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## FRUITFULNESS: RESPONDING TO THE VINEDRESSER'S CARE

**It is important to remember the interplay between God's sovereignty and our responsibility in this area of pruning.** As in other areas, *God will not just short-circuit or circumvent our wills.* At some point, *we will have to confirm any change by our own free choice* (Cf. Gen. 19). He will show us a new direction, or confront us with information intended to rebuke unhealthy or old behavior. He will even bring circumstances to bear upon our lives that will force us to change outwardly (Gen. 19:16,17), at least temporarily. **The inward change, however, still requires a response on our part** (Gen. 19:17-26). Thus, in James 1:2-4, He who sovereignly directs the coming of each circumstance into our experience from His benevolent desire for us, also exhorts us to respond in faith, *so that it might produce the intended result in our lives.* The verse, "...and let steadfastness have its perfect work, that you may be perfect, complete, lacking in nothing" (Jas. 1:4), implies volitional action on our parts. Without it, the implication is that these trials will be unproductive, i.e., successful pruning will not be accomplished.

As mentioned above, **God in His sovereignty and in His benevolent wisdom, directs the instruments of pruning in our experience. Nothing happens by chance. It is by Divine direction.** He must illuminate the Word so that it will speak to us as clear, confrontational truth (II Cor. 4:3,4; Psa. 119:18), either for correction or encouragement. He is at work in the people we are exposed to. Some He sends to us (e.g., Acts 8:25-40). Some He sends away (I Sam. 23:24-29). Of all we meet, He is overseeing the impact they have on our lives (Lam. 3:37,38; I Cor. 10:13). Regardless of *their intentions or motives, He will only permit what can be used for our ultimate good* (Gen. 50:20; Rom. 8:28,29). In this area, as well as in all circumstances in general, *He will only allow what is measured according to our strength and ability in Him*, and what is profitable in some way. Even Satan is on a leash, controlled and limited by Him (Job 1 & 2). **He promises to prevent the overwhelming or impossible situation from occurring, ...or at least to provide for us a way of escape from what is too heavy to bear up under** (I Cor. 10:13). This truth is very important. There is great comfort and hope to be found therein, ...even a boldness in the midst of difficulty. "God is faithful" (I Cor. 10:13; cf. Lam. 3:22,23) must be the watchword of the heart at such times, if we are to survive in victory.

**The difficult thing is that many times we do not understand why God makes the choices He does** (Cf. Isa. 55:8,9). When there is no known explanation, faith can only endure when built upon the firm foundation of the objective revelation of God's character and working as revealed in the Scriptures. This is especially true when it seems that God is cutting off something that He Himself had given us. In those times, we must return to His faithful character and rest our hearts in Him, recognizing that though we do not see the end result of the process, yet, we do know that He who is in control is True and can be trusted. **We believe that if we had His perspective and truly understood what He is doing, and why, we would agree with His decision** (Isa. 29:22-24; 45:9-11).

**From our limited perspective, we sometimes wonder, in our pain, why God is "doing this to us". It is at that point we must trust that He who sees the grand design, ...He who is the wise, experienced, and benevolent Master Farmer..., knows what He is doing.** As He said to Israel, referring to the future time when they will see the outcome of His dealings with them, "Jacob shall not now be ashamed, nor shall his face now turn pale; but when he sees his children, the work of My hands in his midst, they will sanctify My name; indeed, they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel. And those who err in mind will know the truth, and those who criticize will accept instruction" (Isa. 29:22-24; cf. 45:9-11).

**In pruning, He is not punishing us or afflicting us in judgment.** He is not harsh with us because we have failed to perform with perfection. **No! It is because He delights in us, ...because He sees life and fruitfulness within us..., that He prunes us** (Jn. 15:2). It is to encourage the expression of that life resident within us. He takes pleasure in us as His workmanship (Eph. 2:10). **The processes of pruning and training are the necessary methodology for unlocking and encouraging the appearance of the beauty which is within us.** Pruning and training are *not* things to be feared or dreaded. Rather, let us receive them and respond to

their effects with joy, knowing that:

- (1.) It is a sign of God's attentive care of His precious branch (Jn. 15:2; Heb. 12:1-13) -- we are *not* left to ourselves!
- (2.) It is also an indication that we have grown, and are strong enough to bear pruning (Jn. 15:2; I Cor. 10:13) -- there is progress!
- (3.) God sees fruit and potential in us (Jn.15:2) -- there is hope!
- (4.) Our wise and good Master Farmer is doing what is best for us (Psa. 119:68) -- He is faithful!

Thank You, Father, for Your tender and skillful care in training us to fulfill what You have created us for. Thank You, too, that the very experience of being pruned, though it is painful, is a reminder to us that we are alive in Jesus, ...that we are Your children! It is because You see the life of Jesus at work in us that You cut us back to make way for that new life to be expressed without hindrance. We are Your workmanship, Father. We yield to Your creative, guiding hands. Have Your way with us, O God.

### For Meditation: I Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

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### The Holiness and Love of God

“Born-again Christians, whatever their background, have certain things in common. One of these is this task: to exhibit simultaneously the holiness of God and the love of God. The Scriptures teach that we must practice, not just talk about, the purity of the visible church. [In addition, we must practice] an observable love and oneness among all true Christians. [There is a] related parallelism: the call of God to practice simultaneously the orthodoxy of doctrine and the orthodoxy of community in the visible church. The latter of these we have too often all but forgotten. But one cannot explain the explosive dynamite, the *dunamis*, of the early church apart from the fact that they practiced two things simultaneously: orthodoxy of doctrine and orthodoxy of community in the midst of the visible church, a community which the world could see. Our churches have so often been only preaching points with very little emphasis on community. But exhibition of the love of God in practice is beautiful, and must be there.

“We have, then, two sets of parallel couplets: (1) the principle of the practice of the purity of the visible church, and yet the practice of observable love among all true Christians; and, (2) the practice of orthodoxy of doctrine and observable orthodoxy of community in the visible church.

“The heart of these sets of principles is to show forth the love of God and the holiness of God simultaneously. If we show either of these without the other, we exhibit not the character, but a caricature of God for the world to see. If we stress the love of God without the holiness of God, it turns out only to be compromise. But if we stress the holiness of God without the love of God, we practice something that is hard and lacks beauty. And it is important to show forth beauty before a lost world and a lost generation. All too often people have not been wrong in saying that the church is ugly. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are called to show to a watching world, and to our own young people, that the church is something beautiful.

“Several years ago I wrestled with the question of what was wrong with much of the church that stood for purity. I came to the conclusion that in the flesh we can stress purity without love, or we can stress the love of God without purity, but that we cannot stress both simultaneously. In order to exhibit both simultaneously, we must look moment by moment to the work of Christ, to the work of the Holy Spirit. Spirituality begins to have real meaning in our moment-by-moment lives as we begin to exhibit simultaneously the holiness of God and the love of God.”

Abridged from The Church at the End of the 20th Century (with The Church Before the Watching World), copywrite 1970, 1971 by Francis Schaeffer. (Crossway Books: IL 1985 ed.) Pp. 143,144.