit: — (1) as regards ourselves, by abiding in Christ and thus bearing the character of Christ, we shall have the mind of Christ as expressed in His words, and thus be able to pray according to His mind and receive answers to our prayers. (2) Bearing fruit we shall bring glory to the Father by setting forth the character of Christ Who was the perfect expression of the Father. (3) By wearing the character of Christ we shall become witnesses before the world that we are truly His disciples, and thus become the witnesses in this world of that blessed Man who is in the glory. The Lord does not say, "If ye preach ye shall be my disciples," but if "ye bear much fruit." The witness to Christ is found in the lives of disciples. It is a living witness!

HAMILTON SMITH.