

# The Vine and the Branches

By Paul Washer

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Text:** John 15:1-7; Colossians 1:9-10

**Preached on:** Thursday, September 16, 2004

## Grace Community Church

P.O. Box 10608

San Antonio, TX 78210

**Website:** [www.gccsatx.com](http://www.gccsatx.com)

**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/gcc](http://www.sermonaudio.com/gcc)

Let's open up our Bibles to John chapter 15 beginning in verse one.

I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.

Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.<sup>1</sup>

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Father, I come before you in the name of your Son and ask for your help, for your glory, for the benefit of your people. Lord, let the inadequacy be mine and the competence be yours in Jesus' name.*

I usually don't have... I usually almost never preach with notes and that might be my demise here this day, but this is not just a sermon for me. This is a product of struggling, a product of need in my own life.

---

<sup>1</sup> John 15:1-11.

You know, sometimes we look at men who in some shape, form or fashion have been gifted to do certain things and we automatically equate giftedness with spirituality, giftedness with godliness. We couldn't be further from the truth.

In my own personal struggle I know that there have been times in my life when I have stood before people to preach, whether it is has been on street corners or in pulpits and found myself seemingly transformed to give a Word that I had not even thought of and see people miraculously born again and yet to walk out of that same pulpit and be met with the struggles of the Christian life, with failure, sin, immaturity. Do never, never think that someone that God uses is immune from these things. As a matter of fact, sometimes they may deal with these things greatly, very hard for them.

I have sought, I have a tendency towards perfectionism and I have sought all the days of my life so many different ways to try to grow, so many methods, so many things in my quiet times and fastings and prayers and many of those things in their proper place and properly understood are excellent, wonderful tools that God has ordained that they are not the source of growth. They are not the source of change, source of transformation. That is a person and his name is Jesus Christ and I think of the purpose of this sermon. I have selected a passage here, it is in Colossians. I will just read it to you, chapter one verses nine and 10.

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it [the gospel, what has happened to these believers], we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.<sup>2</sup>

My friend, there are just too many things in this passage for me to keep in mind, let alone do. So if I have to go through the New Testament and write out a list of things that I am supposed to do, even if I could do that, if I had the mental ability to do that, the intellectual prowess to do that, where would I find the strength?

I think if a man took all these things seriously and then tried to work them out in a structural methodology he would end in frustration and absolute insanity. I mean, where am I? How is this to be done? How am I to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord? How am I to please him in all respects bearing fruit in every good work? This is not a man sized job. Only God can do this, not some manipulating formula. Only God can do this.

There comes a point in time in our life when God is going to work death into all our ideas and all our five different steps and five different ways and 10 basic truths and four things God wants you to know. He is going to destroy all that and leave us barren except for Christ as our only fountain of strength and hope and life.

---

<sup>2</sup> Colossians 1:9-10.

It says here in... and, again, I don't plan on giving a powerful sermon today and I don't plan on, you know, exciting anybody. And I don't plan on impressing anybody. These are things that in my life when I am on the lawn mower, when I am playing with my kids, these are things that have helped me.

First statement Jesus makes here he says, "I am the true vine."<sup>3</sup>

What does that mean?

I hate to keep referring to brother Lighter, but I have learned a bit from him as well as many of the other men here, but first of all, the thing that he says here needs to be listened to. He doesn't say, "I am like a vine." He doesn't say, "I want to be a vine for you." He doesn't say, "I hope you will take me as a vine." He says, "I am the vine. I am that vine."

But what is the vine? Well, first of all recognize he is it. He is not hoping to be it for you. He is not waiting on the sidelines for you to ask him to come and join you. He says, "I am it. I am this constant vine. This is the reality. This is what I am."

What does it mean? First of all, he is the source of all true spiritual grace, spiritual life, spiritual fruit. He is the source of it all. These glorious and divine things that God asks from you and I cannot be mustered up with human strength. They cannot be drawn from the barren well of our own humanity. They do not come out of dedication. They do not come out of devotion. He is the source, not only a source, he is the source, the only source for anything that is ever going to be God like in you, anything that is ever going to be good, anything that is ever going to be spiritual. It is going to come from him and no one else and nothing else.

We sometimes in our evangelical world we look at the catholicism and the way that it has reduced itself down to ritual and methodology and means of doing things to get grace and all sorts of things. And I want you to know something. I see exactly the same thing in most of our Christian book stores.

You want this from God? Do this. You want to grow this way? These five steps. You want this, that? Then follow these hoops.

The only problem is those hoops will only lead you to frustration. They sell books, but they will only lead you to frustration. He is the source.

You know, I could spend the whole hour and 15 minutes or whatever I have just by repeating one thing. He is the source of all spiritual life and truth. He is the source of all spiritual life and truth.

And I not only say... notice here I am not just saying life, but I am saying life and fruit because unlike what we have been taught many times you cannot have one without the

---

<sup>3</sup> John 15:1.

other. You see, the whole thing of Christian fruit, the whole thing of Christian works, the whole thing of Christian duty, it is all fruit and it is fruit that flows naturally from life. It is life and that life of Jesus Christ produces fruit.

As I have heard some say and I believe there is an element of truth in it, the fruit of the Holy Spirit is Jesus Christ living his life through you. The gifts of the Holy Spirit is Jesus Christ carrying out his ministry through you. It is all about Jesus.

And I know that I risk so much in saying something like that of turning it into a cliché, because it has become a cliché.

You know, especially for those of you who are young. You can make great affirmations in the spiritual faith. Jesus is the only source of life, but you might be 80 years old before you even begin to understand what you said. It means he is essential.

Some words here: he is indispensable, indispensable. He cannot be replaced. He is required for everything. Apart from him, you and I we are nothing and can do nothing. Indispensable. He is not an accessory.

Today in contemporary Christianity people are basically doing evangelism by saying this. “Well, you have got a wonderful house. You have got a wonderful car, you have got a great job and your family seems to be doing ok, but you just miss one thing. You need Jesus in your life.”

My friend, that is pathetic. That is blasphemous. You have no life if you have not Jesus Christ. And all your other things and comforts and everything, demonic, sensual and they are going to bury you in the pit of hell.

What did Paul say? He said, “I don’t know anyone anymore by the flesh. The only thing I want to know: Jesus or no Jesus, Christ or no Christ. That is all that matters, Christ.”

He is essential.

Another thing that this text tells us is that you and I must resist the ridiculous idea that somehow we are the source of our own fruitfulness. Every time.

Now I want to go at this a little bit different. You know, I never heard anyone really stand up and say, “I am the source of my own fruitfulness, but when I hear Christians say things like, “Well, I can’t do that,” they are obviously believing that they are the source of their own fruitfulness and they do not know what Paul meant when he said, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”<sup>4</sup>

You see, what the believer’s idea ought to be... if you truly believe that you cannot produce fruit it is very, very freeing, because then you turn to him who can produce any kind of fruit, all kinds of fruit, abundant fruit, eternal fruit.

---

<sup>4</sup> Philippians 4:13.

In Hosea 14:8, listen to this verse. “O Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like a luxuriant cypress; From Me comes your fruit.”<sup>5</sup>

That is what God said to Ephraim and it is very important because the word “Ephraim,” the name means fruitfulness. He named him fruitfulness, but the problem was this tribe began to think they were the source of their own fruitfulness. And God said, “No. I am the source of all your fruitfulness.”

Another thing that this text teaches us is this. We must resist the pride that may spring forth from fruitfulness.

You know, some progress in the Christian life can also be dangerous. That is why God does not allow us sometimes to experience all the progress that we had hoped for because it would turn and work against us in pride, because we are too immature to really be used to bear such fruit.

Listen to this in 1 Corinthians 4:7. “For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”<sup>6</sup>

He is talking to a very, very gifted Church, manifestations of the Holy Spirit works in all sorts of things and he is saying, “Now, hold on here. You have got this all backwards. You have fallen the way of Ephraim. You have not realized that all your fruit, all your gifts, all your abilities, all your knowledge, all your everything comes from Christ.”

And if it comes from Christ then why do you, how can you boast in anyone, but Christ? Christ alone, he is the true vine.

In another sense he is the true vine because he is the holy and righteous vine whose fruit will always be marked by holiness and righteousness. When someone is bearing the fruit of Jesus Christ you can mark it down, that fruit will always be holy and it will always be righteous.

Let me give you something here in James 3:11 and 12. Here is a question.

Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh.<sup>7</sup>

You see, here is... you have got to understand something. When you and I are the source of what we are doing and the source of the supposed fruit we are bearing. Well, you and

---

<sup>5</sup> Hosea 14:8.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 4:7.

<sup>7</sup> James 3:11-12.

I are not constants. We are not consistent. At one moment we are doing something that appears to have the semblance of light. In another moment we are having the... we are doing something that seems to be shadowed. In another moment we are doing something that seems to be quite dark. You are saying one thing here that seems godly. You are saying another thing that is not. You are acting here in a way that seems to mimic Christ, in another way that mimics the flesh.

If you and I are always just pulling off this Christian life by means of our pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps, if we are doing this Christian life in our power, then what we are going to see is a constant state of inconsistency because we are inconsistent.

But when you are flowing, when the power and the life is coming from Christ, the fruit will not waver. Why? Because that source, that Jesus of ours, he is not a mixed source. He is not off colored. He is not partially contaminated. Whatever flows from him is pure. Whatever flows from him is righteous. That is why brother Lighter made a statement about he had seen Christ in so many way, you know, reflections of Christ, semblances of Christ in godly men and women. And do you know what is amazing, though, to me? And I don't despise my brothers for this. I have seen it in my own self, how you can see a brother who be filled with the Holy Spirit of God and God has his hand on him and maybe in a sermon or maybe in a counseling session or maybe in something going on there in the Church and the brother be moving in the power of the Holy Spirit and it seems like he is just... he is just another person. He gets in the flesh and what do you begin to see? You begin to see this immediate transformation. We are inconsistent and that evermore should encourage us to do what? To abandon all hope in self and to draw upon Christ, to draw upon Christ, to draw upon Christ that we might bear consistent, consistent fruit.

His fruit that he bears in the life of the believer will always be a reflection of his own holiness and righteousness.

Let me give you some verses. In Ephesians 5:9 it says, "The fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth."<sup>8</sup>

Don't you want that? Don't you want that? And not just in the Church, not just in the context of a religious setting. Don't you want that in the place where it is most difficult to have it in the context of your family, in the context of those closest to you?

Philippians 1:11, "Having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ."<sup>9</sup> And why does it come? "To the glory and praise of God."<sup>10</sup> Our fruit is not for ourselves. It is for God.

Galatians 5:22.

---

<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 5:9.

<sup>9</sup> Philippians 1:11.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.<sup>11</sup>

Don't you want to be like that? Well, if you desire to be like that, you must abandon all hope, all hope in self, all hope in secondary means. And you must run, run, run to Jesus Christ, run to Christ.

Now Jesus Christ is also the true vine in contrast to all other vines, all other sources upon which one may draw. And, my dear friend, there are so many sources out there. There are so many things. It is like the world has a trillion outlets in its walls just wanting you to plug into any one of those thinking that you are going to find life, find life, plug into this, try this, do this. In Christianity we have bought into the same thing. Here is this new method, this new system, this new way, this new way, this new teaching. Plug into my wall. And every time you plug in you will pull that plug out in frustration because there is only one source. All other vine are useless. All other sources are useless.

Jeremiah 2:13 says, "For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns That can hold no water."<sup>12</sup>

My dear friend, God will—through his discipline as we are going to see in a moment—work in every one of our lives destroying not only idols, but destroying every false source from which we might attempt to draw. He will frustrate everything until we are focused in on Christ alone, the excellencies of Christ, the finished work of Christ, the continuing work of Christ, Christ, Christ, Christ.

All other vines also lead to barrenness. Jeremiah 17:5-6, "Thus says the LORD, 'Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind And makes flesh his strength.'"<sup>13</sup>

So that doesn't sound like a source or a fountain or a vine, oh my dear friend. I would say of all things that men trust in other than Christ, it is the flesh. And all sources that are offered to you as nothing more than a manifestation of the flesh. It is not Jesus Christ.

And makes flesh his strength, And whose heart turns away from the LORD. For he will be like a bush in the desert And will not see when prosperity comes, But will live in stony wastes in the wilderness, A land of salt without inhabitant.<sup>14</sup>

My dear friends, brother and sister in Christ, I am probably the most appropriate person in this building to give this message because I am so prone to draw strength at times from things that give no strength whatsoever.

---

<sup>11</sup> Galatians 5:22-23.

<sup>12</sup> Jeremiah 2:13.

<sup>13</sup> Jeremiah 17:5.

<sup>14</sup> Jeremiah 17:5-6.

All other vines are corrupt.

Deuteronomy 32:32. Listen to what it says. “For their vine is from the vine of Sodom, And from the fields of Gomorrah; Their grapes are grapes of poison, Their clusters, bitter.”<sup>15</sup>

Every other source of strength outside of Jesus Christ is a bitter source that will bear poison fruit. You take the most self righteous, the most disciplined religious person on the face of the earth and externally their works might appear to be pristine. Their fruit is bitter gall. It is poison. It will lead to damnation and hell. God accepts nothing from our flesh, but only that which is produced from the source of life that flows from his dear Son.

Now he says here in the next verse he says:

I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.<sup>16</sup>

In the ancient world vinedressers were extremely important. How important were they? Even when the nation of Israel was exiled to other nations the pagan king or the pagan governor or commander over the exile would make sure that he would leave vinedressers in Israel to keep the vines because without vinedressers all the vine will be lost.

Here it says in Jeremiah 52:16, “But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left some of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and plowmen.”<sup>17</sup>

Why? Vines are important. Vines are extremely important. Vineyards were important at that time. Vineyards and vines do not grow. They do not produce as they should without the work of a vinedresser.

So many of us so many times fight against a certain work of God without which we will never produce excellent fruit. We have been so led into believing that everything difficult, everything that conflicts, everything that scrapes us and works as a rasp in our life to take away our comfort, that it is from the devil. That is what America has taught us, a comfortable Christianity when what we realize is those who say such things are blaspheming because in the life of God’s people, in his Church, in his vineyard God the Father is the vinedresser and he is the one that is cutting away at us. He is the one that is pruning us. He is the one that is cleaning us. He is.

And even when the devil works—because God does use the devil—no, it is for our good. Absolutely everything is for our good. The problem is many times we do not understand the good. The good isn’t big ministries. The good isn’t fame in the Christian life. The

---

<sup>15</sup> Deuteronomy 32:32.

<sup>16</sup> John 15:1-2.

<sup>17</sup> Jeremiah 52:16.



good isn't that after we die someone will write a book about us. The good isn't that we are respected as the greatest pastor in the world. The good is that we look like Jesus, that we look like Christ.

I am going to say something that is going to sound, very, very vulgar, very horrid, but I am going to say it so that you can grasp the meaning, the being like Jesus is so important in God's eyes in Christianity, that one could rightfully say almost to tell with everything else.

When I... I will never forget one time [?] in Peru, a man from whom I have learned a great deal, very bold man, strong pastor, this young man came out of seminary and walked up to him and had his degree and said, "Pastor [?] I have got my degree. I am qualified to come work for you. How much are you going to pay me?"

He said, "Let me see."

He took his degree and went... ripped the thing totally to shreds and threw it on the ground. "That is what I think of your degree."

And they don't really replace those things. They are originals.

In the same way so many times underneath us are these ulterior motives that are hellish. What is the greatest privilege to be able to preach like Spurgeon? No. To look like Jesus.

When we talk about fruit we are automatically in our American mindset thinking about activity instead of character, character, character, Christ likeness, Christ likeness. Many times the Lord loves you too much to give you the things you are praying for because he wants to give you something better, Christ likeness.

Now if we look at this text he says, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away."<sup>18</sup>

What does he mean?

Well, let me just make this statement. There are men and women, young and old in every congregation who identify with the people of God, but are unbelieving and fruitless and when they die they will go to hell. That is exactly what this passage means. Within those who... within this... let's just look at the Church for a moment as a vineyard. Within this vineyard there are some who they kind of look like branches, they kind of act a bit like branches on a superficial level, but when you really look at them they are fruitless, they are unbelieving, they are not connected to the vine and they will be judged, they will be torn away. They will be judged. They will be cast into hell.

---

<sup>18</sup> John 15:2.

Listen to what Jude says in verse 12. “These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted...”<sup>19</sup>

I have described a great majority of Church membership rolls all throughout his country. And we think that we can somehow cure these men by more discipleship when in fact of the matter is they need the gospel and they need regeneration.

Now look at this for a moment. Let’s just cast our eyes here. They are hidden reefs. They don’t look like problems. They look like kind of everyone else. But underlying that, underneath where you can’t see, but God’s eye can go their dangers lie. They are traditionalists. They are religionists. They have religion, a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof. They might bicker with you on rules. They might be in church every times the doors are open, but they are dangerous because everything they have is superficial, it is common, it is profane.

Also it says they feast with you. They eat right with you. They participate in the supper. They go to the Lord’s Supper. They participate in the feasts that you might have afterwards, all these things and you never recognize them. They are always caring for themselves.

One thing you will notice in an unconverted person, selfishness is the greatest, it is the opposite of love. All they care about is self.

Clouds. Was that clouds? Yes, they are clouds, but it is hard to discern when a cloud has water and when a cloud doesn’t, at least to us. They look like clouds. They look like water bearers. They look like they might have the Holy Spirit when they are guarded. You catch them in an unguarded moment and you will see what they are really like.

They are autumn trees. I can hardly think of anything prettier than an autumn tree, but it bears no fruit. It bears no fruit, doubly dead, uprooted, be torn apart and taken away and cast into the fire.

Look at verse six here in this passage. “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.”<sup>20</sup>

There are so many people, especially in my own denomination, but I mean this just goes so far, every kind of denomination you could mention because of the pathetic theology and pathetic preaching. There are so many people on Church membership roles and they are as lost as they can be because we have forgotten that salvation is not, does not come us by praying and asking Jesus to come into your heart. Salvation does not come by going through four spiritual laws and saying a prayer at the end. Salvation does not come by all these silly little mechanisms we have developed. It comes as a supernatural work of

---

<sup>19</sup> Jude 12.

<sup>20</sup> John 15:6.

God through which God regenerates, makes the heart of life. He gives the man repentance. He gives the man faith. The man repents. He believes and is saved.

And it is a supernatural work of God that manifests as much, if not more of the power of God than when God stood on the first day and said, "Let there be light."<sup>21</sup> Salvation is supernatural everyone who is truly saved is supernatural, is truly supernatural.

Now, this is not an isolated idea in the New Testament. Let me just give you some verses.

Matthew 3:10. "The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."<sup>22</sup> That was the announcement basically of the forerunner of the Messiah.

He says, "Look. Messiah is going to come. Let me give you a forerunner on just exactly what he is going to be telling you. You can be as religious as all get out. You can cross every T, dot every I, but if you are not connected to the vine, if you are not doing this in the power of the Holy Spirit, if you are not truly a child of God you are going to be judged."

He goes on and he says in Matthew 7:19, "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."<sup>23</sup>

Now, let me stop here for a minute and say something. People who do not understand the doctrine of regeneration, you know, the word that is used commonly today is born again. I don't use that word because 99 percent of the people couldn't even give you a biblical definition of what they are saying. They think born again is praying and asking Jesus to come into your heart. They don't realize born again comes from these passages in Jeremiah, these passages in Ezekiel where he says, "I am going to do supernatural open heart surgery. I am going to remove your hostile God hating heart that you were born with. I am going to take it out of your chest and I am going to replace it with one created in the very image of God and you are going to love me because you are going to be like me." It is a supernatural work of God.

Many people will read these passages and say, "Ok, you know, you have got to believe in Jesus, but you have to have works, too, or you are not going to heaven."

They do not understand salvation. We are not saying here that in order to be saved you have got to believe in Jesus and then you have got to add to that works. What we are saying is that if you believe in Jesus it is because God has already done a work of regeneration through which he has completely changed your heart and made you into a new creature created in the image of God in true holiness and righteousness and you have

---

<sup>21</sup> Genesis 1:3.

<sup>22</sup> Matthew 3:10.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew 7:19.

to have good works because just like a sinner has to sin, the righteous has to do righteously.

Now we should remember something that God is able to cut off and burn branches.

Let me read you a passage in Ezekiel 19:12. Speaking of apostate Israel it says, “Its strong branch was torn off So that it withered; The fire consumed it.”<sup>24</sup>

I don’t care how strong your religion is or how strong your church life is. I don’t care how strong your morality is. At the day of judgment God will tear it down, tear it down and it will wilt.

Whenever humans declare themselves to be righteous, they are doing it by contrasting themselves with other humans who are worse. And you can get away with that, but when your righteousness is contrasted with the righteousness of God, there is nothing but to throw yourself down and declare your morality to be dung.

Now, the father judges the fruitless unbeliever, but he also disciplines the believer.

“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.”<sup>25</sup>

Believer, here is really the question. In a type of contemporary Christianity that makes comfort its goal, you are going to have to make a decision. What do you want? Do you want to bear more fruit or do you want to be comfortable and just grow wild?

I can remember one time in Peru prior to having both of my hips replaced and arthritis had eaten my hips to the point of almost not being able to walk anymore, every day was a trial. Every day was a struggle. The pain was incredible. And I walked out on this balcony one morning in Lima, Peru and it was wet and rainy and the humidity was horrible and my legs were hurting so bad and I was tears running down my face and I walked out there, I limped out on the patio and I looked up at God and I said, “Why? I hurt bad.”

No, I did not hear a voice, but I knew exactly what the Lord wanted to say to me. “Paul, dear, dear son, this is exactly what you asked me for.”

And then I remembered all those times in college after my conversion, all the times in seminary when with other believers, you know, we would pray through the night and say, “Oh, Lord, anything you have to do, Lord, to make me like Jesus, do it.”

You know, you... some of you probably are, “Lord, kill me if it is necessary.”

---

<sup>24</sup> Ezekiel 19:12.

<sup>25</sup> John 15:2.

And I think he allows us to pray like that in ignorance because if we really knew what we were asking for we would be too fearful to pray.

The word that he uses here for prune is the Greek word from which we get the English word catharsis which means to cleanse, to cleanse. It doesn't just mean to nip and tuck or shape or mold, but also the idea here. He is moving it into a spiritual realm. It means to cleanse, especially of filth and impurity, that which hinders or spiritual progress.

Do you... is it your greatest passion to produce the character of Jesus Christ? That desire of yours may cost you absolutely everything. It may be the reason God never allows you to go public, become famous. It might be the reason why you never get a mega church. It might be the reason why you never see any apparent success. It might be the reason for physical ailments. It might be the...

Your desire at any cost to bear goodly fruit, to be like Jesus Christ may cost you everything. But everything is worth it, isn't it, if fruit, true spiritual fruit, a reflection of the true character of Jesus Christ is the most important thing in your life, isn't it worth any cost? It should be worth any cost.

Now, this idea is clearly brought forth in Hebrews 12 and we don't have time to go there, but I just want to read one verse from there. "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."<sup>26</sup>

Now let's just look for a moment at the word train, the idea of being trained by discipline. So many people think. They only see one side of discipline when at least there are two sides of discipline. For example, when I was a little boy and I did something bad and my father spanked me that was discipline in a sense. He disciplined me. And that is most people's idea of discipline.

Well, God is disciplining me. Why is he disciplining me? Why is he disciplining me? I am in sin.

No, you might be the most righteous believer on the face of the earth. You might be the most holy, most devoted believer on the face of the earth because discipline is not just for sin. Discipline is also for training in righteousness.

Let me give you an example. When I was a little boy, I wanted to be an athlete. My legs were very weak. My dad was a good athlete when he was a young man so this is what he said. "We are going to feed the cattle and when we get to the end of the very back of the farm you are going to put on ankle weight and you are going to follow the truck all the way home running."

---

<sup>26</sup> Hebrews 12:11.

Now that was discipline. I had not done anything wrong. My father wasn't being cruel. He was simply saying, "If you want to achieve this goal in your life, I know what it is going to take. And if you will submit to my training, Paul, I will get you there."

And I might not have been the greatest basketball player that ever lived, but I was just about the best I could be and it was because of training.

Also something about training you need to realize. Training is not just momentary. These people who are going to run races in the Olympics for a crown that is perishable, most of them, let's say they are 19, 20, 21, 22. Do you know they have been training since they were six and seven years old? Some of them earlier.

We are talking about a lifetime of training, a lifetime of discipline, a lifetime of pruning, a lifetime of cutting, a lifetime of cleansing up until the day we close our eyes in this world.

Do you want that?

Well, I can tell you this. I do, because I have already gone through 22 years of it. And my master's pruning is sweeter than all the delicacies this world can offer me. It is more loving than all the flattery this world can offer me.

Here is the prize. It is not what you think. The prize is conformity to the image of Jesus Christ.

Now, I want to say something here, some thoughts that I have written down. It says, "Discipline does not cause the branch to bear fruit." This is very important. Because we have so many lost church members in America we think that God has got to discipline people in order to produce fruit in their life, in order to make them do something because they really don't want to do it. And that is not the purpose of discipline at all. Discipline does not cause the branch to bear fruit, but rather it prunes and shapes the branch so that it might bear more fruit. The true believer is going to bear fruit. Do you realize that?

If you are a true believer, you are going to bear fruit. You have to bear fruit because you really are a branch and you really are connected to the vine and you can't do anything but bear fruit. But the Father comes by and he prunes you and he disciplines you and he shapes you and he cuts you and he ties you and he does everything he has to do so that you will bear more fruit.

Discipline will not make you bear fruit. You are going to bear fruit. If you are not going to bear fruit you are not a believer.

Let me give you an example. You cannot be a part of the Church. Now, remember, the Church is not made up of saved people and lost people. The true Church of Jesus Christ is not within the confines of this denomination. The true Church is every person who has

truly been regenerated by the Holy Spirit whose nature has been changed. Every true child of God.

Now you cannot be a part of the Church without producing fruit. That ought to frighten us. How many fruitless people go to church on Sunday. You cannot be a part of the Church without producing fruit because in Matthew 21:43 Jesus says, “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people [literally a nation], producing the fruit of it.”<sup>27</sup>

The work of the Father also, something you need to know, must be inward and downward before it can be outward and upward. Let me say that again. The work of the Father must be inward and downward before it can be outward and upward.

In other words, it is going to be a hidden thing before it becomes a seen thing. So much of God’s work—and this ought to be encouraging to you—is a hidden work, a preparing work, a secret work. Down and in, down and in, down and in, eventually it starts to reveal its fruit.

And there is a passage, a beautiful passage in the Scriptures in 2 Kings 19:30 it says, “The surviving remnant of the house of Judah will again take root downward and bear fruit upward.”<sup>28</sup>

And here is this idea again. It is not an organizational idea. It is the idea of an organism, that this organism takes route in some source and being rooted and grounded in that source it produces fruit naturally. This is not a work. This is a life.

It goes on also something very important that will be encouraging to you. The fruitfulness promised to every believer may take a few years to accomplish.

The example of God’s promise to Abraham, Genesis 17:6, “I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you.”<sup>29</sup> That took a long time.

How many of the prophets of old believed the promises and died believing them? The point that we are trying to make here is not that a believer will wait all his life and never produce fruit, but the point we are trying to make is that God’s work in the believer is a mysterious work. There is no little book written of how God is going to work the same way in every believer. He is going to do an inward hidden work, but it will sooner or later manifest itself in abundant fruit and we must be patient, we must wait and we must believe the promises.

Never forget Matthew. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness [why?], for they shall be [filled].”<sup>30</sup> They will be filled.

---

<sup>27</sup> Matthew 21:43.

<sup>28</sup> 2 Kings 19:30.

<sup>29</sup> Genesis 17:6.

It goes on and he says another thing. Fruitfulness seems often to come in seasons. This is also something. I have noticed in my own life that it is not every day there is an abundant harvest coming off of Paul Washer in the same way that in our crops that we have planted on our farm there is not fruit yet.

We see this in Acts 14:17. “And yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons.”<sup>31</sup>

Periods of fruitfulness, periods of rain, periods of plowing, periods of all sorts of different divine works that sooner or later will manifest themselves in fruit and they must manifest themselves in fruit because God never does a work that fails.

Also, in periods of apparent fruitlessness we must trust the Lord. That is another very... especially for some of you young fellows in college or you are going to seminary and you are just wondering when... you know, I want to do something.

Well, be very careful of that language you are using. I don't want to do anything anymore. I want to be something. I want to be like Jesus.

If I get my ontology right everything else is going to fall in place. Don't concentrate so much on doing something. Concentrate on being something. There are apparent fruitlessness seasons of fruitlessness in our lives.

In Habakkuk 3:17 through 18 it says:

Though the fig tree should not blossom  
And there be no fruit on the vines,  
Though the yield of the olive should fail  
And the fields produce no food,  
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold  
And there be no cattle in the stalls,  
yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.<sup>32</sup>

Also in Philippians 1:6, “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”<sup>33</sup>

You know, one of the greatest problems in Christianity today and one of the greatest problems in Christian ministry or ministers today is that we no longer believe there is a need for a hidden season.

Jesus, 30 years for three years of ministry.

John the Baptist at least 30 years for what? Six months of ministry.

---

<sup>30</sup> Matthew 5:6.

<sup>31</sup> Acts 14:17.

<sup>32</sup> Habakkuk 3:17-18.

<sup>33</sup> Philippians 1:6.



Moses, 80 years of hiddenness to bear this great overwhelming fruit of God, redemption of the people of Israel.

Now we just want to jump out there, don't we? We want to do something instead of waiting to be something.

I can think of times where God has hidden me in his fold. And I want to tell you something. Being up in a pulpit doing things like that where everyone can see is not necessarily the sign that God's hand is upon you and that he is going to use you, but when God calls you into that hidden place to be alone with him, my friend, that is the time, that is the time. When he isolates you from everyone else, he doesn't let anyone touch you, he doesn't let you walk down those kind of roads, he doesn't let you turn the grace of God into a circus, he doesn't let you play all those games, he doesn't let you go to America's six flags over Jesus and ride the rides. He hides you away. That is the sign his hand is upon you, the secret work.

Now, this is not just for ministers. Some of you have struggled in the darkness. Some of you have sat up at night, some of you have thought through your salvation, you have wrestled with sin, you have gone through spiritual battles. No one has known about you. You see inconsistencies, impurities in your life you have had to deal with. My friend, that is a mark. That is a mark of God's hand upon you, a mark of God's hand.

Go on. The goal of discipline. What is the goal of God's discipline? You know, there I have heard of fathers who just love disciplining their children for just the perverted desire to see them quenched, to see them cast down, to see them destroyed. Why does our Father discipline us? So that we might bear more fruit.

In Matthew chapter 13 verse 23, "And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty."<sup>34</sup>

My friend, that is abundance. That is... You do not want to bear as much fruit as God want to bear through you. We somehow think that this is just a statement that just keeps going through my mind over and over. Somehow we think we want more of this spiritual life than God wants to give. And that is completely the opposite. If anything, the greatest sin of the Church is not believing about this great fountain that rushes forth from that rock.

I want us to go on. He says, verse three, "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you."<sup>35</sup>

There is a real sense, which both this needs to be seen and something done, something being done. There is a real sense in which the believer is clean through the Word that is

---

<sup>34</sup> Matthew 13:23.

<sup>35</sup> John 15:3.

spoken to that believer that they believe. They are clean. That is what brother Mac talked about when he said positional sanctification. They are clean.

But there is another real sense in which God continues to do a work, continues to do a work of sanctification in your life. We have got to begin to realize once again that in salvation I was saved, I am being saved and I will be saved. That this is a continuous work. Salvation is not some flu shot when you knock on someone's door and you say, "Sir, can I tell you about Jesus?"

And they say, "I have already done that."

And you say, "Sir, I am not talking about flu shot. I am talking about Jesus."

"Well, I have already repented."

"Well, sir, if you are not repenting now, you didn't repent then."

"Well, I already believe."

"Sir, if that was a one time thing for you, you are lost."

You repent and you continue repenting. You believe and you continue believing. God has cleaned you. He continues to clean you. One day you will be clean.

And I want to tell you something that I don't think is spoken of enough because some people would take it for pride, but I am going to say it. In some aspect it is true in my life. There was a time, young men, listen to me very carefully. There was a time when I knew I needed to turn my eyes away from certain things because I knew it wasn't pleasurable to God. Know that. It is what some of you do. You see something, you are attracted to it, you turn your eyes away because you know God is not pleased with it.

I want you to know there will come a time in your life when you are not pleased with it either. That is not being spoken of enough.

Do you think that all our life we are just going to have to walk through life saying, "Well, you know, I would like to look at that, but I can't."

No. God is going to do an inner work in your life and gradually more and more you are going to come to the point where you hate the things God hates and you love the things God loves more and more and more.

It is really going to happen. It is really going to happen. And it is going to continue on happening until the day you go on into glory.

Now, in verses four and five—and this is my main part—he says:

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.<sup>36</sup>

Now, there are certain passages that when I was in college I grew up hearing ministers say, for example, if you don't understand Romans six, you can't live the Christian life.

So I would go up to the man and say, "Will you explain to me Romans six because I don't understand it?"

And they would come off with some cliché little answer and I would understand it.

Well, they don't understand it either.

I heard a minister one time he kept saying, "You have got to walk in step with the Holy Spirit. You have got to walk..." He preached an hour adamant, ferociously, "You have got to walk in the Spirit, live in the Spirit."

Afterwards, wasn't being facetious, wasn't wanting to start a fight or anything. I just went up and said, "Sir, I loved your sermon. I agree wholeheartedly with what you are saying. Sir, I don't know what that means. Could you tell me?"

He could not tell me.

We are always hearing about abide, abide. We have got to abide. We have got to abide.

Ok, I agree with you. What does it mean? How does a branch abide in a vine? Look what we are doing here.

"Abide in me," verse four. "Abide in Me, and I in you."<sup>37</sup>

How does a branch abide in a vine? Well, when we look through this text we hear references to prayer. We have references to the Word of God. We have references to keeping the commands and people kind of just pull those out and say, "Well, you abide in Christ if you keep the commands, if you pray, if you have got the Word in you."

But that is not really what he is saying. Those are more products of abiding than anything else. And so when we look, it is very interesting that Christ does not tell us in so many words how to abide in the vine. He really doesn't. I mean it looks like once he gave this great command abide in me because apart from abiding in me you can't do anything that he would go on and say, "Ok, this is what..." But he doesn't.

So what does it mean?

---

<sup>36</sup> John 15:4-5.

<sup>37</sup> John 15:4.

Well, first of all, I don't think he has to tell us what it means because he has already so clearly illustrated it. He says, "I am the vine. You are the branch."

Now, you want to know how you are supposed to abide in Christ? How does a branch abide in a vine? And there you are going to get your answer.

I just want to read some things to you. It is interesting that Christ does not tell us how to abide in him. It may be because abiding is not some activity that we do, but a reality that we recognize and live in.

A branch does not do anything to become a branch. Have you ever thought about that? A branch does not do anything to become a branch and to be stuck to a tree. A branch does not do anything to become a branch. We do not see little pieces of wood or twigs wandering around the forest looking for a vine to which they can attach themselves.

Once connected we do not hear them struggling and groaning to hold on. And we do not see any of these branches going to a seminar on how to hold on to your vine which is everything we see in Christianity today.

Let me say this. A branch does not grow into a vine, into the vine. It doesn't grow and attach itself onto the vine. The branch grows out of the vine and it is totally and completely a work of the vine itself. It is not something the branch does. It is the life flowing out of the vine, this superabundant overflowing life of Christ that knows no end flowing out of himself the vine and creating branches. Now that's different, that is really different.

A branch does not grow into the vine, but the branch goes out of the vine. It is a creation and a product of the vine from the very beginning. It does not do something to become a branch, but it simply is a branch. And we are branches. We are creations of the vine growing out of the vine in utter dependence upon the vine with one sole purpose, to be what we are, not to become something we are not, to be what we are, a fruit bearing branch. We are to recognize this reality and live in it. We are to recognize the utter absurdity of seeking some sort of independence from the very source of our existence and purpose.

To abide in the vine is to recognize this tremendous, supernatural work of God that has been done in you and just stay there in it, to live in the reality that you have become united with Christ, you are a new creature flowing out of him and flowing out of him is this ever flowing never ending nourishment called the Holy Spirit, the divine sap of God.

It is not doing something. It is recognizing what God has done. God has made you a part of his Son, the true vine and he is flowing his power through that vine to you a branch. You have one purpose, the fruit that flows from the life that I will give you. Don't try to be a brilliant teacher. Don't try to be a superhero. Don't try to go over here and get some hobby that takes over your life and consumes.

I didn't make you for this or that. I didn't make you for the world. I didn't make you to impress them. I didn't make you to do the things that they do or to bear the fruit that they bear. I didn't make you for any of that, Paul. I made you to bear the fruit that is within the context of my will for you to bring me pleasure.

One of the greatest truths I ever heard I heard from brother Morrow. I don't even know if you remember this, but it has... my holistic view of God was tremendously changed by this. God does everything for his own glory. Is that not true? All right? Why would God plant the most beautiful rose that he ever created? Why would he plant it in a wilderness that no one will ever pass through? I mean, would he do that? No one will ever see it. How will he be glorified by it? How will...

I will tell you how and why. He did it for him. He did it because when he looks down at it he will say, "I like this."

I want to tell you something and this will help you. I have not mastered this truth. Don't think I have. But this truth has been a great comfort to me. I want to be that rose out in the middle of that wilderness. That is the ambition.

One day, dear friends, when the kingdom of God comes in the fullness of its power and the Son of man comes with all the holy angels, we are going to just be literally shocked by one major thing that is going to happen. All these hidden little unknown believers that were not movers and shakers, that were not famous, that were not... they were over here just like locked away in a closet shut up to God, they are going to come forth shining like the sun.

Right now my little boy alls he needs is dad. I mean, he is oblivious literally to like little buddies and friends and everything else. It is dad. Dad, let's go do this. Dad, go... everything he does he looks up, dad.

"Do you see this, Dad? Look what I did, Dad."

There will come a day—and it is a natural course of life—where he will want to show other people stuff. Now that is a natural course of life. There is no reason to be depressed about it or anything. But, see, in the spiritual realm that is never supposed to happen. It is always supposed to be, "Look at me, Dad. I am bearing fruit, Dad, fruit you have given me, Dad. And it doesn't matter, Dad, that I am out here in the middle of a desert where no one on the face of the earth can even see me because the only thing that matters to me is you are pleased."

Now I want to do a comparison between Romans six and John 15. Just for a moment I want you just to listen.

All this stuff. I ran in the house when I was mowing the yard because I had been thinking about this for days and while I was on the lawn mower it just seemed to... ideas started coming out of everywhere. I had to write them all down.

In Romans 6:6, now just... Paul says that we have died. We have really died, ok? The old man has really died. And we really are a new creation. It is not a metaphor. It is a spiritual reality. And I keep using the word really, really. We have really died. Whether you believe it or not, we have really died and really become a new creature. And Romans six is more about regeneration than any other doctrine in the Bible. It is about, in regeneration, that old man dying and that new man taking his place. You have really died. If you are a true believer that old sinful depraved nature is dead and has been replaced. And if that hasn't happened, you are lost. You really did die and you were really made into a new creature. It is not just a metaphor. It is not just some heavenly hope. It is a presently reality in the life of every believer.

In Romans 6:11 Paul tells us that we are to live in that reality. We are to live in the reality, not that by believing it will make it happen. No, it has already happened. Your old man has died. You have a new nature.

Now, after settling that, saying this is a spiritual reality. He says, "All right, live in this. Believe it. Live according to what God has really done."

Now in John 15:1-11 Jesus says that he really is the vine and we really are branches. We really are new creations that have grown out of him. All our life flows from him and by nature of what we are, by nature of what we are we have one purpose, to bear fruit and glorify the Father.

To live in any other way, in any way that contradicts or conflicts with this spiritual reality is to live in a fantasy world. It is ridiculous and will always end in absolute frustration.

It is ridiculous. I love to make hunting bows. I am making a big tall English long bow right now and it shoots arrows very clean. Terrible guitar, can't play a song on this thing. You can shoot an arrow with it, but you can't play a song on it. Why? It wasn't made to play songs. It was made to shoot arrows. You have been recreated. You have been remade. And this is not a cliché. I am not just talking like some flowery preacher. This is a reality. You have become a new creature and that new creature was not made for sin. It was not made for the fruit of unrighteousness. It would be absolutely a perversion to take this new creature and try to make it do something like that. You are a new creature made to produce righteous fruit.

Again, I want to say something to you. This has been a great help to me. This has been a great help to me.

The other day—I want to give you an example—I turned. My wife was talking to me. I turned. I said something I shouldn't have said to her. I mean, it was just a small thing, but it was something I should not have said. It was a tiny thing, the voice just a little bit

altered in the wrong way. I mean, it wasn't a violent crime, it was just... and I stopped and I said... I stood there based upon this truth I stood there and I said, "This is not me." That answer I just gave, that look on my face, that is not me. This is not the new creation. I am not like this and I am stopping it right now.

And I turned around and I said, "Charo, this is not me. I am a new creature, created in the image of God in true righteousness and holiness. I am to be patient and kind and loving and forgiving. Forgive me, because I have acted in a way that is... it conflicts with who I really am. I will not give in to this because this is not who I am anymore."

I want to tell you something. It was like... it wasn't quite as dramatic, maybe, as a brother Mac Gandolf back there when he told, "You shall not pass." But I want to tell you something. It got the job done.

Let's pray.

*I thank you for these truths that have helped me, have helped me. And I pray, Lord, that they will help your people in Jesus' name. Amen.*