

Change Our Heart's - Part 5

by Richard Owen Roberts

The speaker discusses God's love and hate, remedial judgments, and the importance of bearing fruit that is in keeping with repentance.

Duration: 1:18:34

Scripture: Isaiah 63:15, Isaiah 63:17, Matthew 6:33, John 15:1-8

Topics: "Gods Love", "Repentance"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding God's love and hatred. He encourages the audience to study the Bible and search for references to God's love and hatred to shape their thinking and behavior. The speaker also mentions a classic passage on remedial judgments that he believes has not been adequately addressed. He urges the audience to spend time meditating on this passage and allowing it to deeply impact their lives. The sermon concludes with a personal anecdote about the speaker's early work experience and a metaphor about branches being gathered and burned.

Transcript

I have three particular things on my mind and heart at this time. And I've been trying very hard this weekend to speak briefly and have succeeded wonderfully well, by my standards at least. And I surely must do so this morning, so I must be very quick about two of the matters.

And then the third will be the message, really. I do want, again, to thank you for the privilege of being here with you, Maggie. And I have always felt deeply grateful for the privilege of these conferences at the Cedars.

We do find that the Lord arranges our lives so that they fall in very pleasant places. And we certainly have found one of these pleasant places here at the Cedars. And lovely things and things that one doesn't really hope will ever happen do happen.

Maggie and I drove down from Illinois this time because we have another assignment tomorrow. We're given the privilege of going to William Jewell College in Missouri and appraising the library of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, which Midwestern Baptist in Kansas City desires to buy and has asked me to help them with that. Now, never in all my life did I think I could get the handle with my own hands the private library of Charles Spurgeon.

But that falls as my delightful task this week. So we do thank the Lord for all the lovely things. Oh, occasionally there is a hard blow.

And someone thinks they're doing God's service by giving us a nasty crack. But nonetheless, the Lord is gracious and merciful. And we delight in the things that he brings across our path.

Now, the first time I spoke at this particular weekend conference, I raised an issue which I knew would alarm and trouble many of you. And probably at least half of those who've said anything to me at all have said they're having a problem with God hating the unrepentant sinner. I'm glad that's troubled you.

I've let it set for a couple of days in the hopes that it would trouble you even more deeply. But I think the sum of the problem that people have, and this has been put to me a number of times, is a very direct question. Are you saying that God hates unrepentant sinners or unrepentant believer? Now, just think about that.

Does that definitely, does that not definitely prove how far from the truth we have fallen? What under God's sun is an unrepentant believer? How could anyone have such a ridiculous notion? Did not our brother Claude speak to this very powerfully yesterday when he quoted our Savior? Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and you do not do what I say? Did he not say, repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand? How, then, can you be a believer and an unrepentant person? And did he not also ask, or command rather, if you love me, keep my commandment. It simply is no such thing as an unrepentant believer. But remember, please, that both repentance and faith refer not to singular actions, but to ongoing activity.

One is not a Christian because they repented and believed. We live repentantly, and we live believingly. Having started to repent, I spend my life in repentance.

Having started to believe, I spend my life believing. What does it matter that I had a moment of repentance or a moment of faith? That gains nothing. It has no meaning or consequence.

If you doubt it, read the book of Hebrews on your knees. But remember also that it is from the Lord's perspective that we're speaking. We're talking about God hating the unrepentant sinner.

Do you remember that early on in his relationship with Peter, our Lord said, I've got a new name for you, Simon, the rock. I mean, Peter was Simon, and Peter, the rock. Now, was Peter a rock when Christ named him Simon? My word, no.

It was a long time becoming what he was named. Our Lord treated him not as he was, but as he was going to become. When we say the Lord hates the unrepentant sinner, he's not referring to that lost and wayward child of yours who's living in rebellion, but has been the subject of his mother's and dad's prayers.

And God is at work within him. And maybe it's still seven years down the line, but that child is going to come to repentance and faith. God is loving that child who he is bringing to himself.

Don't let us lose sight of that. We're talking about God hating the unrepentant sinner, that person who goes through their life in refusing to repent and believe. And with God, as I urge you to realize, to stop saying to people, God loves you just the way you are.

God loves them in their repentance and in their faith. And he wants them to change. He's not willing that they should perish.

And we need to be warning them, you cannot go on in your unrepentance and your unbelief. You must turn from your sin and yourself to Jesus Christ. And use words that will help them instead of words that will encourage them in the wrong direction.

But I need say no more about that. But I do hope, though, with all my heart that you get serious about your Bible. God intended you should.

And if you're going to have any further trouble with the matter, do what I've urged others to do. Get your concordance out. Look up every single reference to God's love and God's hatred.

And you will discover the truth. And God will govern your thinking and your conduct hereafter. Now, that was the first thing I just needed to add a word to.

The second thing is, I've been sort of wishing for a fifth opportunity to preach this weekend. And that's not, of course, sensible or reasonable. And I really haven't expected it.

But I have felt that none of us have dealt with the most classic passage on the subject of remedial judgments. And while I need not go into it this morning, I must call it to your attention and urge each of you to set aside several hours, sometime soon, to carefully work your way through the passage. I'm simply going to draw it to your attention and help you to get a sense of how to pursue it with care.

So I'm making reference now to the prophet Isaiah. And I'm urging you to turn just for a moment. As I said, I'm not going to open it up with any detail.

But I just want to help you to capture a sense of how to proceed in the study and in the prayerful assimilation of this passage. So Isaiah 63, and it actually covers from verse 7 through the end of the chapter and on into 64. So we're dealing with more than a chapter and a half here.

This is actually a lament. I'll just read a small portion of it and pinpoint things you need to face squarely. I pick it up at verse 7. So Isaiah 63 at verse 7. I make mention of the loving kindnesses of the Lord, the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord has granted us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he has granted them according to his compassion and according to the multitude of his loving kindnesses.

For he said, surely they are my people, sons, who will not deal falsely. So he became their Savior. In all their affliction, he was afflicted.

And the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and in his mercy, he redeemed them. And he lifted them and he carried them all the days of old.

But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. Therefore, he turned himself to become their enemy. He fought against them.

Lay hold of that. Understand that these remedial judgments come from the heart of a God who is broken by the misconduct, by the stubbornness, by the rebellion of his people. He selected them.

He said, surely these are my sons. Oh, oh, I must be able to count on them. They're the very ones I have chosen.

I have loved them, not because of any excellencies in them, not because of their size or consequence. But I have loved them because I have loved them. And surely I can depend upon them.

But no, they rebelled, they grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned himself and became their enemy. He fought against them.

What could depict the remedial judgment more effectively than that? A remedial judgment is a time when God has turned himself against his own beloved. And I want to ask you, I want to give it to you even as an assignment in the hope that you will take it as that. Prayerfully work your way through each line of the passage I have outlined.

63, verse 7, through the end of 64, you will see statement after statement after statement. Meditate on these statements. Let them become part and parcel of who you are.

Look at the line in verse 15. Where are thy zeal and thy mighty deeds? The stirrings of thy heart and thy compassion are restrained toward me. Or 17, why, O Lord, dost thou cause us to stray from thy way and harden our hearts from fearing thee? Let this passage become a vital part of who you are in all the days to come.

And recognize deeply that these remedial judgments come from the heart of a God who is deeply grieved and injured by the conduct of his own people. And let me pray that, indeed, this passage will touch us. O God, don't let these dear brothers and sisters treat this passage in a cavalier fashion.

Don't let them neglect it any longer. Bring it to them with great power in the days immediately before us. Deeply prick and affect their hearts and their lives.

Move them so greatly by your broken heart that they will weep for the churches of the land who have redoubt and grieved your Holy Spirit. Make of us a body of people who will care about the very things you care about, who will see every situation as you see it, who will feel what you feel, and who will respond in ways appropriate. Grant us this grace, we plead, in the dear name of Jesus.

And now my text for my final opportunity of ministry to you. The Gospel of John, chapter 15. The question was asked last evening.

Are there New Testament passages that deal with these matters of remedial judgment? Well, yes, there are. They don't necessarily look the same. The truth is couched in different language and in some instances, there's a thrust that's somewhat distinct even from some of the Old Testament passages.

But I want to read the first eight verses of the Gospel of John, where once again, the Father's heart is so clearly unfolded. And the sorting out of the fruitful and the unfruitful is clearly presented. And where the remedial work of God is carried on in the form of pruning in this particular passage.

So let us with great care read verses 1 through 8 of John 15. I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine dresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away.

And every branch that bears fruit, he prunes it that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you.

As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you. Unless you abide in me. I am the vine.

You are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, he bears much fruit. For apart from me, you can do nothing.

If anyone does not abide in me, he's thrown away as a branch and dries up. And they gather them, and they cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you by this.

Is my father glorified that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciple? Now, it's important before we approach the actual wording of the passage that we understand the timing of this particular matter. This is obviously John 15. That follows 14 and 13.

It precedes 17. We must understand that this is our Lord's final discourse. So these words are spoken just almost immediately before.

He's going out into the garden, and Judas coming with the religious leader and the soldier and taking our Lord captive and dragging him into the city and subjecting him to the mock trial and the great and awful abuse that he suffered on our behalf. But we must also have clearly in mind that these words are not addressed to the 12, but to the 11, for one has already left. Judas had slipped out and went to make the final arrangements for the betrayal of Christ.

We can't possibly get the correct interpretation of this passage unless we realize that Judas is God. The theme itself is one of the most frequently reoccurring themes in all of the New Testament, the theme of fruit. I want to take a few moments to give you just a brief rundown of some of what our New Testament teach us concerning the subject of fruit.

Many of you will immediately recognize the words that I quote. Therefore, bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance. Words spoken by whom? John.

They're recorded both in Matthew chapter 3, verse 8, and in Luke chapter 3. Therefore, bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance. For someone to claim that they are repentant and yet not to produce the fruits of repentance is merely to set themselves forth as a hypocrite. We don't live in doubt, either concerning ourselves or others, in regard to the matter of repentance.

If a person says they have repented, then we simply observe, do we see the fruit of repentance? And if there is no fruit, then there is no root. If there is no repentance, there will be no fruit. And if there is no fruit, there has been no repentance.

It's that simple. Those who repent bring forth fruit that is in keeping with or that is appropriate to repentance. But John also, in the same passages in Matthew and in Luke, also said the ax is already laid to the root of the tree.

Every tree, therefore, that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Matthew 3.10, Luke 3.10. So fruit, in keeping with repentance, and the ax, the gospel ax, already laid at the tree at its very roots to cut down that which does not bear fruit. But now referring to our Lord himself.

Listen to these words from Matthew chapter 7, verses 15 to 21. Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits.

Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles are there. Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but the rotten tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree produce good fruit.

Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruit. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven but he who does the will of my Father in heaven.

As I said, Matthew 7, 15 to 21, you find as well the parallel in Luke chapter 6, verses 43 to 44. So whether or not a person is truly a servant of God is readily ascertained, our Lord makes it clear, by their fruit. If their fruit is rotten, you know that they are a bad tree.

Now, I ask you to be sure to understand that the message of John 15 was to 11 and not to 12, because there was a rotten tree in the band. That rotten tree did produce bad fruit. And you can think immediately of some of Judas' bad fruit.

When that woman took that costly ointment and was pouring out her soul's affection on Jesus in that lavish way, the reaction of Judas immediately proved he had rotten fruit. Now, we're not told a great deal about the man and his other activities, but we understand, don't we, that he did have his hand in the purse. There's many questions, but what there was, a bad tree, his rotten fruit, in the person of Jesus, right in the midst of that small band of 12.

And we're not taken by surprise, when in our churches today, it becomes quite apparent that there are bad trees producing rotten trees. But always, you see, we can recognize the validity or the falsity of one's claim to faith on the basis of the fruit that they produce. Let me draw your attention now to Matthew, chapter 12, at verse 33, where our Lord says, either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree rotten and its fruit rotten, for the tree is known by its fruit.

And just because somebody claims to be a Christian, and yet demonstrates nothing but rotten fruit, why should I accept their claim to Christianity? Why should I not do just what my Lord says here? If somebody says they're a true believer, and yet they produce nothing but rotten fruit, why should I not label them as a rotten tree? Make the tree good. Make the tree evil. Understand the situation.

We're not called upon to be forever judging one another, but we are fruit inspectors. And we must watch and see whether a person is bearing fruit that is appropriate to or in keeping with repentance. While our heart's desire is not to be censorious, how do we help people if we do not discern where they're at? And many a person who desperately needs help right in the church is regarded as a good tree, even when their fruit proves that they are a bad tree.

We must ask God to give us such sensitivity, such discerning spirits, that we are able to identify the good and the bad, and to render that help that is appropriate, that the Holy Spirit of God would enable us to give if we were truly caring and discerning. But let me draw your attention as well to Matthew chapter 13, a passage beginning really in verse 3 and running through verse 8, and then picked up again by our Saviour in verse 18 and running on through 23. The parable of the seed.

And we're not going to go into the details of the parable. They're well known to us. But I do want to call your attention to these words.

Other seed fell on the good soil, and it yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. Now, that helps us to understand that this matter of observing the fruit, of being fruit inspectors, is not a matter of regarding a tree as a bad tree because there's only thirtyfold increase. And not commending another because there's a hundredfold increase.

No, the great issue is not what degree of increase is there. It's acceptable if it's a hundred. It's acceptable if it's sixty.

It's acceptable if it's thirty. The problem is that tree that produces bad fruit. So please, please, please, don't be analyzing either yourself or one another on the basis of the quantity of the fruit.

The quality. Is it true fruit? Is it good? And of course, that parable is dealt with in Mark and Luke as well. But again, in Matthew 13, another passage dealing with the subject of fruit.

Starting at verse 24, running to verse 30. Gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them. Gather the wheat into my barn.

You remember the circumstances, don't you? A field was sown with good seed. But then by night, an enemy came and sowed tares in the same field. And so the question comes up.

Should we go out there into the field and root up the tares and get rid of them and our saviors and suck them, let them grow up together. And at the time of the harvest, then you gather the tares into bundles and throw them in the fire. And you gather the wheat and bring it into the fire.

And again, you see a real caution now about this matter of fruit. It's not our task to be trying to root out of the assembly in the blind stupidity those that are there. They're there.

Some force the church by their conduct to deal with that. Their sins are so flagrant. And vicious and contrary to the will and purpose of God that we deal with that.

But we understand, don't we, that throughout our lifetime in the church, there are those we can care. And our great concern is not in poking around in the lives of others, but in being certain that our own lives are bearing those fruits in keeping with repentance. So our Lord is giving us a balance in these various perspectives that he provides on the subject of fruit.

And I call to your mind as well, Matthew 21. I'm reading just a single verse 19. Seeing a lone fig tree by the road, he came to it and he found nothing on it except leaves only.

And he said to it, no longer shall there ever be any fruit on you. And at once, the fig tree withered. So many a tree is left standing.

Many a tree produces leaves for years and no fruit. And the Lord does not deal with it promptly. But there are occasions when he does single out a fruitless tree and places his curse upon it.

We must all understand in this whole area of remedial and final judgments that God does often let something go on for a considerable period. I have reminded you on former occasions of the temple in Jerusalem. I've pinpointed to some of you the obvious fact that while we do not know the precise year in

which our Savior was crucified, we reckon it to be somewhere between the year 33 and 35.

And just for ease, we'll say he was crucified in the year 35. Not at all insisting on the accuracy of that date, but just to aid you in your thinking. He had already placed his curse upon the temple in Jerusalem.

He had said concerning that temple, your house is left unto you desolate. They continued their traditions and their forms in that temple. So if I'm anywhere near correct in saying the curse was placed upon them in the year 35, that means that they continued as they were for 35 years when God himself never came anywhere near that temple.

And yet he left it standing during that 35-year period. And then, just as he promised, an alien horde invaded the city of Jerusalem and so totally destroyed the temple that there was not one single stone left standing upon another. But there's many a life that is fruitless, that is left to go on for 35 years.

And many a church that God has forever abandoned, that is allowed to go on pretending to be something it is not and never can be. But our great concern is our own heart and life. Am I bearing fruit that is in keeping with repentance? Is my church bearing fruit that is pleasing unto God? There are other passages.

I'll not give detail. I could mention Matthew 21, verses 33 to 43, the parable of the vineyard and the wicked tenant farmers. I could mention John 12, verse 24.

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. And some here who have long desired to be fruitful are not yet true fruit-bearing Christians, because you've never died.

You're stopped. But when that grain in the earth lies bearing and begins to rot away, but the life within that seed suddenly springs forth and the vine begins to appear. And in the course of God's time, the fruit.

I could mention also the Gospel of John, chapter 15, verse 16. You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain.

That whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he may give it to you. But let me add just one other reference before coming again to John 15. I was reminded of this passage recently in a phone conversation with a dear pastor.

I'm referring at the moment to Luke 13, and in particular, verses 6 to 9. This pastor had talked to me perhaps a year or so ago. And he had told me that on the staff of the church, there was a man who was creating a great deal of tension and conflict in the church. But indeed, he had tried to work with this man for several years, and it just never seemed to improve.

It was always this tail bearing and this working underneath the seams, stirring things up and creating trouble. And when he talked to me somewhat more than a year ago, he said, I've tried desperately to avoid this, but I'm at that point where I've got to deal with this man. I'm afraid I'm going to have to fire him, but I don't want to.

I want to see him change. I want to see him become fruitful. So as he was praying about it, and praying about it, and praying about it, suddenly one morning he woke up and he had in his mind the parable of the vineyard where the owner of the vineyard had arrived.

And he said, this vineyard is, or no, this tree, rather, is producing no fruit. I want you to cut that thing down and get rid of it. And the keeper of the orchard said, give me another year.

Let me dig around it. Let me fertilize it. Let me give it special attention and see if indeed it can't be turned around.

And the pastor had said to me, this is what the Lord put into my heart. Give this man another year. Give him everything you've got.

Give him hours of your time every week. Do everything in your power to help him to become a tree bearing fruit. Then he called me about three weeks ago.

And he said, the year is up. And the problems are not resolved. Oh, I hate this.

Oh, I wish it weren't so. But I got to fire him. But I don't want to.

I said, don't be hasty. Then he called me back in about 10 days. He said he had come to that point where he said, I've got to fire the man on Monday.

It's just dragged on and on. I got to do it. Then he said, I woke up on Sunday morning.

And all I could think about was Jericho, marching around the walls of Jericho for seven days. And at first, he couldn't relate. No, no, Lord, why do I have that in my mind? And he felt the Lord saying to him, gather some of your choicest, godliest men.

Meet early every morning for several morning. And devote a couple of hours every morning to praying about this man and this situation. So all right, Lord, that's what you want.

That's what you get. So for seven days, a little band of men prayed diligently. But nothing seemed to happen.

And he kept saying to himself, I got to fire him and let the Lord deal with this. But I don't want to, first, because I don't want to do this to him. I long for him to bear fruit.

But secondly, I know also it'll split the church. And on the seventh day, the man in question, very troubled and very nervous, asked the pastor, what are these special prayer meetings about? The pastor refused to tell him what they'd been praying about. The man came back in a little bit.

And he said, I'm going to resign. I don't belong here. I've been just a troublemaker.

And I'm going to leave. And he did, quietly, peacefully, learning to do things God's way. But now let's come back to John 15.

We've gotten some sense of the issue of fruit as our Lord has held it in front of us. In verses 1 to 3 of John 15, we have five very significant facts laid out for us. Number one, I am the true vine.

Now, there are lots of others pretending to be true vine. But there is only one true vine. And that is our Lord Jesus Christ.

Most of our world doesn't like dogmatic people. But some issues are so straightforward, so pure and simple that there's simply nothing to be nice about. There is one true vine.

There are not even any other candidates for it. This is the ground upon which we stand. Christ and Christ alone is the true vine.

The second fact that is so obvious here, my father is the vine dresser. This is his vineyard. These are his vines.

He is the one who has everything at stake. It is his investment that either produces as it ought or goes sour. Now, toward the end of the passage, we'll see the reward for the vine dresser.

But let's get those facts firm. Christ is the true vine. The Father is the vine dresser.

Fact number three, every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes it away. Now, there's judgment. Fact number four, every branch that bears fruit, he prunes it that it may bear more fruit.

Now, there's judgment again. Did you ever watch a pruner at work? I wouldn't want to be one because I don't have what it takes to do it right. I don't know the essentials of pruning.

But there are very important essentials involved, and take it as a given. If you are part of the true vine, you are in for pruning. Not once in a lifetime, but every single season.

No exception. It keeps coming and coming and coming and coming. And if you say to yourself when you're 65, well, I expect I'm just about done with the pruning process.

You'll discover when you're 84 that the Lord is still there with the clippers working on your life. And fact number five, you are already clean because of the word that I have spoken to you of. Now, how does that fit in? Well, if you're a bit on the careless side, you may say to yourself, what he means is the pruning for that season has already been accomplished.

But no, that's not what he's referring to. I remind you of what I pointed out already, that Judas had already left. He could not have said, you are already clean through the word which I have spoken to you if Judas were there, because the word had not cleaned Judas.

Now, here's a terribly urgent matter. What did Peter hear that Judas didn't? What did John see by way of signs and miracles that Judas did not? Well, if there is anything beyond the transfiguration, we're not told about it. My impression is that whatever Christ taught, Judas heard.

Whatever Christ did, Judas saw. But he was not clean as a result of what he saw and heard. The cleansing here refers to justification.

As the word of God is proclaimed, and the believing heart is hearing it, the justifying work of God is taking place. These 11, despite any number of faults that come to our attention concerning them later, are already clean by the word which Christ has spoken to them. They have been justified.

The word of God has produced this cleansing in their hearts and lives. But sanctification is still far from complete. And the part of what is happening in the pruning process is in the area of sanctification.

But for a moment, turn back, if you will, to chapter 13. And let me draw to your attention what occurred at the Feast of the Passover. So 13.1. Now, before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that his hour had come, that he should depart out of the world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

And during the supper, the devil already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray him. Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come forth from God and was going back to God, rose from the supper and laid aside his garments and, taking a towel, girded himself about. Then he poured water into the basin, and he began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded.

And so he came to Simon Peter. And he said to him, Lord, do you intend to wash my feet? And Jesus answered and said to him, what I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter. And Peter said to him, never shall you wash my feet.

And Jesus answered, if I do not wash you, you have no part with me. And Simon Peter said, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. And Jesus said to him, he who has faith, needs only to wash his feet that is completely clean and you are clean, but not all of you.

For he knew the one who was betraying him. For this reason, he said, you are not all clean. Now, it would appear to me that Peter, while justified, is not yet thoroughly converted.

Did not our Lord have to say to him, when Peter insisted that if everybody else betrayed him, he would still be loyal? Our Lord said to him, Peter, when you are converted, strengthen the brethren. You see, this work of salvation is not something accomplished in an instant. It is indeed the gracious work of the Spirit of God that moves from step to step to step.

These men are justified. But you see, Peter was still full of himself. That's why when our Lord asked the question, who do people say that I am? And some said, Elijah.

Some said, one of the prophets. And Peter spoke up, thou art the Christ, the son of the living God. And then, when Jesus began to talk about his death, his suffering, Peter rebuked him and said, shut up, don't talk that way.

We don't like all that negativism. And our Lord said, get behind me, Satan. You don't have your mind set on the things that are of God, but the things of the world.

And then he called the group around with Peter and with the disciples. And he said to them, if any man would be my disciple, let him deny himself, take up his cloth, and follow me. Then he went on to ask, what if a man gained the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall one give in exchange for his soul? And then, if any man is ashamed of me and of my word, then I will be ashamed of him.

And was it not shame and fear for himself that caused Peter to deny Christ with cursing? The word of God was doing its precious work in Peter's heart. But there was still Peter who needed to come to death, the death of self, who needed to take up the cloth and follow Peter. Some of you may be right in that position.

The word has been doing a wonderful work in your heart and life. You sense yourself as having been justified. But the righteousness of Christ is truly credited to your account.

If you may have yet to come to that point, will you deny yourself, take up your cloth, and follow him? You will bear fruit, not the kind of fruit that remains, not the kind of fruit that brings glory to God, until you have reached that point of true conversion where self is dead and Christ victoriously alive in you. So five facts laid out here for our careful contemplation. Then two particular instructions are given and clarified in verses four and five.

The first instruction, abide in me. The second instruction, live so that I can abide in you. This is a dual matter.

I must abide in Christ. Christ must abide in me. In verse four, these precious words are added.

As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. You see, we have too many among us who think that all of this hangs on one single moment of faith, one point of decision when they accept Christ, one tiny prayer they lift to the heavens and ask God to forgive their sin. But no, this is a matter of abiding in Christ.

And in order to abide in Christ, you've got daily to do precisely what the apostle Paul insisted we do, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God. Every day of my life, I have got to take it as a fact that I am dead indeed to sin. That's the negative part.

It's necessary, but I must include the positive part. Not only am I dead to sin, but alive to God. And today, I live like a man fully alive in Christ Jesus.

I abide in Christ day in, day out, month after month, year after year. So what is the significance of having abided in Christ for a day when I was nine years of age? How much fruit is produced by momentary association with the vine? Abide in Christ, that's the first of these precious instructions. The second, as I pointed out, I must abide in you.

And verse five gives us some help in this. Let me read it again. I am the vine, you are the branches.

He who abides in me and I in him, he bears much fruit. For apart from me, you can do nothing. So it is not only my task to consider myself dead to sin and alive unto God, it is my task to see that nothing ever remains in my life that makes it impossible for the Lord to abide in me.

I've got to keep short accounts. I've got to deal with sin. That's why I said earlier how absurd it is to be talking about an unrepentant believer.

No, indeed, there is no such creature. Day in, day out, the believer is longing not only to abide in Christ, but that Christ might abide in him. And therefore, he's quick and careful to see that nothing whatsoever occurs or remains in the life that makes it impossible for Christ to be in him.

Oh, that we may all lay hold of that truth and live it out all our days with all the joy and the excitement that's involved of being part of the one true living life. But then also, in verse six, there's a warning issued. So we have five facts stated, two instructions given, and a warning heard.

If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away as a branch, and he dries up, and they gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. I began my work life earlier than many do today. I met at about eight years of age.

I was hired by a farmer in the Schenectady, New York region to work in the field, and one of the early tasks that was given to me was to learn to drive the tractor. And when I learned to drive the tractor, a large stone bolt was hooked up behind the tractor, and I took a little crew of boys and went out into the orchard, and we piled on the stone bolt hundreds and thousands of branches that had been cut off from the tree. They had been cut off during the winter season.

They had been drying during the early spring, and then we gathered them together, and we made this huge pile, and then for days, these branches burned. There's a warning in verse six. None of us has gone beyond the point where we must carefully ask, does this warning in any way apply to me? If anyone does not abide in me, he's thrown away as a branch and dries up, and they gather them, and they cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

And all around us, there are countless people in the church and outside the church that need to be warned. There's no fruit in your life, and one of these days, you're gonna be cut off and laid out to dry and gathered and burned. And do you really want that to be the end of it all? Are you willing to be cast into the fire and burned? Do you not see the urgency, the necessity of bearing fruit? And you can't bear fruit unless you abide in the vine, and the vine abides in you.

Why don't we get serious about pleading with men and women to do the real and the necessary thing instead of some silly little notion of getting them to say a prayer? I'm not against praying, but I think it awfully foolish to suppose that a moment utterance of a prayer is the equivalent of abiding in the vine, and the vine abiding in you. But in addition to the warning, this is a lovely passage, really, because there's an incentive added. Look at verse seven, at this beautiful incentive.

If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it shall be done for you. Have you been wondering why your prayers are not answered? Have you been wondering about your church, why the prayer meeting is such a silly little thing, so powerless, so foolish? You want to see some true answers to prayer. Well, our Lord gives it to us as a wonderful incentive.

Abide in me, have my words abide in you. You discover, then, you're on praying ground. You discover, then, indeed, that the Lord is both anxious to listen to your prayers and to grant for you precisely what it is that you need.

But then also, beyond the warning and the incentive, we have the results carefully pinpointed in verse eight. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples two splendid results. The purpose of our existence finds fulfillment.

By this is my Father glorified. What we could not possibly do on our own, what would be absolutely and totally senseless to think might happen in any other way, by abiding in the vine and the vine abiding in us, we bring forth much fruit. And it's that abundance of fruit in the life that glorifies God.

And many of you have longed for a protracted season to glorify your great God and say yes, and understand that it is in producing much fruit that he is glorified, and it is through abiding in him and he in you that that much fruit is born. But in addition to this wondrous prospect of glorifying our Father with much fruit, we are also clearly told here that it's by this abundance of fruit that we prove ourselves to be his disciples. I wouldn't care to have to go around claiming to be a disciple of Christ.

I much prefer that the fruit of my life bear evidence that I am truly a disciple of the Lord Jesus. But now let's think of the pruning process. If there'll never be any fruit for my life, I will be cut off, cast aside, allowed to dry, and in time be thrown into the fire.

But if we have fruit-bearing potential, then pruning is going to occur. Maggie and I lived for a number of years in California, Central California, Fresno, California. Soon after we moved there, one of the men in our church came to us one day and said, I would like to plant some grapevines in your yard.

Well, that sounded like a good idea. We'd never had grapevines. We were pleased at the prospect.

And at first, you know, they looked pretty doubtful. But after a while, I mean, they began to flourish. And just about the time they were really looking great, he came around and he said, time to prune them.

Well, what do you want to do that for? They're just now looking good. Oh, they've got to be pruned. Well, all right, go ahead.

And when he got through, we looked with horror. I mean, well, boy, well, that's the end of those. This pruning process, you know, just about the time we like to look to ourselves spiritually, the Lord comes along with the pruning shears.

And there are not many of us that say, go to it, Lord. Nothing I like better than being chopped up. But what we discovered after that first round was that by that careful pruning, we did get an abundance of fruit.

Maggie and I made raisins. We had so many grapes. Think we've still got some of them after 25 years.

Now, pruning is not pleasant to the vine.

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