

John 15:2–11

A Ministry in the Word

Scripture Reading

Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.

Two Kinds of Branches — The Structure of Verses 2–7

Verse 2 introduces two cases: the branch in the vine that bears no fruit, and the branch that bears fruit. Darby's translation makes it plain: *as to every branch in me not bearing fruit, he takes it away; and as to every one bearing fruit, he purges it that it may bring forth more fruit.* Verses 3 through 5 then develop both cases in detail. Verse 6 returns to the first case to underscore it. Verse 7 returns to the second. The structure is deliberate: two cases, one or the other, with the full development of both, and then the return to both in the same order. There is no third case — no branch that is genuinely in Him and yet bears no fruit at all.

Eternal Security and the Branch Taken Away

The doctrine of eternal security is not weakened by the branch taken away. How can a branch be in Him and not bear fruit? The answer is that such a branch was not truly, vitally connected. The Lord said elsewhere, by their fruits you shall know them. No fruit is the mark of the branch that had no living connection. The fruit-bearing branch, on the other hand, cannot be torn away — to pluck it from the true vine is as impossible as plucking up the vine itself by the roots. The Jude 12 picture of trees plucked up by the roots is a different image — those had roots that could be pulled. The true branch is produced by the vine; it does not graft itself on independently.

The purging of the fruit-bearing branch is not cutting off but trimming. There may be growth going in the wrong direction. There may be an excess of leaves — the showy appearance of religious profession that the Lord found on the fig tree He came to in hunger. Plenty of leaves; no fruit. Purging removes what is not fruit and what hinders fruit. It is a work of love, and it is the Father who does it.

Chastening and Pruning — Not Quite the Same

Pruning and chastening are related but not identical. Chastening carries with it something of cause and effect — a wrong done, a consequence following. Pruning is not necessarily that. The Father may prune a branch simply because He desires more fruit from it. There need be no specific failure in the branch at all. A saint in trial with a clear conscience before God may take comfort in recognising that God's hand is upon him not for correction but for greater fruitfulness. The blind man of John 9 is the analogy: neither this man sinned nor his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. Our thoughts are not God's thoughts, and He may have more than one purpose in a single circumstance.

Ye Are Clean Through the Word — Not Through the Water

Verse 3 is almost parenthetical in the flow of the chapter, but it is perfectly placed. The Lord had just washed the disciples' feet in chapter 13, and Peter's confusion had to be corrected: the cleansing the Lord spoke of was not the washing of feet. *He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit* (John 13:10). There are two senses of clean: the individual's entire cleansing, and the state of the company. When the Lord said, *ye are not all clean*, He was not saying that any of the eleven was incompletely cleansed — He was saying that within the twelve, one was not clean at all. That was Judas Iscariot.

And Judas had no fruit. He was the branch that was to be taken away. Yet the other eleven could not detect him by looking at him — because leaves of profession can come from false branches just as easily as from true ones. The Lord sees through the leaves to the fruit, or its absence. Now ye are clean, the Lord says to those that remain, through the word which I have spoken unto you. Darby: *ye are already clean by reason of the word*. This assurance is placed here so that no branch bearing fruit might wonder whether the purging means something is wrong with their standing. It does not. Ye are already clean.

Abide in Me — The Discipline of a Branch

The command abide seems almost too simple. If the Lord had bid some great thing, would we not have done it? It sounds like Naaman before the Jordan. Yet abide is the Lord's word to His branches. And it is a profound word, because a branch that is genuinely attached to the vine is doing nothing other than abiding. The sap flows, the life flows, the fruit comes. The branch's part is to remain in that connection — not to manufacture fruit by its own effort, not to reach down independent roots into something else, but simply to be what it is: a branch on the vine.

The disciple who wrote these words was the one who leaned on the Lord's bosom. John knew something about abiding in a practical way that God could use him to convey it. And 1 John 2:24 shows the same truth in plain language: *if what ye have heard from the beginning abides in you, ye also shall abide in the Son and in the Father*. Abiding is timeless — not merely continuing over time but nestling in, settling there, belonging there. It is rest more than it is activity.

— *Study ends* —