

How Do We Bear Fruit in the Kingdom of God?

By Rev. D. Earl Cripe, Ph.D.

The Greatest Secret to Fruit Bearing

Many people have wondered just exactly how you bear fruit in the Kingdom and how you show your love and appreciation for Jesus Christ and for God to Father. Is it by doing religious works? Is it by praying for at least an hour every day? Is it by attending church faithfully every Sunday? Is it by going to weeknight Bible studies or even leading Bible studies in your home with others? Is it by going out in the way places of life, whether the job, the street corner, the gospel mission or the jail and witnessing to the Gospel? Well, of course we would not want to minimize the importance of any of those things or suggest that they are not necessary in a faithful life well lived. But none of them describes the real secret to Christian discipleship. Jesus gives it to us in verses 9 through 13:

John 15:9 As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.

Jesus Christ loves His disciples the same way God the Father (who set Him into the world to do the work of redemption) loves His Son. If we believe that, and surely we do, then we are to continue in that love. Jesus tells us what continuing in His love means:

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.

One does not love Christ unless he obeys Him. On the other side of that coin one cannot obey Christ in spirit and in truth unless he loves Him. We have sometimes illustrated this by a young man and a young woman who have fallen in love. She does what he asks her to do because she loves him. If she is rebellious against him, it is easy for him to see that, whatever the attraction, she does not love him. On the other hand the day may come in that marriage when she carries out her duties as they have been defined through the years because she deems herself to be a person of character and feels that she must, but she no longer does it because she loves him. The truth be told, she resents him and wishes she did not have to do these things, but she reasons that if she did not she would not be a good Christian and it would reflect poorly on her character. The sad tale that must be related to this girl is that she is not a good Christian and her resentful carrying out other duties is not obedience to the man she claims to at all; neither is it obedience to God

The same is true in our relationship with Christ. When we first came to Him we were so tender in our love toward Him that we could not do enough things for Him. We sought to know more about what He wanted us to do so that we could do it. The driving force in our life was to please Him whom we loved. Unfortunately, in the lives of many professing Christian people, Christian duty has become like that of the housewife just described. There is no more heart in it and no more joy in it, but we have to do it because that is what good Christian people do. And so we force ourselves to go through the motions and wonder what happened to that marvelous joy that we once felt. The point is that if you do not love Christ you cannot obey Him. Certainly if you do not obey Him you do not love Him; but going through the motions of obedience does not mean that you love Him either. We have to truly love Jesus Christ in order to obey Him.

Faith and Truth, Not Feelings, Emotions and Theatrics

We are not talking about emotions here. Some people are more emotional than others, and when a man reaches the twilight years of his life he does not have the enthusiasm that he had in his youth. The Bible acknowledges that when it encourages us to remember the Creator in the days of our youth before the evil days come. There is much more enthusiasm and excitement in Christian obedience when we are young than when we reach the ancient years. That certainly does not mean that old people cannot obey the Lord, because they can. And that underscores the point that we are making here. Love for Christ must not be determined by feelings and emotions. Even so, we all know whether we love Christ and we are obeying Him because we want to, or if we have lost our love and we are just going through the motions because we believe that it is what we should do. Love for Christ is the secret to discipleship.

John 15:11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

Jesus has told the disciples this because He wants them to have joy and enthusiasm in what they are doing. He wants them to fear God, but not allow fear to become the dominant motive of their lives. He wants them to serve Him and to serve the Father in heaven because they love Him, because He loves them, and because nothing makes Him happier than to see fruitfulness in the lives of His children. Jesus wants these disciples to maintain their joy all of their lives. He knows (though they do not yet) that times are going to come when it is going to be hard to laugh, to smile, to feel lighthearted and to walk on the sunny side of the street. Jesus is at one of those points in His earthly life now. But in spite of all the blood and tears that He will sweat, and the pleas that He will make to the Father to find some other way to do this, the Bible tells us that it was because of the joy that was set before Him that he endured the Cross, despising the shame. As disciples of Christ, we cannot

have fun and games. We must take up our crosses if we want to be His disciples. He was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, and we are called upon to fellowship in His sufferings. But we can have joy in every situation, whether it be in life or in death. Jesus has told them of His love for them and that their love for Him is what makes the difference because, when these dreadful and eventually fatal-in-mortal-terms experiences come, He does not want them to lose their joy.

Love As He Loved

Now Jesus tells them that He not only wants them to serve Him because they love Him the way He and the Father have loved them but He demands that they love one another the way He has love them. In discipleship, it is not satisfactory that a man love Jesus Christ the way Jesus has loved Him. That is an incomplete picture. It is mandatory that the disciples of Christ love *one another* the way He has loved them. It should be easy to see that if we do not do this we do not have the love of Christ at work in our hearts. Christ is a great and good man and He has done marvelous things for us; therefore it is easy to love Him — or in any case, it is easier to love Him. But the love that Christ and the Father showed for us was not motivated by that kind of reasoning. He loved us when we were all together unlovely. “Not that we first loved Him,” the Bible says, “but that he first loved us.” “When we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” This is the way that we must love one another if we are to bear fruit in Christ’s vineyard.

John 15:12 This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

Now Jesus goes on to tell them what kind of love it was that He had for them:

John 15:13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

The greatest form of love is when a man lays down his life for his friends. This laying down of one's life comprehends more than Charles Darnay did in the Tale of Two Cities. It means more than taking the bullet so that the intended victim can go home to his wife and children. Those are important concepts, but laying down your life for your friends goes further. It means to put up with their shortcomings, it means to help them in their needs, it means to be patient with them as they grow out of their bad habits and move towards spiritual maturity, it means regard their life as being as important (or even more important) than our own and all those kinds of things. Until and unless we are willing to do those things for our friends in legitimate and proper ways (as the situation and the Holy Spirit determines them to be) we do not love our friends the way Christ loved us. If we do not do that, we are not abiding in Him, we are not bearing fruit in His vineyard and we are not even behaving as His friend.