

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Vine and the Branches

Scripture: John 15:1-3

Code: 1551

This morning we come in our study to the fifteenth chapter of John and what is really one of the most important chapters in all of the Bible and at the same time a very difficult chapter because of some interpretive problems. And as we go into the fifteenth chapter, we do so with a great deal of excitement, at least I do. It's been a long time coming, I've waited a long time to get at the fifteenth chapter of John. And for the last three or four weeks, I guess, I've been studying this chapter and it's just really become a part of me, I believe that it's going to be one of the most exciting chapters we've ever studied together. I am just really thrilled about what the Spirit of God has taught me in this chapter and what affect it's had on my own personal Christian life and I believe that God can really move in mighty ways through the truths of this particular chapter.

Now this morning we're going to look just at the first three verses and even considering as brief a passage as that are going to find it difficult to get it all together because there is so much in this particular passage. This is really a classic chapter. It is one of the most rich and meaningful and at the same time difficult in all of the Bible, and yet it is one that we cannot bypass. Many people do. Many people slip right by it without making much acknowledgment at all, just a few passing comments. But it's something that really needs to be studied in depth and we're going to endeavor to do that. It is another one of those great "I am" passages of John. We've talked about many of those, "I am the light of the world, and I am the bread of life, and I am the way, and I am the door," and all of those that we've talked about and now we come to, "I am the vine." And again we see those words "I am" having reference to the name of God and again referring to the deity of Jesus Christ.

Now this particular set of verses that we're going to be dealing with, and by that I'm considering really through the seventeenth verse but particularly for this morning, just the first three. These verses are just bursting with meat for our understanding and we're going to have to be really diligent students of the Word of God to get all that the Spirit of God would have for us here. I believe in these verses going all the way through verse 17 there is the basis of Christian living, perhaps this is the outstanding passage in the whole New Testament on living the Christian life. And you might think that that would be in the epistles, but the principles here are elucidated in the epistles, but the basics are right here. The concept, for example, of abiding in Christ is here. The concept of what it means to bear fruit as a believer is here. And these are the basics of the Christian life, to abide in Christ and to bear fruit. The epistles then become definitive about what's involved in both of those concepts.

But today we're going to just begin with the basic interpretation of the various features of this analogy. It's about a vine. Jesus talks about a vine. Naturally involved in it are the branches and the one who cares for the vine, the husbandman or the vine dresser. But the key to the passage is the discussion of the branches themselves and we want to see this in detail this morning, who the branches really are.

Now there are two groups of branches in the passage, I'm going to give you a little introduction and then kind of explain it. There are branches that bear fruit. Notice in verse 2 at the end it talks about branches that bear fruit, also in verse 8 it talks about branches that bear fruit. There are also branches that do not bear fruit and those are referred to in verse 2, the beginning of the verse, and also in verse 6 is a further reference to the branches that don't bear fruit.

Now the question that comes up here is this. The branches that bear fruit are obviously Christians. The branches that do not bear fruit become then the problem branches, who are they? Are the branches who do not bear fruit Christians or are they non-Christians? The problem then becomes the branches that do not bear fruit are thrown into the fire and burned. If they're Christians then what does that mean? That Christians can actually perish? Or does it mean that Christians are punished and chastised for a lack of fruit bearing? Does it mean you can lose your salvation if you don't bear fruit? Or does it mean God will punish you if you don't bear fruit? Or as one commentator said, "The idea of taking away and burning simply means to lift you up to new heights of spiritual endeavor." I don't know where he ever got that out of that, but nevertheless spent two pages on it.

Now I want us to really know clearly from what the Word of God says who these branches are. And I think it's just as clear as the Spirit of God intended it to be if we only examine it faithfully connecting it with the rest of the Word of God. And I know that by the time we're done this morning, you will know what I believe is the solution to this problem and I trust you'll see the light on it in terms of the revelation of God as we take it in total.

Now this is the night again before the death of Jesus and in this time, you know, He is speaking with His disciples. I examined the context of this passage over and over again to try and determine what would be the thoughts of Jesus. Why does He seemingly jump into this analogy? What causes Him to do it? What's in His mind as He gives it? And I believe the thoughts of Jesus on that night, as I've analyzed this carefully, involved what was going on surrounding that little group of people that He was with. There was a drama going on that night. He had eleven men sitting there with Him. He was aware of those eleven men. He spent that whole fourteenth chapter comforting them, didn't He? He was aware of the Father because He knew that He was going to be isolated, separated from God the Father when He died on the next day. There was one other man that He was aware of and that was Judas because He had dismissed Judas from the fellowship of that group and told him to go and do what he was going to do and He knew in His mind that Judas was out planning and plotting his betrayal. And I believe in the mind of Jesus He was bringing into focus all the characters in the final

night's drama. I believe He saw in His mind's eye the eleven whom He deeply and passionately loved and who loved Him in return. And I believe He saw the Father whom He also loved with an infinite love and He loved Him in return. And then I believe He saw Judas whom He also loved with that same infinite love, but who did not love Him. Wherein this final little upper room drama, these are the characters that are revolving in the scene.

Thus when we come to the fifteenth chapter, our key to the chapter is to determine what He is referring to here likely has reference to these same characters in this same drama. And therefore I submit that the vine is Christ, the husbandman is the Father, the branches that bear fruit would be those eleven disciples who are legitimate and any like them who shall live throughout all the church age and that the branches who do not bear fruit are Judas branches who never were real to begin with.

Now if we compare, for example, the thirteenth chapter and verse 10, we must give you these introductory thoughts, chapter 13 verse 10, "Jesus said to him, 'He that is washed needeth not except to wash his feet.'" In other words, once you've been saved, once you've been cleaned, you just need a little foot washing periodically. In other words, once you've received Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, you don't have to get saved all over, you don't need another bath, you just need a little dusting off every day. And that's the continuing forgiveness of God.

But then He says in verse 10, at the very end, "And ye are clean." Now He says "ye" and He's referring to His disciples. Then He qualifies it by saying, "But not all of you," verse 11, "for He knew who should betray Him, therefore said ye are not all clean."

Now Jesus is well aware of this distinction among His own disciples, that they are clean but not all of them for there is one who is unclean. Jesus then has in His mind the obvious contrast between Judas and the eleven. And I believe that is the contrast that is carried into the fifteenth chapter. That lingering concept, that lingering knowledge that Judas is out betraying Him at the very moment is obviously upon the mind of the Son of God. And I believe the branches fall into just those categories which we'll elucidate as we look at the passage in a moment.

Both groups had contact with Jesus. The eleven were with Him. Judas was with Him. They were with Him for the same amount of time. Apparently everything looked all right. Judas was highly honored by being given the responsibility of maintaining the purse. But Judas, although apparently in the vine, was a branch that never bore fruit and God finally removed that branch and that branch was burned and still is burning in hell.

Some people would come along and say, "Well, you see, that means that Judas lost his salvation and that if you don't bear fruit, you lost your salvation." John 10:28 says this, "And I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand." The Word of God

is absolutely clear about the area of security. In John 6:6 Jesus said, "All that the Father gives to Me shall come to Me." He said, "I have lost none of them." And so we realize that He cannot be talking about a true believer who stops bearing fruit and loses his salvation and is condemned to hell, but rather He is talking about a Judas branch who apparently is in the vine, who from the standpoint of superficial connection belongs, but it never was real, there never was any vine blood being pumped into that branch and never any fruit bearing. Judas had a relationship with Jesus superficial, but nevertheless he had a relationship. But he left it. He willingly walked away from that relationship. And what was willing on his part became judicial on the part of God. And so it seems to me natural that this is in the mind of Christ, that in the end of the talk with His beloved eleven, He would draw together all the relationships within that little band. Now remember, He's in the upper room talking with them and speaking of branches that do not bear fruit, that are taken away and burned, He is referring to men like Judas. Men who live even today who stand in close connection with Jesus Christ but are apostates and are doomed to an eternal hell. Men, women who attend the church, who maybe go through some religious motions, who maybe have in their own minds some sort of connection with Jesus Christ, but to be sure are not legitimate. And again it seems natural to me that the branches that do bear fruit are those eleven disciples and all like them who truly abide in Christ and show it in the fruit they bear.

This is also a contrast repeatedly given in the gospel of John. And we could do a little study on that some time. Do it for yourself. Find out how many times in the gospel of John Jesus contrasts the true and the false disciple. He does it all over the place and this is just in the same pattern.

All right, then let's look at the text with that as kind of an introduction and we'll expand on the same thoughts. And I want us to see these three verses and the identity of these characters again...the vine, the vine dresser, another word for husbandman, and the vine branches. Notice, first of all, the vine in verse 1. Jesus says to the eleven, "I am the true vine." And we'll stop right there.

Now that statement has so much in it that to begin with, it's extremely frustrating to try to condense it. I am the true vine. This morning you heard Phil read from the Psalms, a Psalm that portrayed Israel as God's vine. And in the Old Testament indeed Israel was God's vine. But you also heard him read the plea of Israel that they be restored for they were a...as Ezekiel calls them...an empty vine. They were a degenerate vine. Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel all talk about Israel as a degenerate vine. And that same Psalm said there would be a new vine, the Son of Man. And indeed Jesus comes along and says, "I am the true vine." Formerly God's life was poured through Israel. Formerly connection with Israel brought the blessing of God, but that's all done with. Israel has forfeited its right to be the vine, I am the true vine.

Now it's interesting that He chooses a figure of a vine. He does it for several reasons. I believe that He desires to show many things by calling Himself a vine...lowliness, He speaks of His humility, a vine planted in the ground, and certainly Christ came in the form of a man planted in the earth. I

believe the figure of a vine shows union, the vine and the branches, there's no more intimate union than that, totally dependent are the branches upon the vine. It shows dependence. I believe the illustration is a classic illustration for showing fruit bearing, how that the branch bears fruit but not of itself. You don't see branches running around bearing fruit. They've got to be connected to a vine. And we'll talk more about that.

But I think the vine is the perfect illustration of many relationships. It's a great illustration of belonging, for example, nothing belongs more than a branch to a vine. For all of its resources, it's totally dependent.

And so, Jesus chooses the figure of a vine. And then He says, "I am the true vine." Now as I said, Israel was God's vine in the Old Testament. That is, through Israel God operated. God was the husbandman still, Israel was the vine. He dressed Israel. Cared for Israel. Pruned Israel. Worked with Israel. Cut off the branches of Israel that were not fruit bearing and cast them aside. And blessing came by being attached to God's covenant people, Israel. Of course faith played a great part in it, obviously. That's what brought salvation. But just being a Jew brought great blessing. And so, God's vine in the Old Testament was Israel.

Now let me show you a passage, Isaiah chapter 5, just the first seven verses, that helps to illustrate this. Isaiah 5, "Now will I sing to My well beloved this song of My beloved touching His vineyard." God's vineyard is Israel. "My well beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill and He dug it," this is God planting His vineyard Israel. "And He dug it and gathered out the stones and planted it with the choicest vine and built a tower in the midst of it and also made a winepress in it and He looked for it to bring forth grapes and it brought forth wild grapes."

Verse 3, "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and me of Judah, judge I pray you between Me and My vineyard. What could have been done more to My vineyard that I have not done to it?" God says...What more could I have done to plant Israel in a fruitful hill to give Israel every opportunity to bear fruits? But instead of bringing grapes, they brought wild grapes, they grew their own.

Verse 4, "When I looked for it to bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes. And now I tell you what I will do to My vineyard, I will take away its hedge, it shall be eaten up and break down its wall...leave it unprotected...and it shall be trampled down." That's exactly what happened in all the captivities of Israel. "I will lay it waste. It shall not be pruned, nor digged, but there shall come up briars and thorns. I will also command the clouds that they rain or rain upon it for the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel."

Now, you see, in that passage Isaiah portrays Israel as God's vine. Israel forfeiting its right to exist by failure to bear fruit. It's interesting that the vine had even become the symbol of Israel. On the coins that were printed during the Maccabean period which is the period between the Old and the New

Testaments, the vine was the symbol on the coin. Herod's temple during the time of Christ had on it a tremendous vine overlaid with gold that some have estimated was worth twelve million dollars. Israel had always been God's vine. But Israel had become an empty vine and now there was a new vine. It wasn't through the covenant relation to Israel anymore that a man receive blessing, it wasn't through being connected with God's promises to Israel anymore, but the new vine was whom? Jesus Christ. And now for a man to know life, for a man to know fruit in his life, he would have to be connected to Jesus Christ. He was the true vine.

Now the word "true" is very interesting and carries several meanings. Alethinos can mean a lot of things. I believe here its great emphasis is on the fact that it means true in the sense of eternal, heavenly or divine. Now that's a meaning for the word true that's very common in Scripture. There was a picture of a vine in the Old Testament Israel, Christ is the reality of a vine. He is the true vine. He is the perfect one as distinct from the imperfect. He is the real as distinct from the type. Israel was a type of God's working and blessing. Christ was the reality.

There's a verse that comes to mind, Hebrews chapter 8 verse 2, that fits here. I'll read it to you. It says, "A minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man." And there you have, just as I said, that same contrast and the word "true" is used in that context. It is the Lord that has planted Christ as the perfect vine. Now all that could possibly be symbolized in a vine comes to fulfillment in Christ. Perhaps this is what Paul's thinking of in Colossians 2:7 when he says that we are rooted and built up in Him. Perhaps he there is seeing Christ as the vine.

And so, Christ is the true vine. He is the true vine in the sense, for example, that He was the true light. Remember in John 1:9 it talks about Christ is the true light. There have been a lot of times that God's revealed His light before, but Christ is the perfect revelation of light. All that could be conceived in the spiritual concept of spiritual light is conceived in Christ. He is spiritually the highest quality, the highest essence of light in distinction from human or earthy light, in distinction from physical light, in distinction from believers who are light of the world, Christ is all that could possibly be conceived of as light in a spiritual sense.

Then also He is the true bread. Remember that statement in John 6? Same word, alethinos, He is the true bread. In other words, there have been many ways that God has sustained men. There have been many kinds of bread, manna, bread from heaven. But Christ is the perfect perfection of sustenance of which everything else is but a type. Do you see what I'm saying? And so there have been many ways in which God has poured His energies into people. There have been vines before, but Christ is all that that concept could imagine rolled into one perfect vine. And Israel was but a type of the perfect vine, Jesus Christ. And so all that the metaphor of a vine could possibly claim of spiritual value is true of Jesus Christ and fulfilled in Him.

Notice also this, we're still at that same little phrase, "I am the true vine." Just to lay the emphasis a little bit on the fact that Christ is the true vine, emphasizing the "I am" end of it, or the Christ end of it. It's amazing how many Christians and so-called Christians have other vines in their life from which they seek their resources. Now I became very analytical in my own life to try and determine what the vines were in my life. They're not really vines, but I've made them vines. How many things do we really attempt to attach ourselves to for our life? Some people think their vine is their bank account. Other people think their vine is their education. Some people think their vine is their sex drive. Other people think their vine is popularity, fame, personal skill, connections, possessions, persons, relationships. Some people think the church is their vine. They think they're attached to a system of religion. Other people have thrown the church over and their vine is a small little me. The vine is whom? Jesus Christ. The vine is not the church. You don't need to attach yourself to the church, that wouldn't be a vine/branch relationship, that would be a leech or a parasite relationship. You must grow out of Christ as a natural branch and so your vine is Christ, not some small Bible-study group, not the church as we know it, not your bank account, not your personal skills or your relationships or any other thing. Jesus Christ is all your sustenance for living, He's everything. That's another sermon.

Israel then was the vine of the Old Testament. Christ is the alethinos vine, the perfect fulfillment of a vine. And it's kind of interesting as you study the Old Testament and you study Israel as the vine and you see that every time it talks about Israel as the vine, it always talks about Israel as a degenerate vine. The vine in the Old Testament is never spoken of apart from a degenerate vine. But the marvelous thing to contrast with that is Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today and...what?...forever. That's the kind of vine I want to get attached to, how about you?

All right, so for the vine, now let's look at the vine dresser. "I am the true vine and My Father is the husbandman, or the vine dresser." Now Christ pictures Himself as a plant, but He pictures the Father as a person. Now some theologians just go really off the deep end, they say, "Oh we have a terrible problem here. That proves that Christ is not deity because if Christ were deity the Father would be the roots of the vine, do you see what I'm saying? So He's connected with Christ. The fact that the Father is a detached person and Christ is only a vine shows the inequality and the lesser character and essence of Christ." And I say that's absolute idiocy. The point of the analogy is not to teach the union of the Father and the Son, it is to teach the care of the Father for the Son and the branches. And you have to assume that in a parable, you want to know what is He trying to teach? Obviously He is not trying to teach the union of the Father and the Son. He's taught that prior in many, many ways in the gospel of John. Here He is emphasizing the care of the Father toward the Son and toward those who are of the Son, the branches. And so He sees the Son as a vine and the Father as the one who cares for the vine and the branches. It's a beautiful relationship. It's the Father's care for His own Son and those who are His Son's by faith.

And so, the emphasis here is not an attempt to present the union of the deity of Christ, but to present the care of the Father for Christ and the branches. Christ has already carefully presented the deity of

Christ and His equality repeatedly. So you have to take it in context.

All right, now notice, we have the word "husbandman," or "vine dresser." Now this is the one who cared for the vine and this is a farmer, is what he was, who maintained the vine. Now I absolutely know nothing about farming, vines, or any other thing like that except what I read. And so I've had to do a lot of studying to find out about how vines operate. But a vine dresser really had two specific duties, apart from preparation of the ground and the planting of the vine and so forth and so on. In direct reference to the vine, he had two things that he was responsible to do. He was responsible to cut off the branches that bore no fruit because they tended to sap the energy from the fruit bearing branches and needed to be removed so more fruit would grow on the other branches so the energy wouldn't be dissipated to the branch that didn't have capacity to bear fruit.

The second thing the vine dresser did was constantly prune the branches that did bear fruit, cutting off little shoots and things so none of their energy was dissipated that they might concentrate...be able to concentrate on bearing more fruit. You notice that at the end of verse 2, don't you? He purges it that it might bear...what?...more fruit. And further on down you'll find out in verse 8 that he wants it not only to bear more fruit but much fruit.

So the idea was then that the one who cared for the vine chopped off and threw away the branches that bore no fruit. And incidently, vine branches are good for nothing, they can't even be burned for fire so they're just...they can't even warm the house, they're just thrown away and consumed, they don't even burn well enough to be usable. They were thrown away. Get rid of them because they're sucking energy that the other branches need. Then he was to prune the branches that they might bear more fruit, those that had already bore fruit.

Now we're going to get into it a little bit. You'll notice the work of the Father outlined in verse 2. The Father is the vine dresser. "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit," here's the first thing the Father does, "He...what?...taketh away." That's the first ministry of the Father to the branches is a ministry of punishment. The Father removes the branch that bears no fruit. He removes it. He doesn't...it doesn't say He fixes it up, it says He cuts it off. In verse 6 it says, "And after that, is thrown into a pile, men gather them and burn them." And we'll talk about that later. These are dealt with with finality. This is a verb that is final, they are cut off and that's it.

Now if this refers to a Christian, we've got real problems and we'll see that in a moment. I believe what happens here is every person who professes a relationship to Jesus Christ who apparently is in the vine, who apparently is a follower, a Judas type, but who has never been saved, and it's obvious he's never been saved because he never bears fruit. That's a dead giveaway. He is cut off at a certain point in the Father's timing for the life and health of the vine and the other branches and he is cast aside. That is the first duty of the Father. So-called Christians who aren't really saved and it's obvious they aren't because they never bear fruit are cast away.

The second work of the Father is also in verse 2. Notice further on down it says, "And every branch that beareth fruit," here comes His second work, "He...what?...purgeth it." The Father has two ministries to the branches, take the ones away that don't bear fruit, purge the ones that do. Now the true Christian is in view here, that's obvious to everybody. Every branch that bears fruit. That has to be the true believer.

Now notice that isn't it interesting that the Father has some work to do on Christians also and it's not a final work here either, it's a continuing work. It's a continuing purging. Now the word purge means to cleanse, or it means to prune. And I'll tell you how that works in a little bit. But the idea of this is that when the Father purges or prunes a branch that bears fruit, He does it that the branch might bear more fruit and eventually much fruit. So then we have the two duties of the Father...take away the branches that bear no fruit and purge the others.

Now, let's look at the third point, the vine branches and this will be really the key. And as I said, there are two types of branches. Now the branches on the vine grow very luxuriantly. They grow rapidly. And they must be tended to carefully. Drastic pruning is necessary. A careful vine dresser who is really going to have a fruitful vine must cut off and remove those fruitless branches for the sake of the health of the vine and the product, the fruit. He must also carefully prune away all the shoots and all the other things that gather on the fruit-bearing vine that tend to sap its strength.

Now when a vine was planted and this still may be true, it was true in those days, when a vine was planted for three years it was never allowed to bear fruit. It was always pruned back each year drastically cut back so that it might develop strength and energy then by the fourth year it was ready to bear fruit. It was full and rich and just loaded with fruit bearing capacity. It had been cut back, pruned, shaved off so that when it was time to bear fruit, its energies were concentrated. A mature vine was normally pruned in December or January. The fruitful branches were trimmed back ready to bear fruit.

Now Jesus said His followers are like that. They're like branches who bear fruit, who need to be pruned. Some of them are like branches that don't bear fruit and ultimately will be completely eliminated and cast into the fire. Let's look at these two branches.

First of all, the professing branch. "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taken away." Now I believe this could not be a Christian for several reasons. Number one, I believe it can't be a Christian because I believe that fruit is in every Christian's life. You say, "You mean that every Christian bears fruit?" Absolutely every Christian bears fruit. Some Christians you've got to look a long time to find a couple of lingering grapes somewhere, but you'll find them somewhere. The very essence of new life in Christ is that it is productive. Now fruit means many things and again that's yet future in our concern, but every believer bears fruit. Ephesians 2:10, I want to substantiate that with some

passages. Ephesians 2:10, and this is really, I think, going to be helpful to us, it says this, "For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto...what?...good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

In other words, the fruit of salvation is good works. For example, you have it also in James and I'm not going to read the entire indication of it, but just highlight it. James 2 talks about it in several ways. Verse 17, for example, "Even so faith if it hath not works is...what?...dead." In other words, it's not even legitimate. Every legitimate saving faith is productive even if it's only in a minimal sense. And he goes on to talk about it, verse 22, "Faith...see thou how faith wrought with his works and by works which faith made perfect." And that doesn't mean you're saved by works, that means the evidence of your salvation is works. And so we see that every believer, every truly saved individual does bear fruit.

Now I want to show you some other passages because I do believe this is very important. In Matthew chapter 7 we read some very important words of our Lord. Verse 16, "Ye shall know them by their...what?...fruits." Now that becomes then a definitive way in which an individual can know that somebody else is a believer. There can't be a believer with no fruit because that's how you tell a Christian. You shall know them by their fruits. "Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles?" Now watch this, "Even so, every good tree bringeth forth good fruit." How many good trees bring forth good fruit? How many? Every...every...every, there is no such thing as a believer who doesn't bring forth some good fruit. Verse 20, He repeats it again, "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."

Chapter 12 and verse 33 of Matthew, "Either make the tree good and its fruit good or else make the tree corrupt and its fruit corrupt for the tree is known by its fruit." Chapter 3 of Matthew, and I'm staying in Matthew cause I want you to see that it's repeated three times in the same book. Matthew 3:7, "But when He saw many Pharisees and Sadducees come to His baptism, He said unto them, 'O generation of vipers, or snakes, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore...watch this...fruits fitting repentance.'" In other words, fruits that are connected with salvation. You see, salvation and fruits go together, that's how you tell if somebody is saved. Romans 6:20, "For when you were the servants of sin, you were free from righteousness, what fruit had you then in those things which you are now ashamed?" You weren't saved, what fruit did you have? Well the implied answer is...what?...none. And if you did have any, it was the fruit of sin. But verse 22. "Now being made free from sin and become servants of God, ye have your fruit unto holiness and the end is everlasting life." Every believer has everlasting life and every believer bears fruit. That's what He says, no such thing as a Christian who doesn't bear fruit.

Then when we go back to John 15, if we meet some people that don't bear fruit, are they Christians? Can't be, no way. They cannot be believers. You say, "Well there's several things about that that bother me." Well that's good, I'm going to deal with that. The thing that bothered me the most were two words at the beginning of verse 2, you see them there? Every branch...what are the next two

words?...in Me. That bothered me, didn't it? Did it bother you? The fact that it's so...you know, that phrase "in Me," it sounds like they're really in, doesn't it? Talk about being in Christ, sounds good. Does it mean salvation? I don't think so. I don't think it has to mean salvation. Let me give you several quick illustrations, running out of time.

Chapter 9 of Romans, just write it down, verses 6 to 8, don't look it up, I'll just comment on it. Says, "All...watch this one...Israel is not...what?...Israel." Did you get that? You can be in Israel and not be the real thing, right? Let me give you another thought. Let me read this one to you, Luke 8:18 says this, "Take heed therefore whom ye hear...how you hear, for whosoever hath to him shall be given, and whosoever hath not...watch this...from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have." Did you hear that? It's an appearance.

Now you remember in Romans 11, here's another one for you, Romans 11:16 to 24, remember there how Israel is seen as an olive tree? Do you realize that some of those branches that were in the olive tree weren't saved? Romans 11 says that God broke off some of the branches and threw them away. You see, it's possible in an analogy to be connected to something and you can't always push that analogy the total route. When we see "in Me" in John 15, the reference is to an apparent connection with Christ, just as in Romans 11 the branches in the olive tree that really didn't abide in the tree and really didn't get their life from the tree were thrown away, and that's no problem, it's obvious there, it tells us what happened, it tells us who it was, unbelievers. By unbelief they were broken off and thrown away. And so in the branches in the vine you have the same analogy and you might even read 1 John 2:19 where it so clearly says they went out from us because they were not of us that it might be made known that they weren't of us.

Now this is a serious, serious message. An individual can live apparently connected to Jesus Christ but in fact really not connected at all. And Paul just warns about that and I warn you, dear friend today, if you are religious or if you come to church or you have a superficial allegiance to Jesus Christ, listen to what Paul said, 2 Corinthians 13:5, listen carefully. "Examine yourselves whether you are in the faith, prove yourselves. Know ye not yourselves how Jesus Christ is in you unless you are discredited." In other words, you better check your life to be sure your salvation is real. It's a stern warning, my friend, because the branches that don't bear fruit He takes away and casts them into fire and that's a picture of hell. And the men that gather them, we'll talk about who those men are in weeks to come. Preparation for judgment, the men who gather them cast them into hell.

And so, what is Jesus talking about here? He's talking about two kinds of branches. He's talking about the branches that are true disciples and He's talking about Judas branches, the ones that hang around Him the ones that make a kind of a facade of faith, the ones that look like they believe, the ones that superficially are attached but they're Judas branches and when it comes down to the acid test, they're gone. And when they willfully show that kind of character, the Father removes them and they never are able to come back.

May I add this note? The people who say that this refers to Christians who lose their salvation put themselves in a very difficult position because if you'll notice, once the branch is removed, it's burned. That would say that if you ever lost your salvation, you could never get it back again. That's like Hebrews 6, people say to me all the time, "Well Hebrews 6 means you can lose your salvation." Well if it does, my friend, it also says it's impossible to get it back again. And if you believe that you can lose your salvation, then you'll only lose it once, according to every passage that talks about it. But if you study the passage carefully, you'll see that all of those have to do with apostates who superficially and apparently attach themselves to Christ but who are never real to begin with. And so we meet the first branches, the professing branches.

Look at the possessing branches, real quick. At the end of the verse we meet them. "Every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it may bring forth more fruit." Now that's not some of the branches get purged, that's what? Everyone. Whom the Lord loves, He...what?...chastens. "Every branch gets purged in order that it might bring forth more fruit." If you can just look at your problems like that, isn't that something fresh? Just say, "Boy, Lord, is this a great problem because just think when it's over, more fruit." See. Terrific. I mean, you could actually begin to pray for trouble. I haven't started doing that, but you could. But the idea is that the Father purges the branch so that it will bring forth more fruit. Terrific.

Now the idea of the word "purging" comes from a Greek word *kathairo* which means to clean. And it was used in farming for many things. It was used in...it's only in one other place in the Bible but outside the Bible it was used in the Greek language for cleansing corn, when corn waste was separated from it. It was used for cleansing the soil of weeds before planting a crop. Philo said, using this word, this quote, "As superfluous shoots grow on plants which are a great injury to the genuine shoots, and which the vine dresser cleanses," and he used *kathairo*, "and prunes," and so forth and so on. So he talked about this word in reference to purging or pruning the branches of the shoots that drained away its life

Now when you went to prune a branch, it could be done in many ways. There was a process called pinching by which an individual would take his thumb and finger and remove just the growing tip of the vigorous end of an unwanted shoot. And by just removing that end, it wouldn't grow so rapidly and it wouldn't be broken off in its weakness by the wind. Then another way was by topping, and this was to remove a foot or two feet of a rather large branch and that prevented its loss in the wind or its dissipation of strength as it became too large, or too long. Then another process was thinning and this would be removing flower clusters, or grape clusters from the branch. There were process by which they clipped off little shoots and cut them so the branch was clean, so that nothing was lost.

And certainly in the case of our spiritual pruning which the Father does to all of us, it's the process of removing all the things...now watch this one...that would hinder our fruit bearing. Do you see? The

Father wants us to operate on a maximum fruit-bearing capacity. And in order for us to operate on a maximum fruit-bearing capacity, He's got to whack off things periodically, sins and hindrances and little things that attach themselves to us, sucker growths and all the other diseases and pests that might get on to us as branches the Father needs to remove.

Now one of the best ways, if not THE best is by suffering or trouble or problems. This is a very effective way to clean out the life as it is, of course, to prune the branch. It must be done with a knife. And even in your life as the Father prunes, sometimes the knife is painful, isn't it? Sometimes it hurts. Sometimes we wonder whether God really knows what He's doing because it hurts so much. We wonder sometimes whether we're in such bad shape that we need so much pruning and the branch on the next spot on the vine never gets pruned. But the Father knows what He's doing. And the valuable lessons of suffering are what awaken us to what is not necessary on our life, what needs to be removed. Now the Father may cause us this pruning in many ways. It may be sickness, may be hardship, may be the loss of material goods, it may be slander, it may be persecution, it may be the loss of loved ones, it may be particular grief in relationships, it may be agony over other people, it may be war...all these things are talked about in the Bible as troubles that beset the believer. It may be a lot of things that the Father uses, God ordained troubles to prune off the sucker roots...shoots and all the little things that get on our lives that drain away our energy and rob us of fruit-bearing capacity.

But I'll tell you something, isn't it wonderful to know that the Father cares that we bear a lot of fruit? You know, have you ever felt like this? Sometimes you get the idea that God's up there sort of with a big whip saying, "Bear fruit...see...bear fruit or I'll get you." But that's not it. The Father is down here with His clippers helping us to bear fruit, you see? He's not...we're not on display trying to operate to please the Father all by Himself, He's down there clipping off the shoots, cleaning off the branch so we can bear fruit. Aren't you glad that God's involved in your life in your fruit bearing? Sure it's trouble but trouble wakens us to our needs. Do you look at your trouble like that, or do you fall into great lapses of self-pity...fearful, complaining or brooding? Or perhaps you feel like God is...you know, He's got good things in mind, He's just...really doesn't know how to go about it, you've had enough. Or it's just, "Why, God? Why me?...idea. But if you have in mind that what God has in mind is more fruit and much fruit, then the pruning process can be joy because you look past the clipping and you see what's going to happen. Oh, it's a fabulous thing to realize what the Father wants to do in our lives...cause us to bear more fruit and much fruit.

I want to read you just one verse, Hebrews...one passage, Hebrews 12:4, just a couple of verses here. Verse 7, "If you endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons for what son is he whom the father chaseneth not?" Then look at verse 10, "For they verily for a few days, that is human fathers, chasten us after their own pleasure, but He for our profit that we might be partakers of...what?...His holiness." We are purged in order that we might partake of His holiness and fruit bearing.

Now the pruning knife hurts a little bit, but oh is it worth it. A vine dresser uses a knife, and I'm going to close with this aspect. He uses a knife. What is the Father's knife? Have you ever thought about that? I've thought about it. What is the Father's knife? You say it's suffering. I don't think so. I think the knife is the Word of God. Watch verse 3, "Now ye are clean through...what?...the Word which I have spoken unto you," purged is the same idea, clean again. Cleansed, purged, pruned. You are purged through the Word which I've spoken unto you. The Word of God is the knife. The affliction or the trouble is only the handle of the knife. That's just where God gets the grip. The knife is the Word of God. Have you ever noticed how much more sensitive you are to the Word of God when you're in trouble? Have you ever noticed how all of a sudden you're reading the Bible and you've got a particular trouble, you've got a particular anxiety and you hit a verse that deals with that and it just leaps off the page? The Spirit of God applies it to your heart. You see, in those adversities the Word of God comes alive, it does the surgery but the trouble makes it obvious to you, it opens the opportunity. Oh there are many ways to express that and explain it but I think you understand. A trial puts pressure on us. It helps us to develop spiritual muscles. But the Word is the knife, it's the two-edged sword that does the cutting.

Spurgeon said this, "It is the Word that prunes the Christian. It is the truth that purges him. The Scripture made living and powerful by the Holy Spirit cleanses the Christian. Affliction is the handle of the knife. Affliction is the grindstone that sharpens the Word. Affliction is the dresser that removes our soft garments and lays bare the diseased flesh so the surgeon's knife may get at it. Affliction merely makes us ready for the surgery of the Word of God. But the true pruner is the Word in the hands of the great vine dresser."

So we're clean through the Word. Notice He says to those disciples who are the true branches, "You have been cleaned through the Word." Their initial salvation came through the Word and their continual purging, pruning is done by the Word of God. When you're in affliction you think more on the Word, you see it applied to you, you feel its force in your life and He uses the Word to cut away the problem.

So we begin. We meet the vine, the vine dresser and the vine branches. We say, "What lessons are here for me?" Or there are many...there are many. Are you aware of the Father's purpose in your pruning? Do you know what's going on in your life when you have trouble? Do you know what its purpose is? To bear more fruit. Are you a fruit-bearing branch? Are you a real believer? Or are you just hanging on and in great danger of hell because some day the Father will remove you, you're not real? Do you know your only source of life is the true vine, Jesus Christ? May God bless these truths to us, this morning.

Father, we thank You. We just thank You because You've taught us from Your Word. Now may we apply these truths in Jesus' name. Amen.

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