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FRUITFULNESS: THE PURPOSE OF PRUNING

In Jn. 15, Jesus says that the Father is the Vinedresser that prunes and trims the branches of the Vine. This is a very thought-provoking analogy that Jesus presents to us. There are many facets of this word picture which could be explored. **Just what is it that a vinedresser is seeking to accomplish by this horticultural surgery?** Why does he cut off some branches entirely, while only pruning others? How does he make his decisions about when and where to cut? What criteria does he use? How does all of this relate to us as analogical “branches of the vine”? **What are some possible applications of this principle to our spiritual lives?**

First, pruning is the cutting off of unnecessary or unprofitable growth, a “cleansing” of the plant to make room for new development. It is the removal of old growth in order to encourage new growth. Even though we are clean, our life patterns still, to a great extent, follow the old habits and patterns of our non-Christian past. Not all of these are areas of definite transgression against God’s revealed moral will. The Scriptures, in Heb. 12:1, make a distinction between sin and *an encumbrance* (literally, “bulk, weight or impediment”). The latter is not evil in itself, *it just hinders you from being and doing what you really desire.* Paul says the same thing about practices which, though permissible, do not assist in accomplishing what is truly valuable (I Cor. 6:12f.; 10:23f.). The remedy is the same in both cases. *If some life pattern is counterproductive, put it aside* and continue on your way. As we walk with Jesus, and our minds are being renewed, we find Him dealing with both bondages of sin and the impediments of old patterns. New truth exposes the error and, as we walk in grace, the old is cut off and the new inner life is expressed in new growth (Jn. 8:31-36; Eph. 4:17-24).

A second possibility is that the process of pruning may be directed toward the removal of unhealthy growth. The development of a part of the branch which has been deformed or stunted through the diseases of sin, and/or the lack of sustenance, can be removed so that we can start afresh. Thus, the health and good appearance of the branch is preserved. A scar may remain, but the old sin no longer saps us of our strength. *A diseased or dead portion of a plant may introduce infection into other areas. The sickness may even spread to contaminate other branches* (e.g., I Cor. 5:1-8; Heb. 12:15; II Tim. 2:14-21). A good vinedresser would not allow such a possibility of infection go unattended for very long.

A third reality is that sometimes growth may be unbalanced, e.g., growth in knowledge can be much more rapid than growth in love and grace (II Pet. 3:18; Eph. 4:15; of I Cor. 8:1). In such cases, the development will be spindly, weak, and limited in its ability to bear fruit. *Trimming back the new growth gives it the opportunity for a more complete, well-rounded development.* It becomes sturdy and strong, much more capable of both bearing its own weight and of effectively producing fruit. Growth may also come to be too concentrated in one area. Thick and dense foliage may crowd out the necessary access to air and sunshine from other parts of the branch, hindering its healthy development. “Cleansing” the plant by thinning out this constrictive ingrown growth allows the entire branch to prosper and come into a mature form.

Another possibility is the Vinedresser may cut back genuine, healthy growth of the vine’s life for a particular purpose. *This may be to encourage growth in one specific direction rather than another.* The resources pouring into the branch are then directed to producing growth in a much more concentrated area. This is partially what makes each of us unique. This is the process of shaping us for ministry. Out of all the possibilities for growth in Christ, out of all the possible things which may be lawful or good, God, the Vinedresser, directs us into a particular area for His good purpose (Eph. 2:10; I Cor. 12:4-11). Thus, the lawful thing may not be profitable for us. *God may be calling us to be different in certain ways than those around us. This is so that we each can bear fruit in a different location and in a different way.* By the

methodology of pruning, the Vinedresser encourages the deeper drinking, the fuller, sturdier stalk, while He at the same time is directing the outward form or expression of that life.

To sum up, pruning is to cleanse the branch from all that is old, unhealthy, and unprofitable in order to direct the development of the branch into its fulfillment according to the wishes of the Vinedresser. It is important to keep the life-link between branch and Vine as strong, open, and unrestricted as possible. Pruning reduces the unnecessary drain of life-sap from the Vine, thus making it readily available to meet the demands of new growth in desired areas. *Pruning essentially involves the correction of unwanted or imperfect growth, in order to encourage and train desired growth.* Spiritual pruning is one of the basic and most important tools that God uses in the process of training and developing godly people.

Father, thank You that we can know that You always have a good purpose for the trimming back of our lives. Your intention is to bring us to our full potential as individuals in Jesus Christ. Your desire is not to inflict pain (Lam. 3:33), but to free us from unwanted, unnecessary burdens, which would otherwise limit the possibility of our maturity and fruitfulness. Father, at this moment, we in faith commit ourselves to the wisdom of Your plan for us, and the skillfulness of Your hands in using the necessary “pruning shears” upon our lives to bring about what is the absolute optimal production of the life of Jesus in us.

FOR MEDITATION: John 15:2.

“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit.”

Interrelatedness and Inter-accountability

When we were converted, we were baptized by the Holy Spirit into the one body of Christ (I Cor. 12:12-31). This spiritual body consists of many individual parts. These various “limbs”, “organs”, or “appendages” are all different from each other, yet they are interrelated, interdependent, and share in a common life. Together they comprise the entire body, yet somehow they belong to each other. The apostle Paul said, “**we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another**” (Rom. 12:5). It is important to understand that **this is an objective reality. It is something that exists and is true whether we feel it, believe it, or not.** Our perception of it does not affect its existence. In fact, it could be, no, it is affecting us, even though we may not be aware of it. **Paul does not state it as something to be pursued,** as an ideal of some kind that would be a “nice witness” if we could attain to it. **No, he describes the body dynamic as reality, as something to be reckoned with.** It is not something we have to “get”, it is something we have “got”, something we “are”. It is possible to walk around in ignorance or in denial of this. It is impossible, however, to escape its impact on your life. Paul is not exhorting us to rally together to try to become something that we are not. **He is encouraging us to recognize what is true about us, so that we can live intelligently with each other.** To ignore it is like living your life denying that you have two hands. You can get by, but life would be a whole lot easier if you would recognize that those hands are yours and learn to use them.

The bottom line is that what you do affects me, and what I do (or don't do) affects you (I Cor. 12:26; cf. I Cor. 5:1-6). We are in this thing together (Rom. 12:5; Col. 2:19). **Therefore, out of love for you, and out of love for Christ's body, and even out of a healthy self-love, I long for you to be established in Christ.** I long for you to be healthy. In fact, if I am to be at maximum, you **MUST** be healthy. *One of the greatest needs of the hour is for men and women to take seriously this interrelationship of life and to hold one another accountable in love, ...to become “holy meddlers” and “agitators of the brethren”..., so that the body at large might be healthy* (cf. Heb. 10:24,25; 12:15,16; I Thess. 5:14,15). This is an active, volitional approach. This is aggressively applying, in practical terms, what Jesus and Paul said the church is all about.