

Fruitfulness Explained: John 15.1-8 Abiding Satisfied

I carry with me a reminder of the incredible plan God has for me, everywhere I go. It is a piece of gold. Most of you here this morning have one too. It is a ring. If you have anything made of gold, silver, or precious gemstones -- you have that reminder also. Or at least after this morning they can become a reminder of God's plan to you of God's plan for your life.

What will you end up with from your life lived on planet earth? God says all we will hold in our hands at the end of life will be either **ashes or treasures**.

For every day, every hour, and every moment lived -- God is going to reduce EVERYTHING to smoke and soot, or one of three things -- gold, silver, or precious stones. Which do you think is better? Your life today reflects what you believe about the end result you desire -- ashes or treasures.

Open with me to 1st Corinthians 3.10-15. When we get to 1st Corinthians we will discuss far more about why God chose these symbols of our life.

The first three substances -- gold, silver, and precious stones are **very identifiable**. They are hard to change. Gemstones can be crushed, ground, or milled as flour and yet NEVER lose their distinct crystalline structure. An amethyst is rhomboid in structure, whack it with a hammer, crush it to powder -- every piece will be rhomboid. Topaz is orthorhombic -- the same is true to the minutest speck. Rubies are hexagonal to the minutest speck; and so through every precious stone. Gold is one of the heaviest minerals, and therefore can be panned easily because the Gold sinks to the bottom, below the other substances. In addition, it can be easily separated from other substances due to the weight differences. Gold is the most malleable and ductile substance known. It can be flattened out to less than .00001 (hundred-thousandth) of an inch and a 1 oz. (28 gram) mass can stretch out to a distance of over 50 miles (75 kilometers)!

These three precious substances are also **very scarce**. It is hard to find much of any of them so they are called precious. They are all out of sight (underground) and hard to get. They also are **very enduring** able to withstand all the elements – fire, water, storms, and time. Gold is also one of the most [resistant](#) metals. It won't tarnish, discolor, crumble, or be affected by most solvents. This adds on to the uniqueness of this mineral.

The other three substances Paul names are all above ground, **very visible** (wood of trees, hay of grass, stubble of straw), **very fragile** – they burn, they die from insect attack, they rot with water; **very soft** (they can be easily ground up and lose their identity); **very plenteous** (they grow everywhere).

But gold and silver and precious stones all have a problem. **They are not usually beautiful in their natural state**. They need some purging, refining, and polishing. My wedding ring is made of precious gold. It has a soft and beautiful shine that reflects an incredible change that has taken place. You see gold and silver rarely occur pure and shiny in their natural state. "The mineral Gold is almost always mixed with a small amount of silver, and sometimes contains traces of copper and iron. A Gold nugget is usually 70 - 90 percent gold, and the remainder mostly silver."¹

Think of **this verse** the next time you look at anything that shines with the luster of gold or silver.

"God has a plan to make us valuable, precious, and enduring. In nature, gold is usually found in combination with other minerals, principally silver, lead, copper and zinc. The process of refining, or purifying, gold to the point where it is truly a precious metal - and a useful one - involves the use of intense heat and caustic chemicals. What is more satisfying after working hard to polish a piece of fine silver than to look into its gleaming surface and see your face? How would we know what we look like as we face each day if we could not look into a mirror, the reflecting surface of which is a thin layer of silver? But think of what the silver had to be put through in the refining process.

God's pruning is the refining process through which the believer must pass before God can look at him and see His own face. Actually, God is looking for the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29).

As we undergo God's pruning, He is removing from us that which dims the image of Christ in us. God has a model or pattern to follow as He fashions

¹ Mineral Facts online at: <http://www.minerals.net/mineral/elements/gold/gold.htm>

*the lives of His children. That pattern is Jesus Christ. And God's great purpose is that Christ should be "formed in" us (Gal. 4:19)."*²

v. 1 "I AM
the True
Vine and My
Father is the
Vinedresser."

Our Father the Vinedresser is here.

He is looking at us and wants to see what our connection to His Son is doing in our lives.

Specifically, God the Father, our personal Gardener is looking for FRUIT.

Fruit is what is produced by God in my life that will last forever.

As we look at John 15 we are listening to the Gardener.

- This morning see God walk down the rows of vine branches. Watch how He takes listless, sometimes empty branches and brings them back to full spiritual vigor.
- Follow His eyes as He examines each branch to see where it is headed, how it is doing, and what needs to be done to improve its fruit-bearing.
- Trace His hands as He skillfully and lovingly lifts up branches that have begun to grow along the ground far from the Light of His Presence.
- Watch as He inspects the leaves caked with the soil of earth and clips, cuts, and disposes of whatever has been paralyzed; cleanses what is salvageable; and weaves back up again into fruitfulness, the restored and pruned branch.
- Then ponder with amazement the huge pile of wilting branches, He cuts away each time He passes down the rows.
- Feel the heat of the flames as all that useless growth is burnt, and the branches look so bare and sparse.
- Remember that the Goal of the Gardener is supreme – getting rid of ANYTHING that impedes the fruitfulness of His branches³.

THE VINEDRESSER.

In Christ's time, the **vinedresser prunes** the branches in two ways: he cuts away dead wood that can breed disease and insects, and he cuts away living tissue so that the life of the vine will not be so dissipated that the quality of the crop will be jeopardized. In fact, the vinedresser will even cut away whole bunches of grapes so that the rest of the crop will be of higher quality.

This morning in our lives God wants both quantity and quality.

² From the paragraph entitled "Purification" in Chastening, a booklet by James H. McConkey.

³ Adapted from Secrets of the Vine.

The greatest judgment God could bring to a believer would be to let him alone, let him have his own way. Because God loves us, He is at work tending to our lives, encouraging us to bear more fruit for His glory. **Your Heavenly Father is never nearer to you than when He is pruning you.** Sometimes He cuts away the dead wood that might cause trouble; but often He cuts off the living tissue that is robbing you of spiritual vigor. How does the Father prune us?

1. Sometimes **He simply uses the Word to convict and cleanse us.** (The word translated “purge” in John 15:2 is the same as “clean” in John 13:10. See Eph. 5:26–27.)
2. Sometimes **He must chasten us** if we are cast down in the mud of sin (Heb. 12:1–11) and spiritually lifts us back up into the sunlight of fellowship. At the time, it hurts when He removes something precious from us; but as the “spiritual crop” is produced, we see that the Father knew what He was doing.
3. If we are flourishing with external growth but not producing much fruit (by giving, sowing and reaping, spirit walking, flesh denying and so on...as we saw last time) **He prunes us** by cutting away at our rambling growth until we bear more fruit. **Our Father has to prune us** so that the quality keeps up with the quantity. Left to itself, our branch might produce many clusters, but they will be inferior in quality. God is glorified by a bigger crop that is also a **better** crop.
4. And finally if we are fruitful and bearing more fruit, at special times **He invites us** to allow Him to even more prune in our lives until we bear MUCH FRUIT!

v. 2a “**Every branch** in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

The first truth of John 15 is that it is for EVERY believer. Jesus is talking to “every branch in Me”. He is talking to every young person here this morning, every mom and dad here this morning. He is talking to every student, every professional, and every senior saint that knows Him as Savior and Lord this morning. He wants us to listen to Him and understand what He is doing.

He’s Talking to us

v. 2b “Every branch **in Me** that does not bear fruit

There are 25 reasons in the following verses why I believe that all of these 8 verses speak about believers headed to Heaven. In fact it was

He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

not until I studied this book more intensely than ever before; reading every word dozens of times -- two words unlocked this passage. Notice those words "**in⁴ ME**" with me starting in John 6: 35 (also 6:47, 56; 7:38; 10:38; 11:25-26; 12:44, 46; 14:1, 10-12, 20, 30; 15:2, 4-7; 16:9, 33; 17:20, 21, 23).

Every one of the 27 times John records "in Me" it refers to the believer or his place in relation to our Triune God. So it is hard to imagine the Lord switched gears in John 15:2 and says this one is unfruitful and thus unsaved. All believers go through seasons of fruitlessness, if you want to verify that think back over your own spiritual pilgrimage, right?

"In me," that is, in Christ, is what it means to be saved. There are tremendous words like propitiation, reconciliation, and redemption that cover particular phases of salvation, but the entire spectrum of salvation is in the phrase "in Christ." There are only two groups of people: those who are in Christ and those who are not in Christ. How do you get "in Christ"? By the new birth. When you trust Christ as Savior, you become a child of God through faith. You are born again by the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit does something else: He not only indwells you, but He also baptizes you. That is what puts every believer into the body of Christ—"every branch in me." 5

Now what does all that mean? **It unlocks the truth that all of these verses are for every believer!** You can be fruitless at times (1st Corinthians 3.15), but not for long. The Lord stops by and starts "lifting you up" out of what ever sin that has soiled you and stopped your fruit bearing. Then as you get back into production He continues until you grow even more! WOW, what a delight to know we are so vital to God's plan He personally is working on us!

I think that the greatest term that expresses salvation, according to the Bible, is this one word *identification*. To be saved does not mean to be joined to a church, to go through this, or to do that; it means to be identified with Christ, vitally joined to Him through a living faith in Him as Savior. 6

⁴ This is the key Greek preposition eis which occurs 711 times translated "in and into" in the Greek New Testament and only 58 times "on".

⁵ McGee, J. Vernon, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 2000, c1981.

⁶ McGee, J. Vernon, *The Best of J. Vernon McGee, Volume 1*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 2001, c1988.

v. 2c "Every branch in Me **that does not bear fruit** He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

Christ's central theme⁷ of John 15:1-8 is **not** salvation, how it is to be obtained or the danger of losing it. Instead, the great theme here is fruit-bearing, and the conditions of fertility.

The **word "fruit" occurs eight times in the chapter, and in Scripture eight is the resurrection-number.** It is associated with a new beginning. It is the number of the new creation. If these facts be kept in mind, there should be little difficulty in arriving at the general meaning of our passage.

Is it really possible that a believer, attached to Jesus can be fruitless at times? Jesus says so. He says I have no branches that I will allow to persist in a state of acting, behaving, thinking, and responding like an unbeliever.

That is what we are like when we sin, when we stray, when we grieve the Holy Spirit of the Living God, when we quench the power and working of the Lord who dwells within us. We are acting like we are lost. We feel cold, distant, useless, and insecure. Often in these times believers feel unsaved and get even more discouraged thinking that they didn't "pray the right prayer" or something. It is exactly those times – times of not living to God's Glory that are "fruitless".

It is exactly those times of not obeying the Lord that we get fruitless. It is when we feel lost, cold, and far from God – that He is talking about when Jesus said, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit".

When that condition arises Jesus dispatches the Gardener. God the Father, the Vinedresser walks down the row, finds the branch in distress and begins His loving work to stop the unacceptable condition of a branch connected to Christ that does not have Christ flowing through them.

Any part of the branch that Christ is not fully allowed into is addressed – that is chastening, that is pruning, and that is purging or cleansing.

FRUIT IS YOUR ONLY PERMANENT DEPOSIT IN HEAVEN.

Real fruit is precious to God! Fruit is the main earthly reason you were saved. Paul told Christians they were "created in Christ Jesus

⁷ Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John Volume 3*. Swengel, Pa.: Bible Truth Depot, 1945, p. 286-289.

for good works" (Ephesians 2:10). In practical terms, fruit represents good works – time, treasure, attitude, or action of ours that God values because it glorifies Him. The fruit of my earthly life is how God is glorified on Earth; and the basis of my capacity to glorify Him in Heaven someday. That's why Jesus declares, "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit" (John 15:8)

ALL BELIEVERS BEAR FRUIT

v. 2d "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit **He takes away**; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

A true branch⁸, united with the vine, will always bear fruit.

Not every branch bears a bumper crop, just as not every field has a bumper harvest (Matt. 13:8, 23), but there is always fruit where there is life. But the question still remains about what "**takes away**" means.

The answer⁹ comes in two parts. First, a clearer translation of the Greek word **airo**, rendered in John 15:2 as "**take away**," would be "**take up**" or "**lift up**." Remember the best commentary on the Bible is the Bible, so look at how God's Word uses this word.

Jesus explains the process that God the Father uses with fruitless areas of our lives. This is the area of greatest blessing if we understand, and greatest confusion if we don't. The translators of this verse have almost added to the confusion by the words "takes away". It sounds like get rid of, or cast out or something terrible. Actually this word translated here "takes away" is the Greek word **airo** and it means simply "lifts up".

We find accurate renderings of **airo**, for example, when the disciples "**took up**" twelve baskets of food after the feeding of the five thousand: Matthew 14:20 So they all ate and were filled, and they **took up** twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained.

This word is used again when Simon was forced to "bear" Christ's cross: Matthew 27:32 Now as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. Him they compelled to **bear** His cross.

In fact, in both the Bible and in Greek literature, **airo** never means "cut off." Therefore, when some Bibles render the word as "takes away" or "cut off" in John 15, it is an unfortunate interpretation

⁸ Quoted from Wiersbe, Warren W., The Bible Exposition Commentary, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

⁹ Bruce Wilkinson, Secrets of The Vine. Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2001, p. 21-35.

rather than a clear translation. "Lifts up," suggest an image of a vinedresser leaning over to lift up a branch.

What a comforting thought to see in this passage our loving Heavenly Father coming down the rows of His Son's vineyard and finding a cast down branch.

What would that be in the context of a vineyard? It could be a branch that has gotten so far under the rest that it is not getting sunlight and that has weakened it and stopped its growth.

It could be a branch that has gotten covered with dirt or caked with mud by the traffic around it or a storm that passed through.

It could be a branch that has fallen and is down on the road getting trampled. All of these are genuine conditions that First Century vineyards faced. All of these also parallel life on planet earth 2004!

The branches out of the sunlight are like believers out of touch with God, prayerless, with no daily habit of find God in His Word. They are not close to other believers and do not feel the warmth of God's love or the encouragement of saints around them who love and care for them. God reaches down and starts to pull them back by whatever means it takes to get them back to the Bible, back to the church, and back into authentic fellowship and accountability.

The branches caked with mud and dirt are believers who get lured into sin. It may be slowly like the dust that slowly built up on the leaves of the plants near the roads back then. A tiny bit over a long time has a deadening effect. Some believers trifle with sin, never plunging in just sneaking in a sin here and there. The net effect is a growing loss of life giving exposure to the Son of God. Spiritual paleness and limpness overtake them slowly but surely and they begin to waste away, their vibrancy fades, their families and marriages suffer – all because of the little sins they allow into their daily lives. Others plunge into sin, and quickly are so caked with it they feel despair, they feel hopelessness, and they feel far from God. Again a loving Savior comes to the scene of the disaster and begins the process of lifting the fallen branch out of the mud.

The branches that are trampled are those who are weak, frail and in need of much help. They get trampled by life, trampled by work, trampled by health concerns, trampled by finances. Each of these areas are a lack of faith on their part, so they suffer the

consequences of fearfulness, anxiety, joylessness and many other ills – until the Heavenly Gardener again comes along through a timely visit, a phone call, a letter, or a message of hope that sparks their hearts to again trust the One who loves them and gave Himself for them – even in the area they are cast down about, and they are lifted again into the sunlight of His love, joy, and peace.

v. 2e "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; **and every branch that bears fruit** He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

These beautiful and life-sustaining trees are mentioned in Psalm 92, the psalm for the sabbath day. "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree..." (v. 12)

- **The palm tree grows in good clean soil.** When you find these beautiful fruit-bearing trees in California, Iraq, Jericho, or anywhere else, you will never find them planted or growing among rocks or worthless soil. Jesus Christ is our righteousness. His grace has brought righteousness to us, which we receive by faith, on the grounds 'and merit of His shed blood. As those declared righteous, we grow in the clean soil of the Bible, of good books, and by keeping ourselves unspotted from the world.
- **The palm tree grows from the inside out.** An oak tree can be rotten and dead in the inside, but it will still be very much alive on the outside. We all remember our childhood days, when we would play and hide in an old oak tree. But it is not so with the palm tree. If it is rotten on the inside, it will die. The life of the righteous is not determined or conditioned by outward appearances, ritual or circumstance. It all comes from within. Solomon gave sterling advice with his words, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." (Proverbs 4:23) The Lord's words to the prophet Samuel are still profitable to us today: "...for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."(1 Samuel 16:7) The believer's life is not made up of a lot of externalities, of rules and regulations by men and religions. The Lord Jesus said, " A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things." (Matthew 12:35)
- **The palm tree grows no branches.** To be sure, there are the fronds at the top but no branches. In other words, it spends no time on side issues. A friend told me of a conversation which he had with the manager of one of the best-known entertainers in the world. After my friend had listened as the man told him of his main responsibility in his job, namely, to keep the entertainer sober until he appeared on the platform, my friend gave his personal testimony of his commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. The manager listened courteously and intently. Then he said, 'You are

right. We, in the entertainment world, are simply trying to paint a sinking ship." And so, for the palm tree, the word found on the seal of the state of New York would be the same: "Excelsior"- always upward!

- All of the fruit of the palm tree is at the top. In other words, everything for God! This is the ambition of the righteous. Personal endeavor and achievement, social activity and serving mankind, will have the underlying motive of glorifying the God adored by the righteous. The "single eye" is a rare item, but when it is found among the Lord's people, it is a gem of highest value and price. Desert nomads would be the first to inform us that the palm tree grows where it is needed. When the children of Israel reached Elim, they were lured to the twelve wells of water in the desert by the sight of the seventy palm trees. The Lord Jesus, in His great high priestly prayer in John 17, pointed out that His children are: out of the world, not of the world, but are in the world, and have been sent into the world. We are planted in this moral and spiritual desert in order that we may be signals to the hungry and thirsty that there is satisfaction to be found in the One who has redeemed us.¹⁰

Psalm 92 "bear fruit"
Beware of sins of old age
Senior Citizens Challenges

Seniors by the time they reach Psalm 92 life should have learned: How useless self pity is; how dangerous selfishness becomes; how worthless greed ends up; how hopeless independence can be; how restless discontentment can be; how empty pleasures become so quickly.

On the positive side senior saints have learned how priceless real friends truly become; how endless Christ's joys can be; how numerous ministry opportunities are all around us; how satisfying Christ's presence becomes the more we are alone; how comforting prayer grows to be in our lives.

v. 2f "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away;

Our Father the Vinedresser is here. He is looking at us.

- If we are cast down in the mud of sin **He chastens us** and spiritually lifts us back up into the sunlight of fellowship.
- If we are flourishing with external growth but not producing

¹⁰ Roy Gustafson, *In His Land Seeing Is Believing*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: World Wide Publications, 1980, p. 75-78 .

and every branch that bears fruit **He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.**

- much fruit (by giving, sowing and reaping, spirit walking, flesh denying and so on...as we saw last time) **He prunes us** by cutting away at our rambling growth until we bear more fruit.
- And finally if we are fruitful and bearing more fruit, at special times **He invites us** to allow Him to even more prune in our lives until we bear MUCH FRUIT!

It is the wise farmer who knows the correct times of the year to cultivate and prune his vines to insure maximum yield. In the Holy Land grapevines first bloom in May, and the fruit will begin to ripen by August. There are two calculated **prunings** (as noted in the Gezer Calendar) in the fall before the vines become dormant, the unproductive bunches from the previous year are removed, and at the peak growth time of the year once the grapes appear, excess leaves and tendrils are cut away to encourage greater yield and even ripening. In our lives we also need to be trimmed when things get in the way and when things are going better than ever! Yahweh will thus bide His time until the appropriate moment to make His pruning in our lives¹¹.

Chart on chasten vs prune?

“Does God have a grudge against His children? Is He trying to “get even” with us? Is God’s chastening and pruning a kind of parental revenge for childish wrongdoing? Often we may think so, but this is far from the truth. God disciplines us for our own profit so we can share in His holiness. God’s one supreme purpose in disciplining us is purification. He wants to take away from us all that mars the likeness of Jesus Christ within us. It is His own holiness that He wants to perfect in us”¹².

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¹² From the paragraph entitled “Purification” in *Chastening*, a booklet by James H. McConkey.

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¹⁵ Bruce Wilkinson, *Secrets of The Vine*. Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2001, p. 39-48.

¹⁷ Bruce Wilkinson, *Secrets of The Vine*. Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2001, p. 50-59.

¹⁸ McGee, J. Vernon, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 2000, c1981.

¹⁹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the New Testament*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books) 1992.

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PROFILES IN PRUNING In the vineyard, an expert pruner applies his skills in four specific ways:

1. Farmers cut anything dead or dying off the vines.
2. Farmers try to expose every branch to the light so that it get maximum exposure to the sunlight.
3. Farmers prune unnecessary growth so that the vine concentrates on fruit production.
4. Farmers keep the soil around the roots clear and prepared to feed the fruit production needs of the plant..

Does God have a grudge against His children? Is He trying to “get even” with us? Is God’s chastening and pruning a kind of parental revenge for childish wrongdoing? Often we may think so, but this is far from the truth. God disciplines us for our own profit so we can share in His holiness. God’s one supreme purpose in disciplining us is purification. He wants to take away from us all that mars the likeness of Jesus Christ within us. It is His own holiness that He wants to perfect in us¹⁴.

When He chastens we are “lifted”; when He cleans we are “purged”; and when He communes we “abide”.

“Every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.” The Greek word is *kathairō*, which means “to cleanse.” Some people consider the purging to be pruning, and He does that too, but it really means to cleanse.

However, the “purging” in this verse literally means cleansing. When I was in the Bethlehem area, I saw that in their vineyards they let the grapevines grow on the ground, and they propped them up with a rock. Because the grapes get dirty and pests get on them, they actually go around and wash the grapes before they get ripe. So the Lord comes to our lives; He lifts us up and washes us so that we may bear more fruit. How does He do this?

FRUITBEARING 101: Jesus Never Neglects Any Vine That He Owns

If you are in Christ He is at work somewhere in your life – trimming, lifting, cleaning, or pruning. Whenever we have fruitless times, God steps in to change that.

“For the Christian, sin is like dirt covering the grape leaves. Air and light can’t get in. The branch languishes, and no fruit develops. How does our Vinedresser lift us from mud and misery? How does He move our branch from barren to beautiful so we can start filling up our basket? The answer to this question is the first secret of the vine. It’s All Up To You, Once believers understand God’s motive in discipline, an astonishing truth dawns: **The discipline doesn’t have to continue! It’s all up to me. I will only experience pain as long as I hang on to my sin.** If you’re still wondering whether you are in a season of discipline, ask yourself this question: **Can I look back over my walk with God and see very clearly that a sinful behavior I used to be caught up in is no longer an issue? Are there thoughts, attitudes, or habits that used to dominate my life but don’t anymore?** If you can answer yes, you’re moving forward and upward with God. If you can’t, your grape harvest basket is probably empty and you are undoubtedly being disciplined. I recommend that you now try to understand what degree of discipline God might be using to get your attention. Note Hebrews 12 with me. There are stages of God’s chastening in a believer’s life¹⁵.”

How do we know what to send ahead? One sobering warning about Heaven is from Pastor Jan David Hettinga¹⁶[1] in his 1996 book entitled **Follow Me**. There he lists three terrible dangers that can rob anyone of finishing well and earning Christ's well done. These three areas should concern all of us who seek Christ's full rewards in Heaven. He says:

1. Beware of **the sins of old age**: lust for comfort and convenience, greed for recognition and covetousness for security. The sins of old age can erase Christ's well done. Remember Solomon.
2. Beware of **the problem of exceptionism**: it makes me think my life is an exception to God’s Word. Thus I can excuse myself from doing anything for Heaven because of my past, or my pain, or my poverty, or my poor self-image. The problem of exceptionism can erase Christ's well done. Remember Ananias and Saphira.

3. Beware of **the unmortified pockets of pride**: allowing these pockets to grow and not be dealt with. It can make me proud of my intellect, or proud of my achievements, or proud of my giftedness, or even proud of my goodness. Pockets of pride in my life can erase Christ's well done. Remember Lot.

1. **Stage 1: Rebuke – “My son, do not...be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him” (v.5).** We hear God’s rebuke, even though we don’t always choose to respond. God can make Himself heard in many ways: a prick of our conscience, a timely word from another person, a Scripture, the preaching of God’s Word, or conviction by the Holy Spirit. (Do you see how wonderful and kind it is of God to use so many methods to get our attention and steer us away from peril?)

2. **Stage 2: Chasten – “For whom the Lord loves He chastens” (v. 5).** In other places in the Bible, the word **chastening** is used interchangeably with discipline. But in our text we find a specific use that shows a more serious degree of discipline. Chastening is something you feel as emotional anxiety, frustration, or distress. What used to bring you joy now doesn’t. Pressures increase at work, at home, in your health or finance. Many Christians bump along in this level of discipline, yet fail to read the signs. They feel unfulfilled at church, critical of their Christian friends, and “on the outs” with God. When they pick up their Bible, it feels like a lead weight instead of a welcome relief. Their relationship with the Lord seems blighted by a sadness or lethargy they can’t quite trace. If any of these symptoms sound familiar, you don’t need to go to church more or try to read your Bible with a better attitude. You need to look for ongoing sin in your life, the dirt crusting over your leaves and cutting you off from God’s best. If you don’t respond, love will compel your Father to take more drastic measures.

3. **Stage 3: Scourge- “And scourges every son whom He receives” (v. 6).** To scourge is to whip, to inflict punishment. It’s the same word the Gospels use to describe what the Romans did to Jesus just before they crucified Him. Not a pretty picture! In fact, for the word **scourge** you could substitute **cause-excruciating pain**. What percentage of Christians do you think have experienced scourging? It may shock you to read that God scourges “every son.” That means you have most likely already been scourge in your life.

FRUITBEARING 102: Jesus wants me to increase in fruit bearing every growing season of my life – so He will work on me to that end!

Do you realize that when you and I were saved we enlisted God Himself as our personal, lifelong gardener? With pruning clippers in hand He is ALWAYS at work! When we are fruitful, God moves in to make us "more fruitful". Are you ready for a troubling truth that, once grasped, will free you to view the trials you're now facing in a new light? Even change how you feel about them and reward you with a beautiful harvest for God?

Because of the grape's tendency to grow so vigorously, a lot of wood must be cut away each year. Grapevines can become so dense that the sun cannot reach into the area where fruit should form. Left to itself, a grape plant will always favor new growth over more grapes. The result? From a distance, luxurious growth, an impressive achievement. Up close, an under-whelming harvest.

Do you know who God has targeted as the most fruitful branches in His vineyard? The senior branches. That is exactly what Psalm 92 says. Seniors or those who are "older" in the faith have so many blessing from the Lord.

Senior saints have deep roots, they have weathered the storms, they have experienced painful losses, they know how brief life can be.

Senior saints know that security only can be found in Christ's Presence, where reside the precious trio of peace, comfort, and joy. Do you remember some of those senior saints that God points out in His Word?

- Anna who fasted and prayed at nearly 100 years of age, and was still growing.
- Simeon who was still praising and serving at an elderly time in life.
- Zacharias and Elisabeth who were involved in ministry and got the opportunity to grow old tired as they raised a son in their old age.
- Aged Saint John the Apostle was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day – he had never grown tired of Sundays in the Presence of the Lord!
- Caleb took on great challenges in his last days to honor the

Lord.

- Joshua made one of the most powerful statements about grandparenting as in Joshua 24.10 he stated that as for me and my house. He was still exerting great influence over his children and grandchildren for the Lord.

FRUITBEARING 103: Jesus invites us closer and closer to Him the more we cooperate in the fruit bearing He seeks.

The Third Lesson of The Vine ¹⁷: **If your life bears a lot of fruit, God will invite you to** abide more deeply with Him. His purpose is not that you will do more for Him but that you will choose to be more with Him. Only by abiding can you enjoy the most rewarding friendship with God and experience the greatest abundance for His glory. Abiding is all about the most important friendship of your life. Abiding doesn't measure how much you know about your faith or your Bible. In abiding, you seek, long for, thirst for, wait for, see, know, love, hear, and respond to ...**a person**. More abiding means more of God in your life, more of Him in your activities, thoughts, and desires.

The cleansing power of the Word of God. "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Pet. 1:22–23). We were born again by the Word of God, washed from our sins. Then in our walk down here we get dirty and need the Word of God to cleanse us continually. That is one reason to study the Bible—to be cleansed. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word" (Ps. 119:9).

How does God work? "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word" (Ps. 119:67). "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes" (Ps. 119:71). My friend, He uses affliction to bring us to the Word of God that you and I might be made serviceable to Him. I don't think that you will ever be clean before God if you don't study the Word of God. I believe that the people who are really dangerous are the ones who are as active as termites in our churches but who are reluctant to study the Word of God. I consider them the most dangerous element against the Word of God and the cause of Christ in this world. My friend, we need to study the Word of God and apply it to our lives. 18

The cleaner we are in our daily lives, the more fruit we will bear. The leaner we are the more capacity we have to glorify God (First Corinthians 10.31). Note that the **fruitful** branches are “purged” (v. 2—same word as “clean” in v. 3) so that they will bear more fruit. God cleanses us through the Word, chastening us to make us more fruitful, which helps to explain why a dedicated Christian often has to go through suffering. As believers move from producing “fruit” to “more fruit” (v. 2) to “much fruit” (v. 8), they glorify the Father. The evidences of the “abiding life” are: a sense of the Savior’s love (v. 9), obedience to His Word (v. 10), answered prayer (v. 7), and joy (v. 11)¹⁹

v. 3 “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

v. 4 “**Abide in Me**, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.”

The Branches Abide

The key to this passage is the word **abide**; it is used eleven times in John 15:1–11 (“continue” in John 15:9 and “remain” in John 15:11). **What does it mean to “abide”?** It means to stay in touch with Christ so that His life can work in and through us to produce fruit. This certainly involves the Word of God and the confession of sin so that nothing hinders our communion with Him (John 15:3). It also involves obeying Him because we love Him (John 15:9–10). This abiding relationship is natural to the branch and the vine, but it must be cultivated in the Christian life. It is not automatic. Abiding in Christ demands worship, meditation on God’s Word, prayer, sacrifice, and service—but what a joyful experience it is! Once you have begun to cultivate this deeper communion with Christ, you have no desire to return to the shallow life of the careless Christian. Abiding is about being not doing; Jesus wants me to be with Him more than do for Him!

Abiding produces fruit. John 15 is Christ's explanation of **fruitfulness**. The entire passage is ONLY to believers. So the salvation is assumed, it is the fruitfulness that is being explained.

Fruit bearing in our lives is totally tied to proximity. We bear fruit when we are connected and close. Many have been born into His family, few stay close in abiding fellowship. Many have eternal life forever in Heaven but do not experience it here today. Jesus is near at times and far much more often.

Jesus wants my Life spent intentionally on fruit bearing for His glory – that means abiding, and that means I will Walk in the SPIRIT.

Abiding speaks of our keeping close to Jesus so that we can bear fruit. To abide never means “to keep yourself saved”. Twice in this passage (John 15.1-16) Jesus commands us to abide. We are never commanded to do anything that we are not responsible and able to do. So He does not say “Keep yourself saved” or “Save yourself” rather He says, “I command you to stay near Me, stay with Me, stay close to Me” much like we say to our children when we want to help and protect them or insure that there is something special they do not miss. Jesus does not want us to miss the benefit and blessing that comes from nearness to Him. Nearness to Jesus is a choice based upon obedience. If you are not close to Him today – He has not moved, you have.

Look at His direct calls to us commanding us to stay near Him in every way possible through life:

John 15: 4, 9 **Abide in Me**, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. 9 “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; **abide in My love**.

To **abide** in Christ does not mean to keep ourselves saved, rather it means we pursue:

- PURITY: as we keep our lives clean through His Word (vv. 3–4).
- FAITH: as we live in His Word and pray (v. 7),
- LOVE: as we obey His commandments (v. 10).

Since we know the Scriptures with one voice promise us that God is faithful and will never leave or forsake us, “**abide**” thus becomes a heightening and deepening offer of closeness to Him. God who has come to live with us now wants us to invite Him into our private quarters where we really live. If He is on the doorstep – He wants into the house. If He is in the entry way He wants into the home. If He is in the living room – He wants full run of the house to go upstairs and into the bedrooms and closets.

When we abide in Christ it is assumed that we entered into His life by the sacrifice He made and we accepted. Abiding grows as we choose to daily maintain constant **dependency** on Him. We stay conscious of our helplessness; we realize that “severed from Him, we can do nothing.” Abiding in Christ means we draw from Him all we need to live His life all our days.

“It is not enough that I turn from myself in disgust; I must turn to Christ with delight. I must seek His presence; I must be occupied with His excellency; I must commune with Him. It is no longer a question of my sufficiency, my strength, or my anything. It is solely a matter of His sufficiency. The branch is simply a conduit, through which flows the fruity-producing juices, which result in the lovely clusters of grapes”.²⁰

v. 5

v. 5 **“I AM the Vine** and you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in Him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

Jesus who is the Eternal Unchanging God of the Universe opens His arms to us opening an intimate and personal relationship directly with us.

Jesus gives the seventh and final declaration of His Divine relationship to us. In God's Word a seven part truth is a completed set. Jesus says that I AM all you need, needed, and will ever need. And in John 15 explains – how to get and keep everything He has promised us.

- He started in John 6.35 revealing Himself by saying: **“I AM the Bread”** we need to never perish, then in John 8.12 by declaring: **“I AM the Light”** we need to live.
- In John 10 He opens to us the truth that He is related to us in two more ways: **“I AM the Door”** we need to enter God's Presence; as well as **“I AM the Good Shepherd”** we need -- who loves, leads, gives Himself to care for us.
- At the grave of His friend Lazarus in John 11.25-27 Jesus tells us that **“I AM the Resurrection Life”** all that we need to live here and there in serenity and security. As the hymn writers say: “no guilt in life, no fear in death Jesus has set my destiny”!
- In the Upper Room Jesus comforts His troubled disciples in John 14.6 with the three-fold cord that can't be broken as He promises **“I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life”**. The way for today,

²⁰ A.W. Pink, John, III, 307-309.

v. 5 **"I AM the Vine** and you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in Him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

the truth for tomorrow and the life for evermore. When Jesus speaks to His disciples in John 15, He was emphasizing *the familiar to portray the eternal*. The **vine** was part and parcel of Jewish imagery, and the very symbol of Israel. The vine was grown all over Palestine as it still is. It is a plant needing a great deal of attention if the best fruit is to be gotten from it. It is grown commonly on terraces. The ground has to be perfectly clean. It is sometimes trained on trellises; it is sometimes allowed to creep over the ground upheld by low-forked sticks; it sometimes even grows round the doors of the cottages; but wherever it grows careful preparation of the soil is essential. It grows luxuriantly and drastic pruning is necessary. So luxuriant is it that the slips are set in the ground at least twelve feet apart, for it will creep over the ground at speed.

JESUS USES A UNIVERSAL IMAGE: there was no one living in Israel in the time of Christ's ministry that had not seen a vine and its branches – except maybe the blind who had escaped the healing touch of Jesus. So when he set out to explain the relationship that he desired from those who were his own children – he used the vivid image of the vine and branches.

JESUS USES A HISTORICAL IMAGE: After the Old Testament era the identification continued, in fact the vine is the national symbol for Israel on the coins of the Maccabean Period (167-63BC). By the time of Christ's ministry the Temple of Herod had made the vine and branches to be the glory of the area in front of the Holy Place. Herod's Golden Vine was the spot that the Jews could bring golden clusters of grapes to hang as an offering to the glory of the God of Israel – and many did. Many wealthy people brought a new bunch of grapes and the not as wealthy would bring a new grape to hang on to that vine. So to all in Israel as John records these words of Jesus the vine and branches were the very symbol of Israel. But Jesus changes the symbolism and declares in v. 1 that He is the *true* vine. The point of that word *alethinos*, true, real, genuine, is this.

JESUS USES A BIBLICAL IMAGE: Often in the Old Testament, Israel is pictured as the vine or the vineyard of God. "The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel" (Isaiah 5: 1–7). "Yet I planted you a choice vine" is the message from God through Jeremiah to Israel (Jeremiah 2: 21). Ezekiel writes in chapter 15.1-11 and 19.10 that Israel is as a vine in God's sight. Hosea writes "Israel is a luxuriant vine" (Hosea 10: 1). Psalm 80.8 records that "Thou didst bring a vine out of Egypt". Thus in the Old Testament the vine had actually become the symbol of the nation of Israel.

JESUS USES A NEGATIVE IMAGE: The vine is never used in the Old Testament for Israel in a positive way. It always spoke of *degeneration*. The point of Isaiah's picture is that the vineyard had gone wild. Jeremiah laments that his nation has turned into "degenerate and become a wild vine" (Jeremiah 2.21) Jesus was warning any who heard Him that just being associated with God's people did not save. They were degenerate and wild. The only hope was by a living connection to Him! We need to be connected to Christ, living in Him or we have no hope. It is not human descent but Divine rebirth that saves. Nothing external can give endless life, only connection to God Himself through Jesus.

JESUS USES A VIVID IMAGE: Vines grew everywhere in Israel as they do today. And everyone who grew grape vines knew the close attention they need to bear good fruit. Each year 90% of all growth from the previous year must be cut away. Pruning was required, and the soil constantly prepared. The vines have to be held away from the ground by trellises or sticks. After three years of maturing, the new plant is pruned back twice each year as it bears two kinds of branches, ***ones that have fruit and ones that don't***. Any branch that does not bear fruit is drastically pruned back, so none of the plant's strength is misused for mere foliage and not grapes. An unpruned vine never produces the good fruit it is capable of—and this Jesus knew very well.

JESUS USES A SOBERING IMAGE: The wood of the grape vine has the distinct characteristic that it is good for nothing. It is too soft for any purpose. At certain times of the year, it was laid down by the law; the people must bring offerings of wood to the Temple for the altar fires. But the wood of the grape vine was excluded. Wood pruned out of a vineyard was only useful for a bonfire. This completes the picture Jesus draws.

- One of the sobering principles of the New Testament is that *uselessness invites disaster*. The fruitless branch is on the way to destruction.
- A second truth: *contact is the key to all of our spiritual life*. Jesus lived connected to God. The secret of the life of Jesus was his contact with God; again and again he withdrew into a solitary place to meet him. We must keep contact with Jesus. Connection takes planning. We must take deliberate steps to stay connected.

- A final truth: *any amount is sufficient*. "To take but one example—to pray in the morning, if it be for only a few moments, is to have an antiseptic for the whole day; for we cannot come out of the presence of Christ to touch the evil things. For some few of us, abiding in Christ will be a mystical experience which is beyond words to express. For most of us, it will mean a constant contact with him. It will mean arranging life, arranging prayer, and arranging silence in such a way that there is never a day when we give ourselves a chance to forget him".²¹ Don't wait for a better time – seek Him now. Don't put off for later and miss the blessing of this moment you can have with Him.

v. 5b "I AM the Vine **and you are the branches**. He who abides in Me, and I in Him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

When Jesus stopped to describe our daily relationship to Him in John 15 – it was of utmost importance. The timing is unbelievable, just hours before the darkest night on earth. The cross and the grave were looming yet Jesus joyously looked ahead for the joy of being united with His disciples and us!

Think about something – when Jesus sums up the Christian life it is with this picture. We are a branch and everything in our life is connected to HIM! All we are and all we will ever be flows through Jesus. That is an awesome thought.

We live our lives from salvation onward – attached to Jesus. Everything we say ***we say with Him***, everything we see ***we see with Him***, everything we do ***we do with Him***. We are like Siamese twins, ***we are connected, attached, linked and sharing His life***.

Now look further and what is amazing if you step back and look at John 15.1-8 -- ***no sin is in the picture***. Jesus is describing us as we are, wearing His righteousness, and thus He sees us as without sin. The result is that Jesus is asking the Father to remove anything that hinders His life from being ours. Life is reduced to being either good or good for nothingness.

To be good branches for Jesus we need some constant help. This is the job of the Gardener, and God the Father assumes the role of the gardener. He is ***always*** at work in our lives trimming, pruning, lifting and promoting Christ-likeness. The explanation of John 14.21 is seen in John 15.1-7.

²¹ Adaptations and quotations from Barclay, William, Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of John - Volume 2 Chapters 8-21 (Revised Edition), (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press) 2000, c1975.

Jesus used this vine/branch metaphor for their understanding. But the importance²² of **vineyards** in the ancient world is difficult for modern readers to appreciate. Winemaking dates back to the earliest days of human history. Genesis records Noah as the first vineyard cultivator and winemaker, with unfortunate results (Gen 9:20 ff.). The production and consumption of wine was an economic mainstay for the farmers of Israel in Jesus' day. Many Christians today do not drink wine, and most have little understanding of a working vineyard. Wine comes from the juice of the grapes produced by a grapevine. So what lessons was Jesus offering to His disciples that night and thus to us?

- WE LIKE BRANCHES -- ARE UNFOCUSED BY NATURE: If left untrimmed, a grapevine will use its available energy to grow long woody branches and extend its territory, while producing a few meager bunches of grapes. Winemakers learned early on that grapevines could be tamed by vigilant pruning of branches so that comparatively few buds would be allowed to grow. ***What are you doing that God the Father is watching for just the right time to trim away from your life? It may be good in the sense of not being sin – but good for nothing in the light of eternity!***
- WE LIKE BRANCHES -- ARE FOCUSED BY THE GARDENER: When the trimming of the gardener is finished, the vine is forced to direct its life-giving sap into the production of grapes rather than territorial expansion. Under good conditions of both sufficient rain and plenty of sunshine, this resulted in heavy grape clusters and abundant grape juice for wine production. ***We go through seasons of being focused by the Lord back on why we are here. These seasons usually follow retreats, they follow car accidents, they follow good messages we hear or read, they follow trips to the hospital, they follow times of Bible study and prayer, they follow the loss of a job, or they follow the death of loved ones or the diagnosis of a serious or even terminal illness. Are you focused yet?***
- WE LIKE BRANCHES -- ARE PRUNED FOR FRUITFULNESS: Major pruning was done in midwinter, when the vine would lose the least amount of its precious sap. This process of cleaning/pruning the vineyard left a bare field with small stumps at the beginning of the spring growing season. ***In our lives it is the***

²² Drawn from Bryant, Beauford H.; Krause, Mark S., The College Press NIV Commentary: John, (Joplin, Missouri: College Press Publishing Company) 1999, c1998

fall and early winter that often sees the most pruning. These are our later years when we have pain, sickness, limitations and the most opportunity for growth in godliness. Are you enjoying God the Fathers work on your life?

- BRANCHES ARE BURNED WHEN THERE IS UNNECESSARY WOOD: Farmers not only snipped off these old branches, but also hauled them away and burned them so the vines could grow unhindered from the mature stump each year. Effective vine dressing required that the farmer continue to prune through the growing season to keep the vine's energy focused on a limited number of grape clusters. Even today the best grapes are produced by developed vines, 12–40 years old, with deep, healthy root systems. ***God has much to burn in our lives. We busy ourselves often with everything but Him! Let your life get lean and focused and fruitful for Him.***

v. 5c "I AM the Vine and you are the branches. **He who abides in Me**, and I in Him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

Abiding speaks of our keeping close to Jesus so that we can bear fruit. To abide never means "to keep yourself saved". Twice in this passage (John 15.4, 9) Jesus **commands** us to abide. We are never commanded to do anything that we are not responsible and able to do. So He does not say "keep yourself saved" or "save yourself" rather He says, "I command you to stay near Me, stay with Me, stay close to Me" much like we say to our children when we want to help and protect them or insure that there is something special they do not miss. Jesus does not want us to miss the benefit and blessing that comes from nearness to Him. Nearness to Jesus is a choice based upon obedience. If you are not close to Him today – He has not moved, you have.

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v. 5 “I AM
the Vine and
you are the
branches. He
who abides
in Me, and I
in Him,
bears much
fruit; for
without Me
you can do
nothing.”
“I AM the
Vine and you
are the
branches. He
who abides
in Me and I
in him **bears
much fruit**”

Constant Attention Needed

Do you remember the explosive power of growth and multiplication that God built into plants? That is why it take so much effort on God’s part to **prune** us constantly. In the agrarian²³ world of the Bible, **pruning** was a crucial process in tending vineyards and produce-bearing trees. Pruning embodies a paradox of life—that growth and productivity require deprivation and stress. If left to grow unattended, a vine or fruit tree will produce lush foliage but little fruit. This passage is a full-fledged development of the analogy between Christ as a vine and His disciples as branches. Drawing in minute ways on actual practices of pruning, Jesus pictures the nature of Christian growth, an important part of which is that God prunes every branch that bears fruit, “that it may bear more fruit” (John 15:2). Far from

²³ Pruning in biblical times was done with pruning hooks (Is 2:4; 18:5). These were small, sickle-shaped knives forged at spearpoint and attached to a short handle. As a tool the pruning hook in the Bible is a physical icon symbolizing prosperity and peace, as suggested by three famous parallel passages that speak of beating swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks (Is 2:4; Joel 3:10; Mic 4:3).

being an image of punishment, pruning signifies nurture, growth and fruitfulness.²⁴

Let me share a few insights from a grape arbor. That is what we called ours at home as I grew up in Michigan. We cultivated grapes for my mother's incredible grape jams, jellies, and juice.

- But we had learned the hard way about the mischievous nature of the rambling, rapid growing grape vines! In every way we are like those vines. Why? **The biggest enemy of the grape is itself. Grapes love to grow and expand their territory.**
- In fact they love to do everything but bear fruit, they must be pruned to do that! We are so much like the grape vine's tendency to grow so vigorously in every direction!
- We, like those vines, have a lot of non-fruitful wood that must be cut away each year. We, like the grapevines, can become so dense in all our external leaf productions (ministry, work, family, athletics, amusements, investments, busyness, stress, anxieties, sins, etc.) that the sun (like the Son of God) cannot reach into the area where fruit should form.
- We, left to ourselves, are just like a grape plant; we will always favor new expansion of our territory over more grapes (fruit for God).
- What is the spiritual result? From a distance our lives look like incredibly green and healthy branches full of luxurious growth, and of impressive achievements. But to the Lord who stands up close, we have an under-whelming harvest of God glorifying eternal fruit!

v. 6 "If
anyone does
not abide in
Me..."

FRUITFULNESS ENCOURAGED IN COLOSSIANS 3.12-17

Colossians 3:12-17 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint

²⁴ Ryken, Leland; Wilhoit, James C.; Longman III, Tremper, Dictionary of Biblical Imagery, (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press) 2000, c1998.

against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. 14 But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. 15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. 17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

I Cor. 3:11-15 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹²Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; ¹³Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. ¹⁴If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. ¹⁵If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

After warning us against the sensual sins, Paul then pointed out the dangers of the social sins (Col. 3:8–9). Dr. G. Campbell Morgan called these “the sins in good standing.” We are so accustomed to anger, critical attitudes, lying, and coarse humor among believers that we are no longer upset or convicted about these sins. We would be shocked to see a church member commit some sensual sin, but we will watch him lose his temper in a business meeting and call it “righteous indignation.”

The picture here is that of a person changing clothes: “Put off... put on” (Col. 3:9–10). This relates to the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Col. 3:1); for when He arose from the dead, Jesus Christ left the graveclothes behind (John 20:1–10). He had entered into a glorious resurrection life and had no need for the graveclothes. Likewise, when Lazarus was raised from the dead, Jesus instructed the people to “loose him, and let him go” (John 11:44).

The graveclothes represent the old life with its sinful deeds. Now that we have new life in Christ, we must walk “in newness of life” by putting off the old deeds and desires (Rom. 6:4). We do this by practicing our position in Christ, by reckoning ourselves to be dead to the old and alive to the new.

Paul began with *anger, wrath, and malice*—sins of bad attitude toward others. The word *anger* is the same as the word *wrath* (Col. 3:6), referring there to the wrath of God. This word describes habitual attitudes, while *wrath* refers to the sudden outburst of anger. God has a right to be angry at sin and to judge it, because He is holy and just. In fact, there is a righteous anger against sin that ought to characterize the saints (Eph. 4:26). But none of us have the right to “play God” and pass final judgment on others by our attitudes. *Malice* is an attitude of ill will toward a person. If we have malice toward a person, we are sad when he is successful, and we rejoice when he has trouble. This is sinful.

Blasphemy describes speech that slanders others and tears them down. Often among Christians this kind of malicious gossip masquerades as a spiritual concern: "I would never tell you what I know about her, except that I know you'll want to pray about it." Evil speaking is caused by malice (1 Peter 2:1). If you have deep-seated ill will toward a person, you will use every opportunity to say something bad about him.

Filthy communication is just that: foul speech, coarse humor, obscene language. For some reason, some Christians think it is manly or contemporary to use this kind of speech. Low humor sometimes creeps into conversations. If someone says, "Now, take this with a grain of salt!" you can remind him of Colossians 4:6: "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt." Salt is a symbol of purity, and grace and purity go together.

The final sin Paul named was *lying* (Col. 3:9). He wrote this same warning to the believers in Ephesus (Eph. 4:25). Satan is the liar (John 8:44), while the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth (John 14:17; 15:26). When a Christian lies, he is cooperating with Satan; when he speaks the truth in love (Eph. 4:15), he is cooperating with the Spirit of God.

A lie is any misrepresentation of the truth, *even if the words are accurate*. The tone of voice, the look on the face, or a gesture of the hand can alter the meaning of a sentence. So can the motive of the heart. If my watch is wrong and I give a friend the wrong time, that is not a lie. Lying involves the intent to deceive for the purpose of personal gain. An old proverb says, "Half a fact is a whole lie."

Bishop Warren A. Candler was preaching about the lies of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), and asked the congregation, "If God still struck people dead for lying, where would I be?" The congregation snickered a bit, but the smiles disappeared when the Bishop shouted, "I'd be right here—*preaching to an empty church!*"²⁵

FRUITFULNESS EXAMINED IN 2ND CORINTHIANS 5.1-10

Romans 14:10-13 But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? **For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.** 11 For it is written: "As I live, says the Lord, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God." 12 **So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.** 13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

²⁵Wiersbe, W. W. 1996, c1989. *The Bible exposition commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. Victor Books: Wheaton, Ill.

1 Corinthians 3:5-17 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. 7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, **but God who gives the increase.** 8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, **and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.** 9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. 10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. **But let each one take heed how he builds on it.** 11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 **each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.** 14 **If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.** 15 **If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.** 16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.

2 Corinthians 5:1-10 For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, 3 if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. 4 For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. 5 Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. 6 So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. 7 For we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. 9 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. 10 **For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.**

FRUITFULNESS ETERNALIZED REVELATION 19.1-8

Revelation 19:7-8 Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." 8

And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Revelation 19:7-8 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) (NIV)

Revelation 19:7-8 "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready."8 And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. (NASB)

1. Casting crowns over and over in the worship scenes
2. Rewards are command based. Commands or imperatives equal responsibility. We are never commanded to do what only God does. We are commanded to do what we are responsible to allow God to do through us. Never does God's Word says "justify yourself, or impute yourself". But over and over God tells us "clothe yourself, flee, be not conformed" and so on.

FOLLOW ME
EXPERIENCE THE LOVING LEADERSHIP OF JESUS

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- An assumption of superiority.
- The need to be more right than anyone else.
- The impulse to prove and promote myself.
- The tendency to take credit for things that were really the ideas or the work of others.
- The ease with which I can hold a grudge over slights that I've been guilty of committing myself.
- My uncanny ability to rationalize, justify, and excuse what I do and say while at the same time, and even over the same issues, being unsympathetic and judgmental with others.
- Leveling behavior; that is, building up myself by tearing others down.

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OTHER STRONGHOLDS

Here are some other strongholds you might want to be wary of:

- I need to stay in control because I'm so shy and sensitive.
- I can't give God complete control because my marriage partner would take advantage of my submission.
- I'm over sexed. God's rules are too restrictive.
- I'm a fearful person. Losing control scares me most of all.
- God understands why I can't surrender.
- Security and comfort have always been big issues with me. I can't risk having God take away my support system.
- My children need my full attention. God can have my life after I get them raised.
- I like to eat. I can understand why the Israelites complained about the manna. I suspect that if I gave my appetite to God, my life would be boring.
- In order to "reach my friends" I have to be with them doing the things they enjoy.
- I'm basically honest. I don't need help with transparency, integrity, and accountability.
- My church or parachurch circle is more right, more blessed, and more spiritually powerful than others. I'm okay because I'm with a superior group.

UNHEALTHY FEAR (CHART)

Diagram 24.1

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| • Fear of Pain | Fear of Abandonment or Rejection |
| • Fear of Death | Fear of Losing Control |
| • Fear of Failure | Fear of the Future |
| • Fear of Shame and Embarrassment | Fear of Strangers |
| • Fear of Loss | Fear of What People Think of You |
| • Fear of Aging | |

HOW DOES GOD DELIVER US FROM FEAR?

Diagram 24.2

- With Greater Fear!
- Fear of God

WHAT IS THE FEAR OF THE LORD?

- This list is distilled from references to the fear of the Lord that appear throughout Psalms.
 1. Reverence and respect for God as the all-powerful Leader of all else.
 2. Certainty of inescapable accountability for behavior to God
 3. Practicing the presence of a Holy God
 4. Humbly following His leadership by obeying His Word.

THE POWER OF UN-SELFED LOVE

Diagram 25.2

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| • Kingdom of Self LOVE | Kingdom of God LOVE |
| <u>REVOLVED AROUND SELF</u> | <u>REVOLVES AROUND THE HIGHEST GOOD OF GOD</u> |
| My Desires | His Desires |
| My Pleasure | His Pleasure |
| My Happiness | His Happiness |
| My Ownership | His Ownership |
| My Control | His Control |
| My Success | His Success |
| My Needs | And the Highest Good of God's Universe |

THE BEAUTY OF KINGDOM COMMUNITY

Diagram 25.3

- Kingdom of **SELF**

RELATIONALLY TOXIC
ENVIRONMENT

Egocentric

Competing
Conflict

Breakdown of Relationships
Alienation

Kingdom of **GOD**

RELATIONALLY HEALTHY
ENVIRONMENT

Christocentric

Serving
Harmony

Building of Relationships
Oneness and Togetherness