



"Trees are not known by their leaves, nor even by their blossoms, but by their fruits."

—Eleanor of Aquitaine

30-Mar-07

The Vinedresser

During His [Passover](#) instructions to His disciples in the upper room, [Jesus](#) uses an illustration to explain how [God](#) works with us to produce fruit in our lives:

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, that it may bear more fruit. . . . I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. ([John 15:1-2](#), 5).

He speaks about four kinds of branches: 1) those that bear no fruit, 2) those that bear fruit, 3) those that bear more fruit, 4) and those that bear much fruit. We will focus on the branches that bear no fruit. To get a clearer understanding, we need to understand a few points.

- **Jesus is the vine:** In the south, a vine is any kind of long, trailing branch, crawling along a fence or up a wall or wrapping itself around a pole or tree. In the vineyard, it is the whole grape plant. Vineyard keepers traditionally keep the vine at waist height—36 to 42 inches. The

vine ends in a large gnarl from which branches grow in either direction along the trellis.

- **God the Father is the vinedresser:** The vinedresser is the keeper of the vineyard. His task is to cultivate each branch so that it will bear as much fruit as possible. God will do this with [love \(I John 4:16\)](#), for our ultimate good ([Romans 8:28](#)).
- **We, the members of God's church, are the branches:** In the vineyard the branches are the vinedresser's main focus because they produce the fruit. They must be carefully tended to produce the highest quality grapes and the biggest yield.

But, what is the fruit analogous to in this metaphor? What fruit are we to bear? Tracing the words "fruit" and "good works" through the Bible results in the conclusion that they are used nearly interchangeably. We can see this in [Titus 3:14](#): "And let our people also learn to maintain *good works*, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be *unfruitful*." [Colossians 1:10](#) is similar: ". . . that you may have a walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being *fruitful* in every *good work* and increasing in the knowledge of God." In practical terms, fruit represents good works or godly living. If we are not doing such things, then we are like the branches that are not producing fruit.

Fruit, or good deeds, are evidence of what is inside a person. In [Matthew 3:8](#), John the Baptist tells the Pharisees and Sadducees to "bear fruits worthy of [repentance](#)." In other words, they were to produce evidence in their actions that they had repented.

Is it possible to be in Christ yet produce no fruit? [John 15:2](#) may seem to say that the Vinedresser cuts off every barren branch, but we need to look more closely at the words "takes away." This Greek verb, *airo*, actually means "to lift from the ground," "to lift so as to carry," and "to carry off." The translation "takes away" suggests cutting off, but in Greek literature, *airo* never means "cut off." "Lifts up" or "raises" is more correct in terms of vinedressing.

In his book, *Secrets of the Vine*, Dr. Bruce Wilkinson has a conversation with a vineyard owner from Northern California, who says, "New branches have a natural tendency to trail down and grow along the ground, but they don't bear fruit down there. When branches grow along the ground, the

leaves get coated in dust. When it rains, they get muddy and mildewed. The branch becomes sick and useless."

Dr. Wilkinson, thinking about [John 15:2](#), asks, "What do you do, cut it off and throw it away?"

"Oh, no," the vineyard owner replies, "the branch is much too valuable for that. We go through the vineyard with a bucket of water, looking for those branches. We lift them up and wash them off. Then we wrap them around the trellis or tie them up. Pretty soon, they're thriving."

Are we not more valuable to our Vinedresser than branches in a vineyard? Certainly! So how does our Vinedresser lift us up? We can find an answer in [Hebrews 12:5-6](#): "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." The intervention of the Vinedresser in [John 15:2](#) is similar to the discipline a parent gives his or her child. God is our heavenly Father, and we are His children. The two metaphors are parallel.

There are three degrees of discipline or lifting up in [Hebrews 12:5-6](#):

1. **The First Degree, Rebuke:** A rebuke is a strong verbal warning. When our children begin to misbehave, we rebuke them. Some parents can do this with just a look. God rebukes us by pricking our consciences through Bible study, sermons, and our interactions with each other.
2. **The Second Degree, Chastening:** If the child does not listen to rebuke, a parent might intensify the punishment by sending him to his room, restricting his activities, or taking away his privileges. When God chastens us, we may feel anxiety, frustration, or distress. Pressures may increase at work or at home, in our health or in our finances.
3. **The Third Degree, Scourging:** "To scourge" is to afflict with blows, to inflict physical punishment. The scourging Jesus received before His crucifixion caused Him excruciating pain. With rebellious children, a good paddling often does the trick, causing pain without injury. When God scourges us, the pressures of our chastening intensify: Instead of problems on the job, we may find ourselves without one. Instead of

being merely sick, we may be deathly ill. The spouse may file for separation. Bankruptcy may loom over us.

These are our Vinedresser's ways of lifting us up and washing us off. They are godly discipline designed to put us in the right position to begin producing fruit again.

What about the rest of [John 15:2](#)? Pruning is indeed cutting, and cutting hurts. It might seem like punishment, like "lifting up," so we need to distinguish between the two. The Vinedresser lifts up, disciplines, because we are not producing fruit. We have become spiritually sick and useless, so He needs to spur us to repent and to return to fruitfulness. The Vinedresser prunes, however, because we *are* fruitful! That is when we need to count it all [joy](#) ([James 1:2](#)) and yield to His pruning shears, so that He may produce more fruit through us.

Job is a good example of God's pruning. God admits that Job was an upright man and that there was no one like him in all the earth ([Job 1:1](#), 8), yet God puts him through loss, misery, and excruciating pain to increase his yield of godly fruit.

Why is fruit-bearing so important and valuable? Jesus gives us the answer in [John 15:8](#): "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples." He continues in verse 16, "I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain." Paul echoes this [Ephesians 2:10](#): "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." With Passover only days away, we would do well to inspect our "branch" of God's work to see what fruit God can expect from our corner of His vineyard.

- Clyde Finklea

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

Producing Fruit

by John W. Ritenbaugh

As shown in the parable of an unclean spirit leaving a man, yet returning with seven more spirits, being cleaned (or purged of leaven) is only the beginning of the growth process. To be made clean only prepares us for producing fruit. God's concern is for us to mature spiritually. If we stand still (resting on the laurels of our justification), the dark forces are going to pull us backwards. Uselessness invites disaster. We have to get away from the negative fixation of not doing and begin concentrating on doing. The consequences of not bearing fruit are graphically described in John 15:6. God's purpose, once we are cleaned, is to produce growth in us.

From the Archives: Featured Article

Death of a Lamb

by Staff

Since the church no longer keeps the Passover with the slaughter of a lamb, we miss important and poignant details that could enhance our observance. A personal experience with two ewes serves as a springboard to explain greater, spiritual lessons.

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