

Cleansed by The Knife

by Fred Tomlinson

This sermon delves into the concept of being cleansed by God, using the analogy of a vine and its branches to illustrate the process of purification and growth in the Christian life. It emphasizes the importance of abiding in God, allowing Him to prune and cleanse us for the purpose of bearing much fruit for His glory. The speaker highlights the need for God's interference in our lives, guiding us through challenges and transformations to fulfill His greater purpose, even when we may not fully understand His ways.

Scripture: John 15:1, Romans 8:28, 2 Corinthians 4:10, Psalm 51:10, Colossians 1:10, John 15:2, Hebrews 12:6, Philippians 1:6, Ephesians 2:10

Topics: "Cleansing by God", "Abiding in Christ"

Description

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Transcript

It's lovely to be together and I'd like you to open your Bibles with me to the book of John's Gospel and we'll read a few verses there in just a few minutes. So clearly not every one of you have been with me in the earlier sessions but if I could make a connection with two of the earlier sessions before I go forward so a couple of weeks ago I titled the message Cleansed by Blood and we talked about the redemption that makes our acceptance by God and our fellowship with God a possibility. In another session following that I talked about being cleansed by water and we talked of the ongoing, the continuing need for the quickened word of God to be our nourishment and at the same time it is the cleansing word of God to us.

Today I'd like to talk about being cleansed by the knife and frankly I pondered that title and I frankly was tempted to soften it but it is as the Lord gave it to me and it's as the Lord put it in Scripture so I must let it stand and I believe that what we'll look at for a little while in this session is something that is perhaps little really understood, I mean truly understood and yet at the same time is hugely important as a topic and as an experience. Jesus in his gracious word uses a visual aid for the people who are standing listening to him which would be very vivid to them because he was talking about a vine and the hearers who were around him were very familiar with vines and vineyards it was somehow part or not far away from their

everyday life and so I'd like to read to you a few verses from John chapter 15 where Jesus is talking about the vine. John chapter 15 for those of you who are turning there and I'm reading from verse 1, Jesus speaking He said, I am the true vine and my father is the husbandman 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 you 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, you are the branches he that abideth in me and I in him the same bringeth forth much fruit for without me you 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 you abide in me and my words abide in you you shall ask what you will and it shall be done unto you herein is my father glorified that you bear much fruit so shall you be my disciples Amen The Old Testament has quite a bit to say about vines and I'm not going to try and talk about all those references right now but it's safe to say that frequently in the Old Testament the vine symbolises the people of God perhaps the most significant passage in the Old Testament along this line is found in Isaiah chapter 5 where the reference is to the house of Israel and in fact it goes on to speak there of God's grace and loving care for that people and yet here they are, they've turned out to be producing wild grapes and as a result of that God threatens that he's going to destroy them and to do it he would use the Assyrian army now here in the New Testament we've got Jesus speaking and he says I am the true vine the fact is what he's saying is that he is the root and he is the trunk of the vine, we are the branches you know the most notable feature of the vine is its purpose its purpose is not its primary purpose that we're thinking about the purpose that we're looking at today is that which is its sole purpose in other words it has no other purpose for existing and that purpose is that it be a fruit bearing tree this and this alone is God's timeless purpose for his people in the earth so this is true for you and for me as we are gathered today each of us exist as a branch with this sole purpose of bringing forth fruit and nothing else in our lives or around the activities of our lives must in any way eclipse this we're talking about God's primary concern for you God's primary concern for me the Apostle Paul writing to the Romans he calls it fruit unto God which is a wonderful expression that's in chapter 7 of Romans and the fourth verse and before we go any further let's just consider perhaps how we should understand even this idea of bringing fruit unto God what we know, I know it very clearly in my heart and I reckon that very likely everyone listening to me knows it in their heart as well and it's this, that we have nothing and we can produce nothing that is worthy of God I have nothing in myself, I can't somehow produce anything at all that would be worthy of God John chapter 15 here aids us in this because as we've noticed from the reading Jesus says we are the branches let me just insert a word there just to emphasise the point we are but branches, that's what we are we are but branches who are privileged by the grace of God and by the miracle of redemption to be enabled to drink in to ourselves the holy sap of the vine and then holding its fruit in our lives and as it were to use a modern word, showcasing it or displaying it or making it manifest, making manifest the sacred fruit which is the product of our abiding in Him and this in-drinking of what I call the holy sap and then in turn offering that back in our worship to God so returning it to Him from whom it came fruit unto God, it's entirely of Him any part or role we have in this that I refer to as the process is entirely God's grace to each and every one of us without exception and this is wonderfully true this fruit that we are talking about at this moment let's be sure we know what we are thinking about this is not measured by the number of converts that each of us have been able to make in the course of our lives this fruit is not measured by what we perceive to be perhaps in our foolishness our successful ministry, something we've created by our ministry something that's come into existence by our ministerial activities again I say it would be in our foolishness that we would think that but nevertheless human minds do think those kinds of things this fruit is not measured by your musical talent or any talent that we have for that matter which we

feel is being engaged in the work of God this fruit that Jesus is having us think about here on this occasion is the golden cluster of His authentic life it's the cluster or the product of the holy sap which is producing in human lives which have been redeemed by His blood and now by His Holy Spirit He is enabling that authentic Christ life to be manifested in us the Apostle Paul puts it so wonderfully in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 and there's a wonderful broader context but I'm breaking into the passage here he says in verse 10 of 2 Corinthians 4 always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus that or if you like in order that the life of Jesus might be manifest in our body and then he goes on almost in a sense to reinforce or highlight what he's just said for we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh how much more boldly can the Apostle declare such a wonderful and magnificent truth he said I'm talking about your bodies, you, the real you the person that you are right now, this body that you live in and then in the second verse I just read to you again I'm suggesting just to make it really clear he said I'm talking about your mortal flesh not in some sort of mystical vague sense but he said right here in this body in which I live the life of Jesus is to be made manifest it's to be presented there this beloved is the fruit that God is looking for in each and every one of our lives the very best thing that I can offer to God is the product of his gracious redeeming work and now the enabling of his Holy Spirit who abides in our inner being manifesting the life also of Jesus without digressing more than just half a step away from this that I'm saying it's interesting reading in Paul's writings to see how he uses the various titles of the Lord Jesus Christ with variations, you will have noted them in your reading without going into that and I'd like to but without going into it right now let me just point out that when he uses the word Jesus as he does in this passage he's talking about the life that God lived in the person that we call Jesus he's talking about the soul life that was demonstrated and manifested in a real man but he was truly God incarnated but it was being lived out it was being expressed in the terms of flesh in other words it's one thing to read if we only had the opening verse of the whole Bible in the beginning God well we say that sounds wonderful and we want to know a lot more about him and then God might talk about his omniscience and his omnipresence and his great qualities and features but when God became a man we saw this eternal holy God manifesting himself in what we would call human terms that is through human flesh we were enabled to relate to God in a way that we could not possibly relate to God otherwise now Jesus came for more than that but that is what he did in the course of his life he showed us what the God life looks like being expressed through a mortal body and Paul is saying here the same is true for you in your mortal body this same life of Jesus is to me made manifest now once again in talking about the vine and the branches the fact is that except the branch abides in the vine this fruit is impossible even in the natural the grapes are impossible unless that branch is connected and is part of the vine root itself and this is equally true and you know even the wood as it were of the branch is of no value and to endorse this I am not turning there but you could read back in the book of Ezekiel in chapter 15 I think the first five verses speak about this that the wood of the vine is useless you can't make anything out of it there is nothing you can do with it it is utterly useless it has no value it is just zero it is good only to be burned Jesus said in verse 6 here and on he is saying that without him we can do nothing at all that is in verse 5 for without me you can do nothing isn't this important for us to really appreciate we can give a sort of nonchalant sort of nod to some of these statements but you know it is truly important that we realise that you may be very very intelligent you may have some high and lofty role in life and wow people with your accomplishments or creations or whatever it is but in this realm before holy God I have nothing to offer him nothing at all anything I have at all came from him uniquely and has been imparted to me and that is his grace and this is being reinforced here as we think about these things relative to the vine that in and of ourselves we can't produce this life without me you can do nothing it is a common and huge mistake that detached branches try to live and express the Christian life that is a huge

mistake we are never told in the scriptures to try and be like Jesus the Bible doesn't tell me that it is not left for my effort in fact there is a great illustration again to digress way back in the Levitical priesthood the priests had to take their garments of glory off before they entered more closely to the Lord's presence and they had to bathe themselves they had to put on linen clothes and the scripture specifically says so there would be no sweat because God will not have sweat he will not have man glorying in his presence and we need to recognize that I can of my own self do nothing I cannot live the Christian life apart from him but when he speaks here about abiding in the vine this is an incredible truth that is being opened up for us he is talking about a union listen to this a union of spirits John says on one occasion he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit we are talking here about a branch in the vine we are talking about a mingling of the two abiding in it is Christ in you you will notice how the apostle Paul he really gets this in a big way and he is the one who talks about Christ in you the hope of glory Christ being in us if any man have not the spirit of Christ he is none of his and then at the same time as we go on watching his readings we see him using the words in Christ Christ in you in Christ as a matter of fact for your interest the phrase in Christ is used by the apostle Paul no fewer than 75 times in the letters that he wrote in Christ we have our own spirits and our own minds on fire as well this great truth this is not trying to live the Christian life it is not being religious it is not going to church and doing our best no not at all it is having the very life of God via this holy sack that we are so privileged to drink into our spirits all quickened by the spirit of God Christ liveth in me says the apostle can you say that today? Amen this word abide includes this and so much more I think we could say it also includes the idea that this merging this union, life is to be maintained it has got to be ongoing this is not an experience that we had 10 years ago or a prayer that we prayed 8 years ago or whatever it is this is speaking about a moment by moment union that is being maintained Amen now then we read there in this passage in the second verse let me reread the second verse of our chapter every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away and every branch that beareth fruit he purges it that it may bring forth more fruit this is the word that can be understood and translated cleansing he cleanses he cleanses the vine and he cleanses the development of what we saw some minutes ago as being the overall purpose of God that we should be fruit bearing well he we are told here is engaged in cleansing it's an ongoing thing in so far as we abide in him and we allow him to have his way there is a cleansing process that goes on and the process is going on for the express purpose of increasing the fruit that we are able to return to God in thanksgiving and to glorify his name and what Jesus tells us in this important passage and he's telling these here is that know all about vines and all about vineyards and all about grapes and all about wine and all about husband men who take care of it all Jesus is saying here that he is referring to that is so necessary is done with the husband man's knife of course more specifically his reference here is to his father so it's with the father's knife and pausing right there should give to each one of us a sense of great peace whereas we've started with this almost frightening title of being cleansed by the knife could sound very frightening but the important thing is who's holding the knife and it's our heavenly father who's holding it as it were as we shall see I trust as we go forward because the question is how should we understand this knife factor that Jesus has chosen to introduce I've never heard anyone say never read it I don't make a habit of reading a lot of books I've got a number of books here that I've gathered over many years now but I'm not a great book reader I read this book that I'm looking at here mostly by far and I don't go listening to everybody and their uncle on YouTube and it's so important but I'm doing it on purpose for a minute it is important that we discover where there are teachers who are able to teach us God and lead us into a deeper union with him when you've found someone or they have found you or God has led you to someone seize that moment you've heard me talk about my earlier experience that I shared with so we're not going to like a smorgasbord we're dipping in a bit here and a bit there and a bit somewhere else that's very much the way it works for so many people who profess to be Christians

today and you end up with a mind that's completely confused on so many issues when you sense you've found someone through whom the Spirit of God but I remember being away I took some time off I'd become an elder in the church in England at this time I was privileged maybe it was inappropriate I don't know but I was brought into the eldership of a very significant work of God at age 29 that's pretty young to be an elder but I can remember during that period and being so blessed by the ministry I'd been exposed to one of the principal speakers said to me on one occasion he said Fred you sit in these meetings like blotting paper because most younger people don't even know what blotting paper is and I won't stop to tell you to share something from the scriptures from time to time I remember being away and I stayed in a we call it a caravan a house trailer that belonged to my uncle and his wife in North Wales and I was there for this one purpose I needed to hear God because I felt Lord I don't want to be I don't want to reveal your truth to me I'm not saying these things nor did I think at that time in terms of well I need to be exceptional not at all I just needed to know that I had the true word of God in me I didn't know the expression cut and paste back then I don't think it existed actually it's common today as many of you know I picked up on the words of the apostle when he speaks of John the Baptist he said he was the voice of one crying in the wilderness he wasn't an echo he was original God had given him something to say and he was saying it I'd like to believe that your passion and your heart is as mine when you preach to someone a lot and then you get a chance to speak or say something even without trying to pick up things that have been said this is difficult because you're preaching the same truth but as that one man who I'm thinking of said to me on one occasion he said Fred in the end we've only got one thing to say the word can come through the uniqueness of who you are so then back to this text with this question how should I understand the knife that is spoken of here what I was saying I've never heard anyone say this at any point in my life but I believe that the knife is God's interference in your life never heard anyone say that before it's God's interference God and you will know that this is true I'm sure God has a reputation for interfering in our lives he interferes with our status quo I've preached before on the Jesus who overturns tables well he does that he's done that in my life and he continues to do it in my life after all isn't this what the husbandman does he interferes in the life and the existence of the vine I mean I thought to myself this is a wild stretch of my imagination but what if the branches of the vine could speak to the husbandman and what's that he's got in his hand isn't that a sharp knife yes it is hey what's he doing what's happening he starts to cut away at the bark cut away at the branch what are they thinking at that point do the branches talk excuse me for being so foolish what's going on with the farmer he's radical he's a spiritual stump we have vines this is the raspberry capital of Canada this town where we live we see the vines we see what the farmers do to the vines once they've finished bearing their fruit you know this is happening in your life I don't know whether you're as aware of it as you should be I hope that the spirit of God is able to highlight this to you that what is happening to you I don't know what's going on you don't really know what's going on in my life except you know a lot more about me than I know about you but I can tell you if you are a man or a woman of God if you've been integrated into the great vine you've tasted of this holy sacred step rest assured that God has started something in your life that he is intent upon completing when we're in his presence in this world he's operating by his spirit and he's interfering with my thoughts he's interfering with my priorities he's interfering with my values he's overturning tables not because he just loves throwing everybody's tables down or he just wants to mess everybody's life up no, we're told this he's doing it for this express reason he's cutting away everything that needs to be removed in order that there becomes more fruit in and around your life that's what's going on I think ever so many of us miss this because we're just so busy with life and we don't realise it I want to encourage you to wake up receive that as it comes in good spirit but we need to wake up to a plan and a purpose this can be illustrated from various people in the Bible the man that comes to my mind quite readily is Joseph in the Old Testament and you know the story of

Joseph I'm sure but do you remember as a young guy he seemed to be his father's pet and frankly I think when I first see Joseph if I didn't know any more I think this man is what today would be called a spoiled brat and that's certainly the way the brothers thought about him do you remember the story let me just drop down quickly do you remember the Midianite traders who came by do you remember the pit into which he was thrown and then he was sold to the Midianite traders and they just took him away the brothers saying you'll remember Potiphar's wife you'll remember the story you then will remember the prison he was taken to prison you'll remember also the baker that he met in the prison you'll remember the cup bearer that he met in the prison you'll remember the dreams that these men had and you'll remember how Joseph interpreted them and then he really got let down there was a deal and the cup bearer got afraid and he forgot about him for the most part anyway but the point that I'm making to the best of our reckoning Joseph spent 12 years in prison and God was engineering every aspect of it and he knew it not he didn't know he thought what a mess I've made of my life and so on and he's talking to me or feeling exactly that today what a fool I've been to do that to go there to not do something else whatever it happens to be but the fact is if God has chosen you his eye never deviates from you his heart is towards you he loves you with a passion and he's got a plan the fact of the matter is although Joseph was completely ignorant of what the plan was behind the scenes he knew what was going on on the stage where he lived his life but he didn't know that God was in control of everything and the fact of the matter is God needed to deal with Joseph and only God knew how to do that only God knows how to deal with me and how to deal with you and he knew where he wanted to get Joseph God had a standing plan for his life and God needed to work in him the fact has just been slightly more specific he needed to be in Egypt that was a long way from where he'd started out he needed to be in Egypt for God's purpose to find its fulfilment and he needed to have a good reputation in Egypt in order for him to be selected for what he was selected for and God engineered the circumstances he got him to Egypt he got him into a mess as it were but the fact is in the end that really was the key to him becoming the second only to Pharaoh in Egypt wonderful he became a saviour to his family and there's a tremendous parallel that I can find to a greater than Joseph in that Amen but you know God is always beyond he's beyond what I'm thinking about him he's beyond what I'm even thinking about myself his plan and purpose for my life is more than I could come up with and if I tried to come up with anything I'd mess everything up in the process you know we've got some wonderful scriptures in our Bible we've got Romans 8, 28 you know that verse don't you moreover you know what we're basically looking at is that God is ordaining everything to come to fulfil his purpose in the end and I'd like to just give you my sort of very unconventional translation of Romans 8, 28 and we know that all things work together for good to them that love God to them who are called according to his purpose here's my unconventional translation things fall apart and come to nothing so that his greater purpose can be realised that's what's happening this is what the pruning is all about and it's it's God he needs we can say well look the I'm trying to think how to put this really but you know his pruning is not just dealing with dead wood this is the point that I want to make his pruning deals with good wood his pruning has to do with living branches his pruning has to do with branches that are born good fruit last year but this is how God thinks but in the new fruit that he intends to produce there has to be a new beginning or to put it another way his work his work always is the product of resurrection the new life and this makes no sense to the natural man because in the natural mind you know we have some success well that was great we'll build on that we'll develop this success and take it to another level but the self life the flesh life must be continuously brought to death in order for the resurrection life to have its way and to produce that which God intends to produce in each one of our lives that's what it's all about I know John Harrison listening to me knows exactly who I'm speaking about there was a woman who was in our church in Liverpool years ago and she wrote a song which we thought was magnificent and it was about the cross of the Lord Jesus

and she talks about Jesus thy cross is sweet to me a gift unspeakably great and she goes on I won't quote all of the hymn but the cross operating in our lives and she says here where all earthly hopes do cease the new creation springs this beloved is the way of God so this isn't a call to despair because you know we've messed up it's certainly not producing a sense that we need to be afraid of what God's going to do but he has that fruitfulness in his heart and he knows what needs to be cut away he knows how to cut it away he knows when the right time is for those changes to be made in our lives and you know this is this is the this is God's way we tend to think to ourselves this is the way we've always thought and God if he was going to respond to that he'd probably say well that's the problem friend you just keep doing what's been good in the past but I'm wanting to do a new thing I'm wanting to open up new doors new spheres of experience of God and of expression of his inward life and of ministry that will glorify his name he knows exactly what's happening in each one of our lives Amen you know I think to myself where would I be today had God not interrupted my plans you know perhaps perhaps your life perhaps you're well on in life and everything's neat and tidy and you feel you know it's all good you know how glad I am that God overturned those things and is working to will and to do of his good pleasure and you know I mentioned this earlier but I'm getting close to 80 and by his grace and in spite of me he's kept the best wine to the end of the feast that's his reputation actually and I wonder if today dear beloved whether you are ready to just bow down before God and and say Lord interrupt my plans my niece in orderly life I give myself to you thank you for not letting me have my way in everything you knew best mine be the glory perhaps however you might word your expression to God basically was saying Lord don't just wash my feet not even my hands and my head wash my heart wash every part of me cleanse me Lord Keith Green put it well in one line of a song he wrote years ago wash me anew in the wine of your blood he'll introduce his word which will further cleanse us in a different way he'll introduce his handling of our lives and his pruning of our lives which will cleanse us in yet other ways but his heart towards us always is to cleanse us liberate us wash us and cause us to bear not just fruit not just more fruit but much fruit for his name's sake and for his glory Amen and apart from you being notified it also gives us a sense of community in this odd situation in which we are that there are others who are identifying themselves with us and maybe you have a comment you want to leave there are those who do that and we're certainly grateful for those who pray for us and for those who support us and if you want the messages in a podcast form so God bless you in Jesus' name I pray Amen

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