

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

I Am the True Vine

Scripture: John 15:1–6

Code: 43-79

The Bible is the authority, the only authority, the only book that God wrote. It contains 66 books – 39 books in the Old Testament, which is the revelation of God before Christ; 27 books in the New Testament, the revelation of God since the coming of Christ, together makes up the 66 books of the Bible.

In the Bible, God speaks. It is His Word. When we come together, we don't come together to hear men speak, we come to hear God speak. The responsibility then of the pastor and the preacher is to take the message from God and bring it to the people. I've always seen myself, not as a chef, but as a waiter. My responsibility is not to create the meal, but try to get it to the table without messing it up. And that is the responsibility which I try to discharge, as we all do whenever we open Scripture.

So as we come to the 15th chapter of John, like anywhere else in the Bible, we are listening to God. The writer is the apostle John. But the writer is also God, the Holy Spirit who inspired every word that John wrote. Because of this, the Bible is without error, it is accurate, and it is authoritative. When the Bible speaks, God speaks. And when God speaks, we listen, because God says to us what we must know.

The Bible should dominate every life and all of human society, for in it is contained all necessary truth for life in time and eternity. And when a nation or a person rejects the Bible, they have rejected God, and the consequences are dire, dire. Those who listen to God through His Word are given life and blessing, now and forever.

And so we come to the 15th chapter of John. Just to set the stage a little bit, starting in chapter 13 and running through chapter 16, we find ourselves on Thursday night of Passion Week, the last week of our Lord's ministry. Thursday night was an important night. He gathered with the 12 disciples to celebrate the Passover on that Thursday night when the Galilean Jews would celebrate it.

They met together in a kind of secret place that we call upper room, and our Lord spent that night telling them many wonderful things, giving them many, many promises. As that night moved on, our Lord exposed Judas as the traitor, and dismissed him. And Judas left to go meet the leaders of Israel to arrange for the arrest and subsequent crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. By the time we come to chapter 15, Judas is gone, and only the 11 are left, and they are true disciples.

But as we come to chapter 15, they're no longer in the upper room. It is deep into the dark of night. But chapter 14 ends with Jesus saying this: "Get up; let us go from here." Apparently at that time, they left the upper room, Jesus and the 11, and they began their walk through Jerusalem, headed out the east side of the city to a garden where our Lord would pray in prayer so agonizing that He sweat as it were great drops of blood. And while He was praying, they would fall asleep. And into that garden later would come Judas, and the Roman soldiers, and the Jewish leaders to arrest Him. And there, Judas would kiss him; the betrayal would take place; and the next day, He would be

crucified.

As they leave the upper room and walk through the darkness of Jerusalem, our Lord continues to speak to them, and what He says to them is recorded in chapters 15 and 16. Of all these things that He says, nothing is more definitive than the first eight verses of chapter 15. Our Lord here give not really a parable – although I guess in the broadest sense could be considered a parable because it is an illustration. It's really a word picture, a metaphor, a simile.

Listen to what He says, I'm going to read verses 1-8: "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."

Now it should be pretty obvious from that final sentence what the point of this analogy is. This is about a vine and branches and fruit-bearing that proves someone to be a true disciple. This then is about the nature of genuine salvation. This is about the nature of genuine salvation. This is a concern to our Lord, a concern to all the Bible writers, and a concern to all faithful Christians, and has been through history. How does one know that one is a true disciple? How does one know that one is genuinely headed to heaven? How does one know that he or she will escape hell? How do we know?

Nothing is more important than this. Nothing is more important than salvation. Nothing is more important than eternal life. Nothing is more important than heaven. How do you know? In this word picture, we have everything we need to know.

But before we look at the nature of salvation, just a reminder: there is also, in the verses that I read you, statements that point to the nature of Christ. Before we get to the nature of salvation, the essential reality of salvation, we have to acknowledge the nature of Christ, the essential reality of Christ.

The divine nature of the Lord Jesus Christ is here declared in verse 1: "I am the true vine," He says. And in verse 5 again: "I am the vine." How is this a claim to deity? Because of the verb "I am."

Back in Exodus, chapter 3, when Moses came before God in the wilderness and asked His name, God said, "My name is I Am That I Am." The tetragrammaton: the eternally existent one; the one of everlasting being; the always is, and always was, and always will be one. Theologians call it the aseity of God, the eternal being of God. He is the I Am.

Throughout His preaching, teaching, healing, discipling ministry, Jesus continually declared that He is God, He is God. He said things like, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working."

In a context of discussion about the Sabbath, He reminds them that, “The Sabbath doesn’t apply to God because God is at work all the time; and the Sabbath doesn’t really apply to Me either because I, like God, am at work all the time.” They were infuriated that He would make such a claim. That was in chapter 5 of John’s gospel.

Later in chapter 8 Jesus said, “If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing. It is My Father who glorifies Me of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’ And therefore if God, who is your God, glorifies Me as God, you ought to also glorify Me.” And again they were offended at such perceived blasphemy.

In chapter 10, He even said it more concisely: “I and the Father are one, one in nature and essence.” In that same chapter, chapter 10 and verse 38, He said, “Though you do not believe Me, believe the works that you may know that the Father is in Me and I in the Father.”

All through His life and ministry, He claimed that He is God. Every time Jesus said, “My Father,” which He said many, many times – every time He said, “My Father,” He was underscoring that He had the same nature as God. And His Jewish audience did not miss the claim. They were not at all confused.

In fact, in chapter 5, verse 18, this is what we read: “For this cause, therefore, the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but was also calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.” They understood that that is exactly what He was doing, exactly. And one of the ways that He did that was by taking to Himself the name of God “I Am” and applying it to Himself.

There’s a series of those claims throughout the gospel of John. He says, “I am the Bread of Life. I am the Living Bread that came down from heaven. I am the Light of the World. I am the Door, I am the Shepherd, the Good Shepherd. I am the Resurrection and the Life. I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” And then He makes the stunning, inescapable claim, chapter 8, verse 58, “Before Abraham was born, I am eternally existing.”

Jesus is none other than the great I Am, the eternal God in human flesh. Is that important to believe? Listen to this, John 8:24, “Unless you believe that I am, you will die in your sins.”

Can I say that another way? If you don’t believe in the deity of the Lord Jesus, you’ll go to hell, that simple. No matter how religious you are, how moral you are, how well your intentions might measure up with the best of humanity: if you do not believe that Jesus is God, you will go to hell. If you believe He is a created being of any kind, no matter how noble or how elevated, you will go to hell. You will die in your sins, which means you will die without forgiveness. The penalty is eternal punishment.

The Jews understood exactly what He was saying. It’s a shocking, shocking, devastating assault on Jewish theology. Their theology had deviated from Scripture, the Old Testament. But it was a well-developed system. And Jesus attacked that theology. He attacked their understanding of God, He attacked their understanding of the law, He attacked their understanding of righteousness, He attacked their perspective on works and faith and grace, He attacked all of the elements of their theology. And then if that isn’t bad enough, that caused them to hate Him. Then He claims to be

God, which they see is the ultimate blasphemy, and that becomes the reason they want Him dead.

So here He is on the final night with His disciples, and He reveals another powerful declaration of His divine nature and says, "I am the true vine, I am the vine." Having looked at that, I want to take you to the most important part of the passage, and that is the nature of salvation, the nature of salvation. I don't think this is clearly understood by many people, but there's no excuse, given these simple words.

The drama that unfolds in this analogy is simple: there is a vine, there is a vinedresser, and there are two kinds of branches – branches that bear fruit and pruned to bear more fruit; branches that don't bear fruit, cut off, dried, burned – that simple. As you well know, our Lord could say profound things in the most simple ways; and that's exactly what you have here.

We know that the first two characters, Jesus said, "I am the vine – " verse 1, and He said " – My Father is the farmer, the vinedresser. So we know the vine is Christ, and the farmer who planted the vine and cares for the vine is the Father. But the question here is, "Who are the branches? Who are the branches?"

There are branches attached to Him. They're all attached. All the branches are attached. But the ones that don't bear fruit are cut off, dried, and burned. So who are they? Let me remind you of the context. This all begins back in chapter 13 in the upper room, and it's pretty clear that there are two types of disciples in that upper room.

Jesus is there, verse 1, very aware that His hour of death is coming. And it says, "He loved His own who were in the world, and He loved them to the max. He loved His own who were in the world, and He loved them to the max, to the eternal limits of His capacity to love." However, there was somebody else there, verse 2. One of those disciples attached to Jesus, Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, it says in verse 2, "The Devil had already put it into his heart to betray Him."

I don't really think there's a lot of mystery about the two branches. What did Jesus have in His mind that night? They had just left the upper room. The drama that took place there over Judas, the exposure of Judas, the disciples, when Jesus said, "One of you will betray Me," they said, "Is it I? Is it I? Is it I?" which is to say they had no idea it was Judas.

There was nothing manifestly obvious in the life and character and behavior of Judas that would have distinguished him as a false disciple. He was visibly attached, and for all intents and purposes, looked like everybody else, did what everybody else did. But, clearly, there were two kinds of people in that room that night. There were those who bore fruit and there was that one who did not. There were those who remained abiding in, remaining in, attached to the vine; and there was that one who's cut off.

I've had some discussions with people around the world about this passage, and folks have said to me, "Well, this is proof that you can be in Christ, you can be attached to Christ, and you can lose your salvation." The Bible does not teach that, and the words of our Lord Jesus, in the gospel of John, are very explicit: "My sheep hear My voice – " using another metaphor " – and I know them and they follow Me. And I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father who has given them to Me is greater than all, and no one is able to

snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one. Together, we hold those who belong to our flock."

In John 6, Jesus said, "All that the Father gives to Me will come to Me and I'll lose none of them." This is not talking about believers, fruit-bearing branches that all of a sudden are cut off and thrown into hell. This is talking about people who are attached, but there's no life because there's no fruit.

Judas had that very night just a few hours before walked away from Jesus terminally, finally. He is what the Bible would call an apostate, an ultimate defector. He had been for three years close, so close that people didn't even know there was no life. Judas now was on his way to the leaders of Israel to set up the deal to arrest Jesus to get his 30 pieces of silver, and to go from there to hang himself, and catapult into hell.

This is the reality of that night, and this has to be what's behind our Lord's thinking and speaking here. He needs to explain to these men Judas. Wouldn't it seem natural to you that in this intimate talk with the beloved 11 that are still with Him, that they're all still trying to process Judas. He was high profile. He was the one who carried the money, trusted. They were trying to figure out just, "How did it happen? Who is he? How does he fit? What's going on?" and our Lord gives us an explanation.

He says, "There are branches that have an outward appearance of attachment, but bear no fruit. They're taken away and they're burned." And He has to be thinking of Judas. Judas, who was in close connection to Him, has left on his way to eternal hell. And, in fact, the Bible says he went to his own place. It says it would have been better for him if he'd never been born, Mark 14.

So our Lord helps us to understand the elements of the parable. He is the vine, the Father is the vinedresser; the branches that bear fruit are the true disciples; the branch that bears no fruit, cut off and burned, is a false disciple. That's the way we understand His words.

There are, in the kingdom of God, possessors of life and professors: "Not everyone that says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into My kingdom," Jesus said in the *Sermon on the Mount*. There are people who build a religious house, but they built it on sand, and rather do not build it on rock. So Jesus really has gathered all the figures in the final night's drama and formed them into a strong analogy full of meaning.

As we look at this metaphor, many truths unfold for us to consider, and we have to take time to deal with them to some degree. But I think you can now see what the simple understanding is – and we'll fill that in. Let's start with the vine, the first character in this picture. The vine, Christ Himself: "I am the true vine," verse 1, verse 5, "I am the vine."

He chose to see Himself as a vine, to present himself as a vine. He had earlier, in chapter 10, presented Himself as a shepherd with a flock. He had earlier presented Himself as light. He had earlier presented Himself as, through the Holy Spirit, water. So He drew from familiar analogies.

And you might say, "Well, He referred to Himself as a vine because a vine is lowly, and a vine is in the earth and in lowliness. The vine, if it weren't propped up by some kind of wires or something, would just run along the ground, and this speaks of His lowliness." It's a good metaphor to speak of

His lowliness.

Somebody else might say it's a good metaphor because it speaks of union, it speaks of the closeness and communion of those who are Christ's with Him, the very same life flowing through the vine, flowing through the branches. Others might say it's a good symbol, it's a good word picture because it talks about fruit-bearing, fruitfulness, the result of being in Christ is manifest. Others would say it illustrates dependence, as our Lord said, "Without Me, you can do nothing." It illustrates that kind of dependence.

All the life comes from the vine. It emphasizes belonging. If you are connected, you belong. And I think all of that is true. But there's another, much more important reason why He says, "I am the true vine," and that is because there was a defective vine.

There was a corrupted vine. There was a degenerate vine. There was a fruitless vine. There was an empty vine. Who? Israel, Israel. That's right. The covenant people of God, the Jewish people.

Israel is God's vine in the Old Testament. In Isaiah 5, Israel is presented as a vine. God says, "I planted My vine, My vineyard in a very fertile hill," Isaiah 5. And that chapter, verses 1-7, goes on to talk about everything God did to give them all that was necessary for them to bring forth grapes. They produced *beushim*, sour berries, inedible, useless. Israel was the vine. And that metaphor carried through the history of Israel during the Maccabean period between the Old and the New Testament.

The Maccabeans minted coins, and on the coin was a vine illustrating Israel. And on the very temple, Herod's massive temple, there was a great vine that literally had been carved and overlaid with gold, speaking of Israel as God's vine. God's life flows through the nation. That was a symbol of Israel. There's much in the Old Testament. Psalm 80 – sometime you can read Psalm 80 in its fullness – but Psalm 80 tells us the tragedy of Israel's defection as a vine.

Just listen to a few of the words from Psalm 80: "God removed a vine from Egypt, bringing Israel out of bondage in Egypt. Drove out the nation's, planted the vine –" like Isaiah 5 " – cleared the ground before it, took deep root, filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shadow. The cedars of God with it's bows, it was sending out its branches. It shoots to the river." Then this: "Why have You broken down its hedges, so that all who pass that way pick its fruit? A bore from the forest eats it away. And whatever moves in the field feeds on it."

God planted Israel and then turned on Israel in judgment. Psalm 80 then says, "O God of hosts, turn again now, we beseech you. Look down from heaven and see, and take care of this vine, even the shoot which Your right hand has planted. It is burned with fire. It is cut down." Yeah, that's Israel, that's Israel. Ezekiel said it is an empty vine, no fruit. Isaiah says it produces sort of toxic, useless, inedible results.

Israel had been the stock of blessing. Israel had been planted by God. His life would come through Israel to all who attached to Israel. But Israel was unfaithful, idolatrous, immoral, and God brought judgment. That's what the Old Testament lays out for us.

The disciples, like all the other Jews, thought, "Hmm, I'm Jewish. I'm connected to God." Israel, the

people of God, the Jewish people, are the source of divine blessing: "I am a Jew; I was born a Jew. I'm the seed of Abraham; I'm connected to God." Not so.

Our Lord comes along and says, "If you want to be connected to God, you have to be connected, not to Israel, but to me. I am the true vine, *althinós*. I am the true vine. I am the perfect vine. Through Me, the life of God flows."

Paul understood that. He said Israel has all the privileges in the book of Romans. They have a form of godliness, but they have no life. They don't know God. They're alienated from God. He's the true vine.

Just to give you a comparison, in the 8th chapter of Hebrews, the writer of Hebrews says, "Jesus is the true tabernacle." He's the true tabernacle. He is the true vine. He is the true tabernacle. He is the true temple. It is through Him that the life of God flows.

Colossians 2:7 says, "We are rooted and built up in Him." These disciples know Israel is going to be destroyed. They know the temple's going to be destroyed. He already told them that just hours before this. They know it's all coming crashing down. It's over. He pronounced judgment on them, not one stone upon another. The fury of God is going to be unleashed.

It's important that we understand that the stock of blessing is not Israel. "Not all Israel is Israel," said Paul. Christ is the true vine just as He said in John 1, He is the true light. And in John 6, the true bread. He is the true vine.

Anybody who's going to know the life of God has to connect to Him, and has to connect to Him genuinely as God, as the I Am. All other vines are false vines. Israel is a degenerate, dead vine. Christ is the true and living vine.

Isaiah says Israel, as a vine, has run wild. Jeremiah says Israel has become a degenerate plant, a strange vine. It's as if Jesus was saying to those men, "You think that because you belong to the nation Israel, you are secure in your connection to God. Not so. You think that just because you're a Jew and a member of the chosen race, you are connected to the blessing of God? Not so. I am the vine and life flows only through Me. I am the way, the truth, the life." So He is the vine.

Now the second character in this picture is the vinedresser, verse 1: "My Father is the vinedresser." That's the farmer, the person who cares for the vine. Christ pictures Himself as having been planted by God, and that's true. The Father was behind everything that Jesus did.

The Father sent the Son into the world, right? That's what Scripture says. The Father laid out the plan. Jesus said, "I only do the will of My Father. I only do what the Father tells me to do, shows me to do, commands me to do. I only do what pleases the Father."

The Father cared for Him. The Father provided a virgin so that He could be virgin-born. The Father provided everything for Him. The Father provided the Holy Spirit to empower Him through His ministry. The Father provided everything He ever needed. So it was the Father caring for the Son, and it is the Son who is the One who possesses true, divine life.

Now verse 2 then introduces the branches, the branches. And there are two kinds of branches. "They all appear in Me, every branch in Me." They all are attached, just like there were lots of people attached to Israel in the past. But not all Israel is Israel, and not everyone who is a Jew is really connected to blessing. They were attached, they were connected, but there were branches that – it says at the beginning of verse 2 – that do not bear fruit. And He takes those away, the Father does – the Father is the judge. And then there were branches that bear fruit, and He pruned those so that they would bear more fruit.

The Father is at work and He's doing two things, two very divine works. He is judging false branches – cutting them off, drying them out, and sending them to hell; and he is pruning true fruit-bearing branches. This is the Father's work.

Now let's look at these branches and just consider what this is saying. The vine is flourishing, growing luxuriantly, but some serious steps are taken by the vinedresser, the farmer. First of all, when He sees a branch that has no fruit, He takes it away, He takes it away. Down in verse 6, He throws it away, it dries up. Those branches are gathered, cast into the fire, and burned. That is drastic judgment by God on false believers, false believers. No fruit.

You say, "Does every Christian have fruit?" Yes, every Christian has fruit. That's how you know you're a Christian. What is fruit? Righteous attitudes, righteous longings, righteous desires, righteous affections, righteous virtues, righteous behaviors. That is the manifestation of life; and where the life of God exists, the fruit must be there.

That's why Ephesians 2:10 says that we have been saved by grace through faith, unto good works, which God has before ordained that you should walk in them. It can't not be that way, because where there is the life of God and the soul of man, it becomes evident. That's what it says at the end of verse 8. When you bear much fruit, you prove to be a true disciple. James said, "Faith without works is –" what "– is dead," it's useless claim. The only way you know faith is real, salvation is real, is by the evidence.

Matthew 7, Jesus said, "You'll know them by their fruit," and that's repeated a number of times in the gospels. Paul in Romans 6 says, "You were slaves to sin, and now in Christ you become slaves of righteousness." We're known by our fruit. We're known by the manifest evidence of transformation.

That's the only way you can tell a person's a Christian – not by remembering an event, not by remembering a prayer, not by some wishing and hoping. The way you know someone has been transformed and regenerated and born again is because the fruit of righteousness is manifest in that life. It's not perfection, but it's a dominating direction. There are people who attach to Christ and are fruitless.

Look, the whole nation of Israel is seen in chapter 11 of Romans as a branch attached to God. But they were cut off because of unbelief and sin, and a new branch, the church, was grafted in. They had an attachment to God, but it was fruitless. There are many people who are attached to Christianity, attached to the church, attached some way to Christ. But time and truth go hand-in-hand. Given enough time, the truth will come out. And ultimately either in this life or the next – for sure in the next – the Father will send them to the fire. This is a concern all through the gospel of

John. In fact, in chapter 6, many of His disciples walked no more with him. Remember that? It's a call to true discipleship.

There are Judas branches in every age superficially attached. But let's look at the possessing branches in verse 2. Every branch that bears fruit, evidencing the life God, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. So the Father does hard work. He completely whacks off the entire branch that is fruitless so that it doesn't suck the energy out of the vine uselessly. They're gathered and burned.

But He comes back at the fruitful branches and He prunes them. He purges them. It's actually a verb *kathair* that means to make clean. But it was used in agriculture for pruning. It could mean removing waste matter after winnowing grain. It could mean cleaning weeds out of the soil before planting grain. But it also can mean anything that cleans the plant to make it more productive.

Philo, the Jewish theologian at the time of the early New Testament said this: "As superfluous shoots grow on plants, which are a great injury to the genuine shoots in which the vinedresser cleanses, and he uses *kathair* this same word, and prunes because he knows it's necessary. So God whacks off some branches completely, false believers who spend eternity in hell. But for the rest of us, God goes to work on us with a knife, with a knife.

In ancient times, I've read that sometimes there was a pinching process. It even started with the hand between the first finger and the thumb to literally pinch the end of a growing shoot that could cause it to die. There was sort of a removal of kind of a dead end of a branch. And then there was the thinning of all the sucker pieces coming off that branch. Lots of ways to do that, but all had the same purpose in mind, and that was so that the branch would be more productive. That's the work of the Father for what He does. The Father comes into our lives with a knife to cut away sin and was us superfluous.

In Hebrews 12:1 it says, "Laying aside the weight – " right " – the weight and the sin." We all have sin in our lives; it ought to be cut off. But we also have stuff that doesn't necessarily get categorized it's sin. It's just unnecessary, wasted, superfluous. Sucker branches.

The Father comes along in our lives with a knife – it's painful – and He cuts. He cuts sin. He cuts useless, wasteful behavior, preoccupation with things don't matter. How does He do that? He might do it through sickness. He might do it through hardship. He might do it through the loss of a job or loss of a friend, loss of a loved one, loss of material goods. He might do it through the loss of reputation, slander.

He might do it through failure, something you worked really had to pull off. And He might do it through persecution from people outside, and people you know and even love. He might do it through grief. He might do it through disappointment.

It might be extremely painful emotionally. It might be extremely painful physically. God orders trouble. This is God providentially using the knife. God orders trouble.

The best thing that can happen to us to prune us is trouble. Second Corinthians 12: "When I am weak – " the Bible, Paul says " – then I am – " what " – strong." I would rather be content with afflictions, difficulties, weakness, trials, because in my weakness God's strength is perfected.

James 1: "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, because the testing of your faith produces patience, and patience has a perfecting work." Peter put it this way: "After you've suffered awhile, the Lord makes you perfect." That's the knife.

You want to welcome that because you want to be more fruitful. You can chafe in self-pity and wallow around in disappointment complaining, brooding, full of anxiety when things don't go the way you think they ought to go. Or you can look heavenward and so, "God, thank You. Thank you for working on me to bear more fruit. More fruit."

You could say, "Why me, God? Why me? Why did this happen to me? How could it ever be?" Or you can say, "Thank You. Thank You, Lord. Thank You. I embrace this like the apostle Paul. I embraced this like James: 'Count it all joy.' I embrace this, because this pruning means God intends for me to bear much fruit."

Another way to look at that is in the language of the writer of Hebrews in chapter 12. Listen to what he says: "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline, nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him, for those whom the Lord loves, He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He received. It is for discipline that you endure. God deals with you as with sons, for what son is there whom his father doesn't discipline."

"But if you're without discipline of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them. Shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them. But He disciplines us for our good so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful. Yet, to those who have been trained by it, afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness." More fruit, more righteousness is the product of divine discipline – trials, tribulation, trouble. The believer is to expect this to be fruitful.

And I want to add something here. The vinedresser has a knife. What precisely is that knife? Verse 3 answers that: "You're already clean because of the word which I've spoken to you."

You've already been saved, and you were saved through the Word, right? Faith comes by hearing the Word. You were saved by believing the Word. It was the Word that did its work in you, begotten again by the Word of Truth, Scripture says, and you will be pruned by the Word.

In the final analysis, it's not the afflictions themselves that are the knife, it's the Word of God that is the knife. Now let me explain that. It is not the affliction itself that is the knife, it is the Word of God that is the knife.

Now we should understand the Word of God is a knife from Hebrews 4:12, "The Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword, dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart." It's a two-edged knife and it cuts every direction, the Word does, the truth of God.

So here's the idea. The Father is the discipliner. The Father is the one who in His providence, brings about the trials, the troubles, that cause us concern. The Word becomes, however, the actual cutting instrument, because when the trial comes and we react wrongly, the Word convicts us. The

Word cuts into our disrespect for God's purposes. The Word cuts into our hostility. The Word cuts into our anger. The Word cuts into our questioning, and it indicts us. Trials are the handle of the knife. The blade is the Word of God. The Father brings the trial, and the blade is the Word of God. The Word is the knife.

Listen to how Spurgeon explained 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 eventually and effectively cleanses the Christian."

He says, "Affliction is the handle of the knife. Affliction is the grindstone that sharpens the knife. But the knife is the Word. Affliction is the dresser." He says, "Affliction is the dresser that removes our soft garments and lays bare the diseased flesh, so that the knife may get at it." Affliction makes us ready for the knife, to feel the Word of God.

The true pruner is God. Affliction is the handle and the occasion. But the pruning, the Scripture is the knife that cuts. Why? So that we would bear more fruit. The more you know the Word, the more you love the Word, the better you react to trials, right? The more you allow the knife to do its work.

You know, we should be praising God all the time here because, as a church, we are so submissive to the Word of God. We know it so well, that when we get into these issues of life that surround us, whatever they may be – these disappointments, these elements of suffering and trial that are so much a part of life – we know the Word of God. And we not only know it, we trust it. We not only trust it, we love it. We not only love it, we want it to do its work, and so we submit to the knife.

And I believe that that is why this church is so fruitful. That is why the fruit from this church circles the globe. You bear much fruit because you have suffered and let the Word do its work, bringing conviction, cutting away the sin and the things that don't matter. That's how it is in the kingdom, that a lot of people attach to Christ. Some will be cut off and burned, some bear fruit; and those that bear fruit, the Father works on to bear more fruit, much fruit. That's the kingdom.

We're thankful, aren't we, that we know that we are fruit-bearing branches. If you don't know that, you're in a very dangerous situation. Take warning from this passage. Come truthfully to Christ, genuinely to Him.

Father, we are again this morning so blessed together, so thankful. We ask now that You would confirm to our hearts the truth, and set it loose in every life to accomplish Your purpose. We pray in Christ name. Amen.

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