

## The Branch-Life of the Believer

### Lesson 6: THE CLEANSING

*Every Branch That Beareth Fruit, He Cleanseth It, That It May Bear More Fruit-John 15:2*

#### I. Introduction

- a. The grape vine unlike many fruit-bearing trees quickly develops wild wood that **hinders** its own fruit production, and therefore needs the most radical pruning.
- b. One may have a grape vine rooting so deep in good soil that it needs neither digging, nor fertilization, nor watering. However, pruning **cannot** be dispensed with, if the vine is to bear good fruit.
- c. Some trees need occasional pruning; others bear perfect fruit without any: the grapevine **must have it**.
- d. And so our Lord tells us, here at the very outset of the parable that the one work the Father does to the branch that bears fruit is: *He cleanseth it, that it may bear **more fruit**.*

#### II. The Nature of the Pruning Activity

- a. Consider for a moment what this pruning or cleansing is. It is not the removal of weeds or thorns, nor is it anything from **without** that may hinder the growth of the vine.
- b. No; it is the cutting off of the long shoots of the previous year, the removal of something that comes from within, that has been produced by the **life** of the vine itself.
- c. It is the removal of something that **proves** the vigor of its life; the more vigorous the growth has been, the greater the need for the pruning.
- d. It is the honest, **healthy** wood of the vine that has to be cut away. And why? Because it would consume too much of the sap to fill all the long shoots of last year's growth.
- e. The sap of the coming growing season must be saved up and used for the health and production of the **new** fruit alone.
- f. The branches, sometimes eight and ten feet long, are cut down close to the stem, and **nothing** is left but just one or two inches of wood, enough to bear the grapes.
- g. It is when everything that is not **needful** for fruit-bearing has been relentlessly cut down, and there remains as little of the branches as possible, that full, rich fruit may be expected.

#### III. Pruning in the Life of the Believer

- a. What a solemn, precious lesson this is relating to the Branch-Life of the Believer! It is not to **sin** only that the cleansing of the Husbandman here refers.
- b. Let's consider one area specifically requiring this pruning. Our own religious **activity**, which is developed during the very act of bearing fruit. This is one thing that must be cut down and cleansed away.
- c. The religious activity to which I am referring includes all our patterns of **worship**; our religious practices, habits and rituals by which we grow comfortable, predictable and routine. Jer 7:21-24 *"This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Go ahead, add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat the meat yourselves!"<sup>22</sup> For when I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not just give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices,<sup>23</sup> but I gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you.<sup>24</sup> But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts. NIV*
- d. While the very practices which we have developed to draw near to God and in which we have demonstrated our devotion, have served us reliably in the past, we must not **cling** to them and expect the same results in the future from them.
- e. Here is why. Our relationship with Christ is not **static**; the sanctifying work of the Spirit within us is never quiescent. We are ever being drawn into a deeper and fuller experience of our life in Christ.
- f. If the performance of our mere outward religious activity would suffice in bringing us into that life bearing relationship with Christ then we could have continued with the ritual worship of ancient Israel. It did not suffice for them and it will not **suffice for us**.
- g. Another contributory factor in working out our relationship with God is that we inevitably use our **natural** gifts of wisdom, logic and reason, or zeal. These things work for us and yet they require pruning.
- h. In using our natural gifts we often think that we have discovered some magic **formula** by the use of which we may access the throne of God.
- i. As these natural gifts develop in our pursuit of God we are ever in danger of being unduly developed in our use of them and we begin to think of them as "**the way** we access the throne of God; this is the way I worship".
- j. This is so because we become comfortable and we know how to do these things. It is then that these practices become **trusted**. God is no longer our source of supply, what we know and what we do becomes our source of supply.
- k. This is a subtle form of **self-sufficiency** that the Husbandman recognizes in us and is quick to prune away.

## The Branch-Life of the Believer

### Lesson 6: THE CLEANSING

*Every Branch That Beareth Fruit, He Cleanseth It, That It May Bear More Fruit-John 15:2*

- l. And so, after each season of work, God has to bring us to the end of **ourselves**; bring us back to the consciousness of our helplessness and back to the realization of the danger of all that is of the natural man.
- m. As a branch, abiding in the Vine means that we must acknowledge our inadequacy to produce the fruit that God desires of us. We must ever be reminded of the words of Jesus, “*without me you can do nothing.*”
- n. After pruning, all that is to be left of us is just enough to receive the power of the life-giving sap of the Holy Spirit. What is **of man** must be reduced to its very lowest measure.
- o. All that is inconsistent with the most entire devotion to Christ's service must be removed. As branches, we must be to be free from any hint of the **flesh** in our fruit bearing. Jude 23 *hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.*
  1. The Greek word used for **SPOTTED** refers to the contamination of a garment that once it comes into contact with a contagious skin disorder can not be cleaned, it must be burned, it is defiled.
  2. In a spiritual sense any product of the flesh (the natural man) is thus **defiled**, therefore, anything that would be offered to God which emanates from the flesh is defiled and must be pruned away.
- p. The more perfect the cleansing and cutting away of all that is of **self**, the less surface area over which the Holy Spirit is to be spread.
- q. This is the true circumcision of the **heart** which is the circumcision of Christ. Col 2:9-11 *For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. <sup>10</sup> And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: <sup>11</sup> In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: KJV*
- r. This is also the true crucifixion with Christ and the bearing about the dying of the Lord Jesus **in the body.** Gal 2:20 *I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. KJV*

#### IV. Application

- a. The problem that we face is that once we have lapsed into any measure of self-sufficiency, in any aspect of our spiritual life, we grow so comfortable with it that we resist letting go of it.
- b. Spiritual pruning forces one to let go of the known for something that is unknown. The natural man abhors this letting go but the spiritual man comprehends that by it he is growing into a real abiding relationship with Christ.
- c. The task of the branch is to be ever vigilant for ways in which the flesh has crept into his worship of God and to confess those eruptions to the Husbandman.
- d. To what extent are you aware of your own predictable religious activity shaping your spiritual relationship with Christ?
- e. Are you on autopilot in your Christian life? Are you content and self-sufficient? What needs pruning to enable you to produce MORE FRUIT?

#### Prayer:

Blessed cleansing, God's own cleansing! How we may rejoice in the assurance that we shall bring forth more fruit. O our holy Husbandman, cleanse and cut away all that there is in us that would make a fair show, or could become a source of self-confidence and glorying. Lord, keep us very low, that no flesh may glory in Thy presence. We do trust Thee to do Thy work.