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FRUITFULNESS: CLEANSING AND COMMUNION

What is pruning? It is the removal of growth which is a detraction from the fruit-bearing ability of the plant. In Greek, the word translated as “prunes” literally means “cleanses” (Jn. 15:2). Thus, the pruning process is cleansing the branch of all that distracts its life power so that it might bear fruit more efficiently. **Jesus told His disciples that they were already clean because of the word which they had heard from Him** (vs. 3). **They would, however, need to be cleansed of extraneous growth on a regular basis.** The way into greater fruitfulness will require continued trimming, shaping, and directing of growth so that we might more and more come to be what the Vinedresser desires.

These words were uttered by Jesus as they were leaving the upper room to go out to the garden of Gethsemane (Jn. 14:31b). We tend to read them or hear them as an isolated teaching of the Master as He was preparing His men for His departure. The chapter and verse divisions in our Bibles have artificially broken up what is John’s record of the conversation that began at the Passover meal, i.e., the last supper, and continued throughout the course of the evening. In addition, translation into English often introduces obscurities which make it virtually impossible to see connections in word pictures and vocabulary that the original language had. Sometimes associations which would have been obvious to the original participants are totally lost to us. Taking these factors into account, we discover that **Jesus is not introducing a totally new and unrelated train of thought into the evening. He is alluding to something that He had spoken of just a few hours before.** Jesus had taught His disciples some significant things about cleansing. Because of the emphatic nature of the presentation, and the interaction of the disciples with Him at so recent a point in time, there can be no doubt that Jesus’ words, recorded here in John 15, would have been linked in their minds with their earlier experience, recorded in chapter 13. **In fact, the exact same phrase, “you are clean”, occurs strategically in both passages** (Jn. 13:10; 15:3). **They could not have missed the connection.**

In Jn. 13:1-11, Jesus washed the disciples’ feet. Here, the idea of washing in order to be wholly clean seems to involve dealing with the pollution of sinful attitudes, etc., which impinge upon us, and will affect us, as we live in this world. We can pick up such “dust” in our daily intercourse in the world. To be restored to our condition of being completely clean” (vs. 10), we must have this “dust” removed through a spiritual foot-washing. The fact that Jesus said, “You are clean” to the believing disciples (vs. 10) refers to their standing as redeemed ones before God their Father. By faith in Jesus’ word (Jn. 15:3), they are counted as righteous or “clean” in the sight of God. They had “bathed” and, therefore, had only to maintain their purity by “foot-washing”.

An interesting comment which Jesus made in verse 8 clarifies the need for the putting off of this spiritual pollution. Jesus told Peter, in a literal translation from the Greek, that if He did not wash him, “...you have no part with Me”. In other words, **there is a necessity to be cleansed of this accumulated dirt in order to maintain our communion with Jesus.** This Greek verb is in the present tense, not the future. Jesus was saying that, without this washing, Peter was not presently possessing (or enjoying) any portion or share with Him. Not that he *will* not have (future), but that he *does* not have (present). It was not a threat that he would lose his salvation, for He assured him that they were clean already (vs. 10). (Judas, by contrast, was *not* clean. [Jn. 13:10,11]) Rather, **it was a statement warning of the effects of sin on their communion with Jesus. Sin causes a separation or alienation in the flow-of-life relationship which is to exist between Jesus and His disciples** (Isa. 59:2; Eph. 4:17,18). The result is that the carnal believer is left to his own resources and wisdom in dealing with life. Christ is of no practical benefit to him (Gal. 5:2). The flow of grace is cut off and the Christian’s life becomes like that of any unbeliever (I Cor. 3:3), instead of a life of power (I Cor. 2:4,5; 4:20; Acts 1:8). **The cleansing of Jn. 13, then, is a**

returning to the positional purity of our standing in Christ through the confession of sin, putting aside the spiritual pollution of worldly attitudes, **and being renewed in our life-sharing relationship with Him** (I Jn. 1:9). As James said, it is "...keep[ing] oneself unstained by the world" (Jas. 1:27).

The cleansing or pruning of Jn. 15, however, is different. The difference between the use of "cleansing" in Jn. 13 and 15 seems to be that whereas in both passages it refers to abiding (Jn. 13:8; 15:2-5), i.e., maintaining a life-communion with Jesus, there is a somewhat different emphasis that comes from each passage. Both passages begin from the cleanliness which already exists for the one who has trusted Christ. Jn. 13 focuses upon the protection of this cleanliness from the effects of the surrounding world. **Jn. 15, on the other hand, focuses upon the outward direction of the life which has been joined to Jesus, the growth which is to come out of this cleanliness.** The emphasis is not upon merely returning to an original condition of cleanliness. The thrust of Jn. 15 is about going on from that abiding place into new expressions of growth, which are then shaped, pruned, and directed according to the plan and wisdom of the Vinedresser. **Fruitfulness grows out of that beginning relationship. In fact, it is the result of a deeper, more consistent drinking of that original spring of purity** (Jn. 15:4,5). **We must jealously guard that pure relationship, not only in our own lives but also in the lives of others.** If we come to one another as Jesus did, with humility as a servant, with words of affirmation on our lips ("You are already clean... Those who have bathed only need their feet washed and they will be entirely clean... etc.") instead of words of judgment, with a tender desire to restore and refresh one another from the weariness of our pilgrimages, we will be received. The apostle John tells us in another place what results we can expect: "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin" (I Jn. 1:6,7).

FOR MEDITATION: Jn. 13:10a; 15:3.

"Jesus said to him, 'Be who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean...'".

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

The Importance of the "Body Dynamic"

What is meant by "the body dynamic"? How does it work? Why is it important? In a nutshell, when we speak of the body dynamic, we are referring to **the interrelatedness of individuals in the church of Jesus Christ, and the impact that this interdependency has on all the people involved.** It is important to recognize that this body dynamic is at work all of the time, whether we are passively oblivious to it, or whether we are actively putting it to work. I believe that throughout church history, from the 3rd century until the present time, most Western Christians have been of the former mindset, or shall we say "lack of mindset", regarding the body concept. **God meant for the body to be a very active ministering community, a place where members are choosing to be responsible to help each other grow** (Heb. 3:12,13; 10:24,25; 12:15,16), a family where every member is valued, loved, protected, nurtured, and encouraged to mature and become a responsible contributor to the family and to the larger society (Eph. 2:19). In contrast, **most of us have been raised in a culture that esteems individualism, privacy, self-determination, personal rights and independence.** It is hard for us to see that **we can no longer completely cling to such values if we are to participate actively in the kingdom of God.** Paul said that we are not our own, we have been bought with a price (I Cor. 6:19,20). We are *not* masters of our own destiny any more, at least if we are following Jesus. We belong to Christ... and He has made us members one of another (Rom. 12:5).