

I Am the True Vine

(Growing Spiritual Fruit)

Part 2

Introduction

In the first part of our study we looked at what the Bible has to say about spiritual fruit. Now we look at pruning, the process by which our Gardener ensures a larger crop.

Our Study

All fruit trees must be pruned. Before we can actually bear fruit, we need to turn our attention to another gardening process—pruning.

The Scripture: John 15:1-2 in The Living Bible

Jesus said, "I am the true Vine, and my Father is the Gardener. He lops off every branch that doesn't produce. And He prunes those branches that bear fruit for even larger crops."

1. What does the Gardener lop off? _____

2. What else does He prune? _____

3. Why? _____

Surprised? By pruning those branches already bearing fruit, the Gardener is ensuring a much larger crop.

God is an experienced pruner. Let's turn to the gardening books now and see what they have to teach us about growing fruit. First, we need to consider a few points about the art of pruning. Just as no natural tree can prune itself, neither can we. Our attempts at self-pruning will always prove disastrous. We see ourselves differently than the Father does, and so we prune the wrong branches or do an incomplete job. We need to entirely entrust the job to our Pruner for several reasons:

- ☞ He's very experienced at His job.
 - ☞ He's a master of His craft.
 - ☞ He knows the product He wants.
 - ☞ He's a connoisseur of good fruit.

Before any pruner ever begins to prune, he studies the tree, taking into consideration the elasticity of the tree's branches and their sway and bend during high winds and storms. He must consider, too, the excess weight of the fruit they will bear.

He must also consider the strength of the weakest point of any limb and the weakest point of a fruit-bearing branch. Only after he has completely studied the tree is he ready to begin the actual pruning.

A primary reason for pruning is to gain a bigger, healthier crop and that includes controlling unwanted growth. Here's where we are frequently at odds with our Pruner. Human nature wants to grow unrestricted and we're almost always pleased with ourselves when we're growing. Unrestricted growth is usually not necessarily what the Father wants, however. As our Pruner, He's interested in whether our growth fits into His over-all purpose for the rest of His garden.

We've all probably met spiritual Jack-of-all-trades Christians who can do everything--lead worship, teach brilliantly, counsel effectively, lead home meetings--much like trees with excessive growth, which make them prey to the wind and the weight of the water on their leaves. The branches droop and create problems of air circulation; they break easily. Cutting off unwanted growth strengthens the main trunk and other branches.

Yes, these people do many good works, but are they growing spiritual fruit? You see, the Lord has made His Church a Body in which all of us have a part or function. When one person with strong natural talents insists upon or gives into the temptation of doing more than his share, he keeps other members of the Body from exercising their gifts and learning how to minister. It also goes without saying that a person who divides his limited time among too many ministries will be hard put to find sufficient time to spend with the Lord.

Pruning maintains plant health. Each tree, during the course of its life, has much dead, diseased, or injured wood. Left untouched, these unprofitable parts of the tree can in time become the means by which the whole tree is destroyed. Isn't it better to sacrifice a branch or two than the whole tree?

Another reason for pruning is the fact that most fruit grows on new growth; therefore, old growth is frequently useless to the tree, using up vital energy that could have gone into new growth and fruit.

It is on the new spiritual growth in the life of a Christian that the *rhema*, the living word of God, grows. Probably everyone reading this has been blessed by a fresh word from the Lord. Our hearts have been stirred by some new insight another Christian has shared with us, rather than by a repetition of the same old experiences we've heard before.

Finally, pruning enhances the over-all beauty of a garden. We must always remember that in the Lord's garden each tree grows in harmony with all the other trees. Sometimes it is necessary to prune a tree (or a ministry) simply because it does not complement the others growing there.

Now, back to Scripture.

The Lord has many means of pruning, but Jesus shows us the most important ways.

The Scripture: John 15:3

"You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you."

4. What is one way we are made clean (pruned)? _____

The Scripture: John 15:4

"Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself, it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."

- 5. What is the secret of Jesus' remaining in us? _____

- 6. Why? _____

The Scripture: John 15: 6

"If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned."

- 7. What is the person who does not remain in Jesus like? _____

The Scripture: John 15: 7-8

"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you. This is my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

- 8. What will the Father give us if we remain in Jesus? _____

- 9. What is the Father's glory? _____

- 10. What does it show? _____

The Scripture: John 15: 16

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name."

- 11. What are we appointed to do? _____

- 12. What is the characteristic of that fruit? _____

- 13. What promise does Jesus repeat? _____

Being Fruitful

If we will search our Bibles we can learn much about being fruitful. However, the first Psalm gives a beautiful summary of what our walk in the Spirit should be during the entire fruit-growing process.

The Scripture: Psalm 1:1-3 in The Amplified Bible

"Blessed (happy, fortunate, prosperous and enviable) is the man who walks and lives not in the counsel of the ungodly [following their advice, their plans and purposes], nor stands [submissive and inactive] in the paths where sinners walk, nor sits down (to relax and rest) where the scornful [and the mockers] gather. But his delight and desire are in the law of the Lord, and on His law (the precepts, the instructions, the teachings of God) he habitually meditates, ponders and studies by day and by night. And he shall be like a tree firmly planted [and tended] by the streams of water, ready to bring forth his fruit in its season; his life also shall not fade or wither, and everything he does shall prosper [and come to maturity]."

14. What is the reward of those who do not walk nor live in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in the path where sinners walk, nor sit down where the scornful gather? _____

Note the progression of the sinner's actions--walks and lives, stands and sits.

15. What is the delight and desire of the godly man? _____

16. What does he habitually do? _____

17. What does the psalmist compare him to? _____

The reputation of the Gardener

Why is our Gardener so fussy about His trees and their fruit? Why does He care so devotedly for them, supervising their growth at every step of the way? Why has He worked so hard to make sure His trees produce exactly the kind of fruit He likes? Why are His standards so high? For a very important reason. The Gardener's reputation in this world is at stake in the fruit He produces. It is probably the best witness He has to convince the world's "trees" that they would be better off growing in His orchard.

Remember at the beginning of this study, we said there were two kinds of fruit, the fruit of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the flesh is easily produced. We need do nothing to make it grow; like some pervasive weed, it grows wild.

The truth is simple and inescapable:

If we do not produce the fruit of the Spirit, we will grow the fruit of the flesh by default.

God has left the choice up to us--we can bear the bitter, poisonous fruit of the flesh, or beautiful, nutritious fruit of the Spirit. Which do you choose?

The Answers

1. Every branch that doesn't produce
2. Those branches that bear fruit
3. For an even larger crop
4. By the word Jesus has spoken to us
5. We must remain in Him.
6. No branch can bear fruit by itself. Neither can we bear spiritual fruit unless we remain in Him.
7. A withered branch that is thrown away and burned
8. We can ask whatever we wish and it will be given to us
9. That *we* bear much fruit
10. That we are Jesus' disciples
11. Bear much fruit
12. It is lasting
13. The Father will give us whatever we ask for in Jesus' name
14. They are blessed, happy, fortunate, prosperous and enviable.
15. The law of the Lord
16. Meditates and studies God's instructions day and night
17. A tree firmly planted and tended by the streams of water, ready to bring forth his fruit seasonally. His life shall not fade or wither and everything he does shall prosper and mature.

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