

3. Jesus' metaphor of the vine and branches illumined a couple of critical dimensions in the new relationship He was going to establish with His disciples. They were going to know Him in a new way because of sharing in His life – them in Him and Him in them. And this union would secure the continuation of His presence and the outworking of His purposes in the world; His disciples were going to bear His fruit abundantly as branches in the vine. But this fruitfulness depended upon them abiding in Him: living out His life in them by yielding to His Spirit and His leading according to His word to them.
  - a. Jesus' departure and return in His Spirit was going to inaugurate a new relationship imposing a new responsibility of intimacy and mission: The disciples were to abide in Him in order to fulfill their calling to bear His fruit in the world. And abiding in Him meant more than simply holding tightly to the things He'd taught them and the charge He was giving them; it meant *abiding in His love*. Jesus' love motivated and directed His interaction with them (13:1) and His love, in turn, reflected and expressed His Father's love for Him and the world He created; Jesus had come into the world as the beloved Son to fulfill the Father's loving design for His creation and the image-son at its center (3:16, 35, 5:19-21). And that design involved taking human beings up in the divine life and love – people gathered to the Father through union with the Son by the indwelling Spirit. Jesus' abiding in His own is the work of love, and so it must be with them: The apostles were to abide in Him, which is to abide in His love (15:9).

Jesus' love for them was the premise behind His exhortation; He could direct them to *continue* in His love because He'd already bestowed it. Most importantly, He had loved them *just as* His Father loved Him. The tendency is to pass over this as Jesus merely stating that He was following His Father's example: "My Father has loved me and so I've loved you." But He was affirming something far more profound; He was telling His apostles that He loved them *in the same way* and *toward the same goal* as His Father's love for Him. The love the Father had bestowed upon the Son the Son had bestowed upon His followers. And this was a love bound up in *mission*. The Father's love sent the Son into the world to fulfill His purposes for it (cf. 3:26-36, 5:16-23, 10:14-18) and the same purpose governed the Son's love for His Father and His own (13:1, 14:30-31, 17:20-26). Jesus had loved His disciples and now He was exhorting them to remain (abide) in His love – the love which reflected and expressed His Father's love for Him.

The implication, then, is that abiding in Jesus' love is abiding in His Father's love. And abiding in the Father's love entails being governed by the missional orientation of the Father's love just as Jesus had been. In terms of Jesus' imagery, abiding in His love means bearing His fruit as branches in Him, the True Vine. *The Father had sent the Son to bear the fruit of creational purging, renewal and reconciliation and this fruit was to hang on the branches of those abiding in Him and His love*. In this way they would carry forward His mission in the world. Thus Jesus' love *for* His disciples was to become His love *in* and *through* them – His purposeful and effectual love directed toward the same design as the Father's love which sent Him into the world (cf. 15:16, 17:18).

- b. This is the critical framework for interpreting Jesus' assertion that abiding in His love depends upon *keeping His commandments* (15:10). Many treat this statement in isolation and so embark upon the task of compiling a list of Jesus' directives in order to assess their obedience and love for Him. But this cheapens His statement and misses His point. As throughout the context, "commandment" here refers to specific instruction concerning a particular matter (13:34, 14:15, 21, 15:12). Jesus wasn't talking about a laundry list of moral and ethical directives (whether conceived as "moral law" or the "law of Christ"), but the apostles' obligation in view of His departure and return in the Spirit. Those events were going to inaugurate a new creational reality and new relationship between Him and them and so between them and His Father and His Spirit. Everything was going to change – including *them* – and they were obligated to conform to the truth of that change in the way they ordered and governed their thinking and lives.

Embracing this new reality and new relationship means abiding in Jesus and His love and this involves His word abiding in them (informing and directing them). Thus the apostles would "keep His commandments" by conforming to the truth as it is in Him – the truth to which the Spirit would enliven and empower them by joining them to Him. Jesus had "kept His Father's commandments" by conforming to His Father's mind and purpose in the leading of the Spirit (ref. 4:34, 6:38-40, 10:14-18, 14:30-31) and so it was to be with His disciples.

- c. Participating in and yielding to Jesus' life and mind would ensure the apostles' fruitfulness, but also their *joy*. But just as their fruit was going to be His fruit in them, so it would be with their joy (15:11). Once again, the context illumines Jesus' meaning. He wasn't talking about some sort of subjective, ethereal delight or elation, but *His* joy – the joy that characterized Him as the true Image-Son (cf. 14:27). And Jesus' joy was informed, disciplined and directed; it was the deep sense of satisfaction and delight which He derived from His conformity to His Father's life, mind and will. This is the joy He was promising His apostles, and they would experience His joy when they were taken up in His life so as to bear the fruit of His will and work in the world (16:19-24, 17:1-14). When they experienced His joy in this way, their joy would be authentic and full.
- d. Jesus exhorted His apostles to abide in His love by keeping His commandments. He then elaborated by telling them that His commandment was that they love one another as He had loved them (15:12). He transformed the plural *commandments* into the singular *commandment*, indicating that the obligation of mutual love was somehow the marrow of all that He was requiring of them (cf. 15:17). Moreover, this mutual love was to correspond to the love He had for them – the love which corresponded to His Father's love for Him. Once again Jesus was emphasizing the new relationship that was coming with the Spirit. As their fruit would be His fruit and their joy His joy, so it would be with their love: Their Lord's love for them was going to manifest itself in their love for one another; in turn, this mutual love would be the means by which they would bring forth the fruit of His purposes for the world – the fruit for which He'd called them and set them apart.

Such love is no vague or emotional sentiment; it is the love that inheres in the God who is love. It is the love of the Father that sent the Son into the world and the purposeful, self-giving love of the Son exerted on behalf of that beloved world. Jesus had demonstrated this love and instructed His disciples concerning it in all of His interaction with them and through His words and deeds in their presence. He had loved them from the beginning and now His love was about to reach its apex in the cross (15:13, ref. again 13:1).

Jesus directed His apostles to abide in His love, which they would do by keeping His commandments. His “commandments” consisted in the body of instruction He’d given them in light of what was about to transpire. And at the heart of these instructions was the obligation to love one another with the same love and in the same way that He had loved them. Hence verse 17: “*These things I command you, that you love one another*” (cf. again vv. 10-12). They’d experienced Jesus’ love and were about to witness its supreme expression. Calvary was going to reveal love as they’d never known it, but for a greater purpose than merely their instruction. Calvary was going to show them what it meant for them to keep their Lord’s commandment: They were to give themselves for one another as He had given Himself for them. In this way they would show themselves to be true and intimate friends of their Lord (15:14-15). And when they kept His instruction in this way, they would bear His fruit in themselves such that the world would perceive the meaning of His coming (cf. 13:34-35 with 17:20-23).

- e. This fruitfulness was Jesus’ intent in choosing them (15:16a). He had come as the Seed of Abraham to bring Yahweh’s blessing to all the earth’s families, but He was going to carry out this mission of fruit-bearing through those who share in His life by His indwelling Spirit (cf. Matthew 28:18-20 with Galatians 3:7-29). As the faithful embodiment of Israel, Jesus was going to reconstitute Israel – Yahweh’s elect “image-son” – in Himself, but upon the foundation of His chosen apostles; the first Israel had been founded on twelve men and so would the new Israel (Ephesians 2:11-22; cf. also Hebrews 12:18-24 with Revelation 21:1-14).
- f. Thus their fruit would *remain*, being the produce, not of themselves, but of the ever-living vine in which they possessed their life and vitality. This scheme of fruitfulness – the vine bearing its abundant, enduring fruit in its branches lovingly prepared by the vinedresser – is the Father’s purpose in the Son by the Spirit, and thus a matter of infinite glory and great joy. Animated, informed and directed by the life and mind of the Messiah-Vine, the branches give themselves eagerly and fully to their blessed task of fruit-bearing – fruit that is the produce of “abiding in His love” and “keeping His commandments” by living out His love in the world. This fruitfulness deriving from the obedience of love is the eternal purpose of the triune God; is it any wonder, then, that Jesus repeatedly insisted that such “branches” would see their petitions granted (15:16b; cf. again 14:12-14, 15:7-8)?

*“Drip down, O heavens, from above and let the clouds pour down righteousness; let the earth open up and salvation bear fruit and righteousness spring up with it. I, the Lord, have created it.”*