

GRACE GAZETTE

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Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Hebrews 12:12-13

THE PURGING OF THE BRANCHES

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. John 15:2

One of the greatest stumbling blocks which the Jews (in the New Testament) faced was what they knew (or at least thought they did), after many years of being steeped in the scriptures, especially, Moses' law. This outcome was prophesied by Isaiah when he said. *"But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken."* (Isa 28:13)

Now, this result was, obviously, not some fault which lay in the word of GOD, nor was it a bad thing for them to read and study the scriptures. We know that the reality was; GOD had simply hid the truth from them, even as the LORD exclaimed, *"I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."* (Mat 11:25) And as Paul pointed out to the Corinthians, *"But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart."* (2Cor 3:15) This was also prophesied, by Isaiah, *"Behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid."* (Isa 29:14)

Due to the innate corruption and natural darkness of man's understanding it is impossible for him to see, even the clearest of truths found in the scriptures. The more that men rely upon their own understanding, the cloudier any grasp of truth is manifested. In this condition the more that they analyze and study the scriptures the less likely they are to arrive at the truth, except that the LORD should open their eyes that they might then see the simplicity of those things which the SPIRIT is pleased to hide from the wise and prudent and reveal unto babes.

In the movie, "SLING BLADE"; the main character, Carl, is a mentally challenged man who has been "rehabilitated" and released from an institution for the criminally insane. His case worker sets out to find him a job so that he might become a somewhat functional part of society. He takes Carl to a friend of his who owns a lawnmower repair shop to see if he might give Carl a job.

When they arrive at the shop the owner and his "technician/mechanic" have become exasperated in not being able to determine why this particular lawnmower will not crank up and run. While the caseworker, his friend, and the mechanic are talking, Carl goes over to the lawnmower and in just a moment he has figured out what the problem is. The mower had no gas in it. These men, with all of their expertise and learning, had what you might call the "paralysis of analysis". They ignored the simplest of diagnoses, in favor of a more complex solution, and thus they missed the real answer which was right before them all of the time.

This passage (chap.15) in the Gospel of John, concerning the TRUE VINE and HIS branches is often misapplied even though the language is quite clear as to who and what the VINE is as well as how fruit is borne on the branches. The grace of GOD and HIS provision and work in HIS people is not hidden here, except to those who seem to prefer the establishment of their own righteousness and are not quite convinced that HE does provide everything that they need.

I am always amazed when some, who profess to believe in “salvation by grace”, nonetheless feel compelled to complicate the simple message of the complete salvation and provision of blessing which is given to the sons of GOD by that grace, and turn it into a system of conditional blessing which depends upon their own activity. If one thing is clear in this passage it is this: CHRIST is the VINE from which the branches receive their life and through which all fruit bearing must come. The branches expend no activity or effort. They do not seek out the VINE nor do they have power to remain attached to the VINE or for that matter to detach themselves from it.

All work in tending to the VINE and the branches is expended by the VINEKEEPER and all fruit is borne by the attachment of the branches to the VINE. The branches only serve as a place where the VINE is pleased to manifest the fruit which stems from the VINE itself. The branches can produce nothing of themselves even as the LORD said, *“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.”* (John 15:5) The fruit is a demonstration of the VINE’s viability and not vice versa.

After introducing HIMSELF as the VINE, the LORD JESUS CHRIST, then states a very sobering fact. *“Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away.”* (John 15:2) It is clear from what HE says here, that unfruitful branches are only fit to be destroyed as HE reiterates in v.6. Some have concluded that HE is saying it is possible to be a true branch and yet be unfruitful due to disobedience or inattention to duty. Yet the context of the passage overrules that very idea, since HE goes on to say that those who “abide in HIM” are indeed fruitful as we see in v.5.

So when HE says *“every branch in me that beareth not fruit”*, HE is referring to those false professors such as those in Matthew 7:19-23. They are said to be *“in HIM”* only in a detached fashion as is seen by their ultimate destruction, even though they are convinced in their own minds of their great faithfulness and ongoing obedience. They have a name to live but are dead.

Actually I believe a more accurate reading (according to our understandings of the English language) of this statement would be, “Every branch which does not bear fruit in me” shall be cast away. That is, all of the “fruitbearing” which men claim to produce of their own will and determination shall be shown to be as that house which is built upon the sand, and is cast down when tested by that which is true. *“Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place.”* (Isa 28:17) CHRIST alone is the RIGHTEOUSNESS of HIS people.

None of those branches which bear fruit in HIM could ever possibly be cast away, since HE will keep that which is HIS unto the end. *“Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.”* (John 13:1) HE would be fighting against HIMSELF and HIS purpose to manifest HIS grace in HIS people if HE were to destroy that work which HE performs.

Then HE doubles down on this very concept when HE clearly states that the VINEKEEPER, (i.e. the HUSBANDMAN) purges (i.e., cleanses) every fruit-bearing branch that it may produce fruit in abundance. This is the very purpose which HE has ordained the creation and redemption of HIS people for. *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”* (Eph 2:10) *“Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”* (Titus 2:14) HE will thus produce fruit in those branches which HE has grafted into the vine, and does sustain continually unto this end.

How then can this fruit be seen? In what fashion is it demonstrated? HE said; *“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”* (John 13:35) Many would tell us that this fruit is seen in evangelism, morality, good works, or some even tell us it can be measured by the letter of a man’s doctrine. Yet CHRIST told HIS disciples, *“This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.”* (John 15:12) *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”* (Gal 5:22-23) *“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.”* (1John 3:14) mam