

## **GOSPEL FRUIT THE TEST OF GENUINE DISCIPLESHIP**

Preached on Tuesday Evening, October 31st, 1854, at  
Oakham, Rutland

"Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples." John 15:8

Why does the farmer, at this season of the year, cast into the bosom of the earth so much valuable corn? That at harvest time he may reap a crop. Why does the gardener now transplant fruit trees, and put them by the side of a sunny wall? That those trees, when their bearing season comes, may produce rich and ripe fruit. If the farmer reap no crop, if the gardener gather no fruit, each is disappointed, and they would conclude, either that the seed was bad and the tree worthless, or that there was something wrong about the soil. So it is in grace. Why does God sow the seed of His Word in the heart of any? or why does He plant any tree of righteousness in His garden here below? That there may spring from the one a crop which may issue in His glory; and that fruit may be found on the other which shall be acceptable in His sight.

How much and how pointedly does the Lord Jesus Christ in this chapter insist upon fruit as a mark and evidence of true discipleship! With what unsparing hand does He cut off the branches that bear no fruit, and what a fearful doom does He pronounce upon them! And how He brings before our eyes His heavenly Father, investing Him with that striking character of "a husbandman," whose office it is to take away the fruitless and purge the fruit-bearing branches. "I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman. Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away, and every branch that beareth fruit He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more

fruit." But the Lord seems to sum up the whole in the words before us, in which He speaks as if He would urge the strongest motives upon His followers to induce them to live to His glory. "Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples."

In speaking from these words, I shall, with God's blessing, endeavour to show—

I. *What it is to bear much fruit.*

II. *How God is glorified thereby.*

III. *That to bear much fruit is a mark and test of genuine discipleship.*

I. In looking at our first point, *the bearing of much fruit*, I shall endeavour mainly to show three things: 1, that this fruit is not found in any heart by nature; 2, the source whence this fruit comes; and 3, the nature of the fruit thus produced.

i. Now, upon the first of these points we have not only the unanimous experience of God's people, but the positive assertion of Him who cannot lie, of Him who is Incarnate Truth itself. "Without Me," He says, "ye can do nothing." This declaration from the Redeemer's own lips should be decisive; it should stop at once all disputing; and we should bow down to it with hearty assent, as being convinced of it, not only from our own experience, but also from the infallible authority of the Lord Himself. In the margin it reads "severed from Me," that is, disunited from Me; in other words, "without union with Me" ye can do nothing. All fruit, therefore, or appearance of fruit, which is not produced by virtue of a living and spiritual union with the Lord Jesus, whatever fair show it may assume, however shapely and

beautiful it may look to the eye, is not such as God is glorified by; nor is it that which forms a test of genuine discipleship.

Amidst all the wreck and ruin which sin has wrought in this once fair world, amidst all the hideous forms of wickedness and selfishness which everywhere meet our eye, we cannot but be struck with the exceeding loveliness of some characters, and with the devotedness, self-denial, liberality, and religious zeal of others. It may seem harsh and unwarrantable to throw all this fruit rudely on the ground, and crush it under foot as worthless. But we must not call that gospel fruit which is not produced by the gospel, nor pronounce that spiritual fruit which is not the fruit of the Spirit. Nature can, and indeed does, produce much that wears a very close resemblance to gospel fruit; but it puts me in mind of what one sometimes sees made by the skilful fingers of young ladies—what is called wax fruit. I have seen sometimes under glass shades fruit so ingeniously made, so artistically shaped, and so beautifully tinted, that at first sight I could scarcely distinguish it from real. But were you closely to examine it, were you to touch it, smell it, and taste it, you would find it destitute of every qualification that constitutes fruit. It never grew on a tree, it possesses no flavour, contains no juice, the sun never ripened it, the dew never mellowed it; human fingers, and human fingers alone, manufactured it. However neatly moulded and beautifully coloured, it is, after all, but a piece of dead wax, a deceptive imitation, a false appearance, meant merely to catch and please the eye. So there may be in many characters, amid the various sections of the religious world, an appearance of fruit, much that resembles, and even externally surpasses, the fruit which grows upon the gospel tree, as the waxen fruit may to the eye be more beautiful than the real, the choicest fruit alone being imitated; and yet it wants the

gospel flavour, the gospel substance, the gospel reality, and the gospel vitality. It never grew upon the gospel tree, and, with all its outward beauty, is only a waxen imitation, wrought by the skilful fingers of the dexterous artificer, at best a cheat and a sham.

Again, there may be fruit which differs from this imitation fruit in having a certain kind of life in it, but, after all, is only what one may call hedge fruit—sloes, leather-coats, crabs, mere productions of the hedge and copse, only fit for the teeth and stomach of plough-boys. Now, as no one but a plough-boy would presume to say that these products of a wild crab or sloe tree are worthy of the name of fruit, that term being properly reserved for the product of the garden and orchard, so whatever fruit springs out of a man's natural heart, and is produced by mere human exertions, can only be truly characterised as hedge fruit.

This, therefore, we may lay down as a most certain truth, that every product of nature, however wearing the appearance of religion, from the highest Calvinism, the wax imitation, to the most grovelling Arminianism, the sour crab, cannot be called gospel fruit. It does not flow from union with Christ; it does not grow in the gospel garden; it is not matured by the dew and rain of the Spirit; and it is not ripened by the Sun of righteousness. It lacks, therefore, every qualification of gospel fruit—the fruit here spoken of whereby God is glorified, and whereby His people are manifested as true disciples of the Lord Jesus.

2. But this leads us to look more closely at the only source of all gospel fruit. The Lord Himself sets forth this point in a most beautiful and blessed manner. "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in Me." He here

declares the original source and continued production of all true fruit. It springs, in the first instance, wholly and solely out of union with Himself, and is maintained by an abiding in Him. The branch cannot bear fruit of itself. No life is in it, no fruit is on it, but as it grows out of and maintains its union with the stem. It has no independent, self-sustained life, sap, or fruitfulness. All these it derives from its union with the stem, living only in its life, and growing only with its strength. The natural vine is a beautiful emblem and representation of this. In the same way, then, as the natural vine pushes forth the bud out of itself, which expands into a branch, upon which branch the grapes grow, deriving all their substance, shape, and flavour from the sap that flows into them from the stem, so all gospel fruit is procured by the spiritual branch having first union with the Lord Jesus Christ, and then receiving out of His fulness those supplies of heavenly grace whereby fruit is borne and matured to His honour and glory.

But before we can realise in our own souls this heavenly union, so as to become by virtue of it gospel fruit bearers, we must be taught and brought to see and feel that without Christ we can do nothing; and the conviction of this must not be a mere matter of doctrine or theory, the easily adopted article of a religious creed, but must be so deeply wrought into our hearts as to become a living part and parcel of our daily experience. Many sighs and cries, groans and desires, must have been elicited from a conviction of our helplessness, barrenness, and unworthiness before we shall realise such a vital union with the Son of God as sensibly to receive out of His fulness. And when we have felt this living union which springs out of a manifestation of Christ and a receiving of Him into the heart by faith and love, we must also, through the operation of the blessed Spirit, receive such continued communications out of His inexhaustible fulness as

to maintain the union thus realised. To experience this is to experience the inflowing and incoming of the sap out of the stem into the branch. As, then, out of the stem, by virtue of the sap, the bud was first formed, which became lengthened into the branch, so from the same sap the branch, when grown, pushes forth leaves, flower, and fruit, the latter gradually swelling and ripening till fit for the winepress or the table.

3. But, leaving the natural figure, we will now look a little more closely at the nature of the fruit that grows upon the gospel tree, and is produced by virtue of a living union with the Lord Jesus. We may divide gospel fruit into three leading kinds—fruit in the heart, fruit in the lips, and fruit in the life; and these three we will examine separately.

i. The fruit of the heart is first in origin and first in value. The other two being worthless without it, it justly takes precedence of them. As God looks to and works on the heart, the production of heart fruit is His special prerogative. We therefore read that "He worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure," and declares, "from Me is thy fruit found." He it is who by His good and gracious Spirit produces and brings forth every grace in the soul. Some of these we may consider.

1. First, then, there is the *fear of God*, which in two places of Scripture the blessed Spirit declares to be "the beginning of wisdom." Whatever slavish fears may work in the natural conscience, there is no filial, godly fear in the soul which is not derived from union with Christ, and does not come out of His glorious and inexhaustible fulness. It is, therefore, a new covenant grace, the special implantation of God's own hand. "I will put," the Lord Himself says, "My fear in their heart, that they shall not depart from Me." This fruit being the

beginning of wisdom, all other gifts and graces of the Spirit will certainly and necessarily follow.

2. *Faith*, therefore, that special gift of God and choice grace of the Spirit, is eminently a gospel fruit of the heart.

Speaking of faith last Lord's day morning, I called her the queen of graces. We may well say, therefore, that faith is a most excellent fruit of the heart, and assign it a first and foremost place among the fruits that grow on the gospel tree, as springing so eminently out of union with the Lord Jesus, for "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness." It is by faith that this union is first experimentally produced, and it is by faith that it is subsequently maintained; for through it as a living channel all sap and virtue flow out of the Lord Jesus Christ into the soul. There is therefore no grace more highly spoken of and commended in both Old and New Testaments.

3. And what shall I say of *hope*? Is not hope too a fruit of the heart? Does it not grow a fair and goodly fruit on the gospel tree? What "good hope" is there except "through grace" producing union with Christ? and what hope is there which maketh not ashamed that does not spring out of the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost? and where but within does hope dwell? Every ray of gospel hope flows out of union with Christ, and is received out of His fulness, as every well-grounded expectation of being with Him in glory springs from some manifestation of His favour and love.

4. Every warm feeling of *love* towards His name, truth, cause, and people—is not this too another fruit of the heart which flows into the soul from its union with the Lord Jesus? This is the crowning fruit, the richest, choicest, and ripest that is found among the clusters, as well as the highest and most distinguishing mark of true discipleship. "If ye love Me keep My commandments." "By this shall all men know that

ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another."

So might I run through every inward fruit, such as repentance and godly sorrow for sin, contrition of spirit, humility of mind, prayer, watchfulness, with every grace whereby a Christian is inwardly adorned, and show that they all grow upon the gospel tree, and all spring out of union and communion with the Lord Jesus. May we not say, then, of one who is blessed with the possession of these fruits of the heart, that he resembles the king's daughter, who is "all glorious within," as adorned with every grace of the Spirit, as well as all resplendent without in her "clothing of wrought gold," the righteousness of her spotless Head?

ii. Now from fruit in the heart there springs fruit in the lip, "for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:10). As faith is heart fruit, so confession is lip fruit, and as the former is unto righteousness, so the latter is unto salvation. But as to believe with a justifying faith is of God, His gift and work, so to confess with a saving confession is of the same divine operation. "I create," He says, "the fruit of the lips." This fruit of the lips we give Him when, in spite of all opposition from without and from within, we confess His holy name before an ungodly world. The order of divine fruitfulness may therefore be thus laid out. The Lord first plants His fear deep in the heart. With this grace He at the same time communicates faith, which, indeed, is the main source and spring of godly fear; and as He draws forth faith into living exercise upon the word of His promise, it credits His testimony concerning Jesus, and thus sets to its seal that God is true. This is heart fruit. But as the Lord proceeds to bless the soul with manifestations of His mercy and goodness, He raises up a spirit of thankfulness and praise, which issue forth from the lips.



1. This is putting a new song into the mouth, as was the case with the children of Israel (Exod. 15), Hannah (1 Sam. 2), David (Ps. 40:3), Hezekiah (Isa. 38), and the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:46); and this song of praise for manifested mercy is the first fruit of the lips which God is said to create.

2. From this secret song of praise flows the second fruit of the lips, which is confession of Him openly before man. This consists in making a public profession, boldly declaring on whose side we stand, in not being ashamed of the Lord Jesus in the face of His scornful and bitter enemies, in bearing His cross, carrying it upon a bold shoulder, and, though sometimes galled with the weight, still to sustain its load, remaining faithful unto death, that we may obtain a crown of life.

3. To speak a word in season to the Lord's tried and tempted family, and out of your own experience, so far as enabled, to bring forward something that He may have done for your soul, is another fruit of the lip, and one whereby the Lord is glorified and His people edified.

4. Always to employ kind and affectionate language in your intercourse with the Lord's people, and to treat them with unvarying tenderness and sympathy, is also a fruit of the lips. I do not mean the canting, hypocritical softness of the day, but the kind and tender words which spring from real love and affection.

5. To call continually upon the Lord's name in prayer and supplication to tell Him all our trials and exercises, and to beg of Him to visit, water, and bless our souls, is also a fruit of the lips. To make it truly such, heart and tongue must ever move together; and it is a great mercy when we can say

with David, "Give ear unto my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips." Such prayer as this, the breath of God's Spirit in the soul, makes sweet music in the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. Christ's own mark of the elect is that "they cry night and day unto God."

6. To drop a word, as occasion may arise, of warning, rebuke, or instruction, in one's family, before the world, to those in affliction and distress, is another fruit of the lips. No one can tell what power there may be in a single word, "for life and death are in the power of the tongue." A word may be dropped that may hereafter be useful to some one in a foreign land, on a sick bed, on a field of battle amid the wounded and dying, which perhaps has been long forgotten by you and by him too, till God brought it to his mind, and blessed it to his soul. Or you may be called upon to stop, by a word, the mouth of an enemy, or to speak in defence of the truth before a superior. Thus the apostle urges Timothy "to be instant in season and out of season;" and speaks of his "holding fast the faithful word as he had been taught, that he might be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and convince the gain sayers" (Titus 1:9). Whatever is thus spoken in the name of the Lord, with a single eye to His glory, will be accepted of Him as a fruit of the lips.

7. Nor will we exclude from this fruit the pen of a ready writer; for some can write who cannot speak, and Christian correspondence has often been signally blessed; and many a gracious man by his writings still speaketh whose tongue has long been silent in the grave.

But we must ever bear in mind that the fruit of the lips must always flow from fruit in the heart. "The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth," says Solomon, "and addeth learning to his lips." It is only when we speak out of a full heart that our

words fall with any weight or power on the heart of others. It is good to feel as David felt when he said, "My heart is inditing," literally "bubbling up, a good matter." When there are these inward bubblings up of good matter, and the heart, like a gushing stream, pours forth its gracious feelings, it is a blessed fruit of the lips, and often ministers grace to the hearers.

iii. But besides fruit in the heart, and fruit in the lip, there is fruit in the life. A conversation in all points fully agreeable to the gospel of Christ; acts of liberality where we possess the means; undeviating integrity and honesty, in spite of all temptations; the strictest, most unswerving fidelity to all engagements; faithfulness to one's word under all circumstances, though to adhere to it may be against our own interest; these are some of the fruits in the life. Laying aside also everything unbecoming the gospel and our profession of it in word and action; endeavouring to commend our religion even to the enemies of God and godliness; maintaining a sober, godly, circumspect deportment before the family, the church, and the world; obeying Christ's precepts, and walking in His footsteps; adorning the doctrine by a separate, devoted, self-denying life—these are some of the clusters of fruit which hang visibly before the eyes of men on the gospel bough.

And all these fruits are not to be a thin, scanty, wizened crop—two or three berries on the top of the uppermost bough, and they concealed from sight by the broad leaves of a luxuriant profession, but a crop so abundant as at once to show the fruitfulness of the tree; for it is the bearing of much fruit in the heart, in the lip, and the life, whereby God is glorified, and Christ's disciples manifested. The Lord's words on this point are very expressive and emphatic—"Herein is My Father glorified that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My

disciples." Observe the stress which the Lord lays on the words "much" and "so." It is only those who bear much fruit that glorify God; and those only are fully manifest as the disciples of the Lord Jesus.

II. We are thus brought to our second point, which was the glory brought to God thereby. What a wonderful thought it is that God should be glorified by such a poor insignificant creature as man! That the great God, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, who fills all time and all space, and "dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto," should derive glory from the words and actions of a worm crawling upon earth. What an insight it gives us into the character of the Most High! How it seems for a few moments to lift the veil that hides the Majesty of heaven from our view, and to show us something of His unspeakable and infinite condescension. That He can take a kindly interest in what His people on earth think and say for the honour of His great name, and bestow an approbation of the tribute of praise which they bring, is enough to overwhelm our minds with wonder and astonishment. That you—even you—weak and worthless, a poor insignificant worm, crushed before the moth, may by bearing much fruit, bring glory to God! How such a thought seems to surpass every conception of the heart. To glorify God is the highest ambition of angels. The brightest seraph before the throne has no higher aim, no greater happiness, than to bring glory to His name. And yet a poor sinner on earth may glorify God as much, and in some ways more, than the brightest angel in the courts of eternal bliss. What different views the eyes of God and the eyes of men take of events passing on the earth. Men have been almost everywhere rejoicing in what is called the "glorious victory of the Alma," though purchased by such a dreadful expenditure of life and suffering. As an Englishman I cannot but rejoice in the victory our gallant soldiers have gained,

though as a Christian I must ever hate war, and mourn over such torrents of blood, and so many souls hurled at once into eternity. But the great God of heaven and earth, when He looks down on a field of battle, what glory does He see there?—what sees He but the violence and wickedness of man—greater cruelty and ferocity displayed by human beings towards each other than by wild beasts? What glory is brought to God by all the victories gained by one country over another? I have thought sometimes that a poor old man, or feeble, decrepit woman, lying on a workhouse pallet, fighting with sin, self, and Satan, yet enabled amidst all to look to the Lord Jesus, and by a word from His lips overcoming death and hell, though when dead thrust into an elm coffin to rot in a pauper's grave, brings more glory to God than all the exploits of Nelson or Wellington, and that such victories are more glorious than those of Waterloo or Trafalgar. It is true that the parish officers will not proclaim such a victory; nor will bells ring or cannons roar at such exploits; but the God of heaven and earth may get more glory from such a despised creature than from all the generals and admirals who have ever drawn up armies in battle or sunk hostile fleets beneath the wave. Truly does the Lord say—"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways."

It is indeed marvellous that glory should be brought to His great name by what His people do and suffer upon earth; that their feeble attempts to believe, to love, and to hope in Him; to speak well of His name; and to adorn His doctrine in their life and conversation, should redound to His honour and praise. Wondrous indeed is it that a poor insignificant worm, whom perhaps his fellow-mortal will scarcely deign to look at, or passes by with a shrug of contempt, should add glory to the great God that inhabiteth eternity, before whom the highest angels and brightest seraphs bow with holy

adoration! Well may we say—What are all the glorious exploits that men are so proud of compared with the tribute of glory rendered to God by His suffering saints? You may feel yourself one of the poorest, vilest, neediest worms of earth; and yet if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with a living faith, hope in His mercy, love His dear name, and in your vocation adorn His doctrine by a godly, consistent life, you are privileged above princes and nobles, yes, even above crowned heads, and all the glory of man, because you are bringing glory to God. It matters not what may be your station in life. You may be a servant, master, wife, husband, child; your rank and station may be high or low; but whatever it be, still in it you may bring glory to God. If a servant, by obedience, cleanliness, industry, and attention to the directions of your master or mistress. If a master or mistress, by kindness and liberality to your dependents, and doing all that you can to render the yoke of servitude light. There is not a single Christian who may not glorify God, though in worldly circumstances he be, or seem to be, totally insignificant. Glory is brought to God by those who live and walk in His fear and more sometimes by the poor than by the rich. Only adorn the doctrine of God in all things, and you will bring glory to God in all things.

When the Lord Jesus Christ was upon earth He was in a suffering state; and to this suffering image must all His people be conformed. In that suffering state He brought glory to God; and is now exalted to the right hand of the Father. So those who suffer with Him will be also glorified together; and glorious indeed will they be, for they will shine like the stars for ever and ever, resplendent in the glorified image of the Son of God. The apostle therefore says, "When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." The Lord did not assume angelic nature. He therefore did not adorn or beautify it; but by assuming

our nature, the flesh and blood of the children, into union with His own divine Person, He invested it with surpassing lustre. This is the foundation on which a redeemed sinner brings glory to God—not in himself, but as being a member of Christ, "of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones." What a thought it is that the lowest believer should actually bring more glory to God than the highest angel; and that the suffering obedience of a saint should be of higher value than the burning obedience of a seraph. To bring glory to God, then, should be our highest aim and most ardent desire. How the Lord urges this upon the consciences of His true disciples in the words of the text, "Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." A little fruit brings but little glory to God. It is in proportion to the amount of rich, ripe fruit that is borne upon the branches of the vine, that the Lord is glorified.

III. But we pass on to our third and last point, which was to show that the bearing of much fruit is the test of genuine discipleship. "So shall ye be My disciples."

We are not to suppose that the bearing of any or much fruit makes a person to be a disciple of Jesus; but it manifests him as such. It is therefore a mark, test, and evidence of true discipleship.

But what is it to be a disciple of Jesus? We read of the twelve disciples, though one of these was a traitor; but were they Christ's disciples only? The Lord clearly had others besides those whom He specially called such, and who were in more immediate and continual attendance upon Him; for He said on one occasion to others, "If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). What, then, is the exact meaning of the word disciple? It means, properly, a

learner, one who is under a teacher, whose submissive and devoted pupil he has become, and from whom he receives continual instruction. A disciple of Christ, then, is one who is admitted by the Lord Jesus into His school, whom He Himself condescends personally to instruct, and who therefore learns of Him to be meek and lowly of heart. A disciple of Jesus is one who sits meekly at the Redeemer's feet, receiving into his heart the gracious words which fall from His lips. This was Mary's happy posture, whom the Lord commended for choosing the better part. Such is also the posture of all the saints of God, according to the ancient declaration, "Yea, He loved the people; all His saints are in Thy hand, and they sat down at Thy feet; every one shall receive of Thy words" (Deut. 33:3).

But a true and sincere disciple not only listens to his master's instructions, but acts as he bids. So a disciple of Jesus is one who copies his Master's example, and is conformed to his Master's image. A sincere disciple is also characterised by the love which he bears to his Master; so a disciple of Jesus is one who treasures up the words of Christ in his heart, ponders over His precious promises, and delights in His glorious Person, love, and blood. A disciple of Jesus is one who bears some reflection of the image of his heavenly Master; he carries it about with him wherever he goes, that men may take knowledge of him he has been with Jesus; and as when Moses came down from the mount his face shone from the reflection of the heavenly glory which had streamed upon his countenance, so does the true disciple shine before men with some sparkles of the glory of the Son of God.

To have some of these divine features stamped upon the heart, lip, and life, is to be a disciple of Jesus. But this we cannot be without some union and communion with His



gracious Majesty. Even literally and naturally we cannot associate with people without catching a certain resemblance to them, for good or evil. If we are much with a person, especially if he be of marked or peculiar habits, we are apt—almost without knowing it—to catch his manner or expressions. This kind of imitation seems almost innate in us; and we see almost daily its effect in producing a similarity between persons otherwise different. It is in this way that children catch the ways, manners, and language of their parents; and thus friends and relations learn to understand and often imitate each other. It has been frequently remarked that wives and husbands, as they get old, often grow like one another—their very faces becoming assimilated. All these instances show how imitation and similarity are continually produced by close and intimate association. So it is, in a higher sense, in the things of God. To be much with Jesus is to be made like unto Jesus; to sit at Jesus' feet is to drink in Jesus' words; to lean upon Jesus' breast is to feel the warm heart of Jesus pulsating with love, and to feel this pulsation causes the heart of the disciple to heat in tender and affectionate unison; to look up to Jesus is to see a face more marred than the sons of men, yet a face beaming with heavenly beauty, dignity, and glory. To be a disciple, then, of Jesus is to copy His example; to do the things pleasing in His sight; and to avoid what He abhors. To be a disciple of Jesus, is to be meek as He was, humble as He was, lowly as He was, self-denying as He was, separate from the world as He was; living a life of communion with God, as He lived when He walked here below. To take a worm of earth and make him a disciple of Jesus is the greatest privilege God can bestow upon man. To select an obstinate, ungodly, perverse rebel, and place him in the school of Christ, and at the feet of Jesus, is the highest favour God can bestow upon any child of the dust. How unsurpassingly great must be that kindness whereby the

Lord condescends to bestow His grace on an alien and on an enemy, and to soften and meeken him by His Spirit, and thus cause him to grow up into the image and likeness of His own dear Son. What are earthly honours and titles when compared with the favour thus conferred upon those whose foundation is in the dust? Compared with this high privilege, all earthly honours, stars and garters, titles and robes, sink into utter insignificance.

But look at the test of being such a disciple of Jesus as I have been attempting to describe! It is to bear much fruit. This alone proves we are in His school. Suppose a new schoolmaster were to come into this town, an able teacher (for a clever man sometimes cannot teach), and were to open a school upon some new principle; and suppose that by his able teaching he were to draw a number of scholars together. Well, after some time had passed away, sufficient to prove the value of his system, we should expect some fruit to be found from his teaching. We should expect his pupils to manifest the great advances they had made in the various branches of art and science taught in this new and excellent school. But if we saw no fruit from his teaching, and the children who went to the school were rude, rough, and ignorant, making no progress, and showing no proficiency, we should at once condemn the master; and say that his profession of being such an eminent teacher was an impudent and worthless boast; or that those who said they went to his school were not his real scholars, and paid no heed to his instructions. May we not take this comparison into the things of God? How is it to be known that you have been admitted into the school of Christ? How are men to know you are a disciple of Jesus? Is it by great swelling words, telling them under what a blessed Instructor you have enrolled yourself? Or is it by letting people see, by your life and conversation, what advances you are really making in

vital godliness? The honour of the teacher is reflected in the excellence of the pupil; and by the progress of the disciples we appreciate the excellence of the master. So, when we see those who profess to belong to the Lord Jesus acting contrary to His will and Word; when we view them proud, wrathful, covetous, selfish, unfeeling, unkind, disobedient, worldly minded, occupied wholly with business, and devoting little or no time to the things of God, we must fear they are either deceiving themselves, or trying to deceive us. Must we not say, "Why, these persons may profess to be disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ; but it does not appear as if they had got any profit from what they call His teaching?" On the other hand, if we see them meek, holy, humble, gentle, affectionate, and can clearly perceive that the Lord is at work in their soul, conforming them to His divine image, training them up to be heirs of His heavenly kingdom; and not only thus teaching them inwardly, but also bringing forth in their lips and lives the fruits of righteousness—then we feel that such indeed are disciples of Jesus Christ.

Thus the bearing of much fruit not only brings glory to God, but proves such rich fruit bearers to be genuine disciples of the Lord Jesus. Now, though there is no merit in their bearing fruit, they sometimes get comfort from it, as proving an abiding union with Christ. "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." There is no maintaining of holy confidence in the soul but by walking in godly obedience; nor can there be any true spiritual communion with God whilst the guilt of disobedience lies hard and heavy on the conscience. To make straight paths for our feet; to walk in the fear of God; to live to His glory—are not only sweet tests of genuine discipleship, but faith, hope, and love cannot be maintained without them. Yet, my friends, if we know anything of what gospel fruit is, and what

we are as poor, vile sinners, must we not too often put our mouth in the dust? Instead of rejoicing in our fruitfulness, must we not often rather lament our barrenness, and cry out, "My leanness, my leanness! Woe unto me!"? Still, if we see and feel a deficiency in these points in ourselves and others, and comparing our hearts, lips, and lives with the Word of truth, must plead guilty, shall this utterly discourage us? Are we necessarily brought to this point to say, "Well, if this bearing of much fruit be a necessary test of discipleship, I have no part or lot in the matter. I had better give up all my profession, and abandon myself to utter despair?"

No. This very discouragement may prove of service to us. It is good, at times, to be discouraged; because it makes us learn that "without Christ we can do nothing," and that it is only by His grace that we can produce fruit to His glory. It is, therefore, good to see and feel our barrenness and unfruitfulness; for it is this very sight and sense of our own want of fruit that leads us in earnest desires to the Lord Jesus Christ to work in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure. All who know anything of what gospel fruit is must come to this conclusion, "From Me is thy fruit found." What they do, they do by grace; grace being the source not only of every desire, but also of every good word and work. And I may add this remark, by way of conclusion, that, as in autumn the tree which is laden with the weightiest crop of fruit bends its branches most to the ground, so the Christian who bears most fruit is ever the lowest in his own eyes. Nor is it those branches which rear their heads highest in the sky which bear the best or heaviest crop. The nearer the ground, generally speaking, the more fruitful the branch. The crowning fruit of a true disciple is humility. And the more sensible that he becomes of what the grace of God is and does, the more will this rich and ripe fruit be brought forth in his heart, lip, and life.