



"THE CLEANSING"

*Jesus said: "And every branch that beareth fruit,
He cleanseth, that it may bear more fruit." John 15:2*

There are two remarkable things about the vine. There is not a plant of which the fruit has so much spirit in it, of which spirit can be so abundantly distilled as the vine. And there is not a plant which so soon runs into wild wood, that hinders its fruit, and therefore needs the most merciless pruning.

I look out of my window here on large vineyards—the chief care of the vinedresser is the pruning. You may have a trellis vine rooting so deep in good soil that it needs neither digging, nor manuring, nor watering—pruning it cannot dispense with, if it is to bear good fruit. Some tree needs occasional pruning; others bear perfect fruit without any—the vine must have it. And so our Lord tells us, here at the very outset of the parable, that the one work the Father does to the branch that bears fruit is: *He cleanseth it, that it may bear more fruit.*

Consider a moment what this pruning or cleansing is. It is not the removal of weeds or thorns, or anything from without that may hinder the growth. No. It is the cutting off of the long shoots of the previous year, the removal of something that comes from within, that has been produced by the life of the vine itself.

It is the removal of something that is a proof of the vigor of its life—the more vigorous the growth has been, the greater the need for the pruning.

It is the honest, healthy wood of the vine that has to be cut away. And why? Because it would consume too much of the sap to fill all the long shoots of last year's growth—the sap must be saved up and used for fruit alone. The branches, sometimes eight and ten feet long, are cut down close to the stem, and nothing is left but just one or two inches of wood, enough to bear the grapes. It is when everything that is not needful for fruit-bearing has been relentlessly cut down, and just as little of the branches as possible has

been left, that full, rich fruit may be expected.

What a solemn, precious lesson! It is not to sin only that the cleansing of the Husbandman here refers. It is to our own religious activity, as it is developed in the very act of bearing fruit. It is this that must be cut down and cleansed away.

We have, in working for God, to use our natural gifts of wisdom, or eloquence, or influence, or zeal. And yet they are ever in danger of being unduly developed, and then trusted in.

And so, after each season of work, God has to bring us to the end of ourselves, to the consciousness of the helplessness and the danger of all that is of man, to feel that we are nothing. All that is to be left of us is just enough to receive the power of the life-giving sap of the Holy Spirit.

What is of man must be reduced to its very lowest measure. All that is inconsistent with the most entire devotion to Christ's service must be removed. The more perfect the cleansing and cutting away of all that is of self, the less of surface over which the Holy Spirit is to be spread, so much the more intense can be the concentration of our whole being, to be entirely at the disposal of the Spirit. This is the true circumcision of the heart, the circumcision of Christ. This is the true crucifixion with Christ—bearing the dying of the Lord Jesus in the body.

Blessed cleansing, God's own cleansing! How we may rejoice in the assurance that we shall bring forth more fruit.

*O our holy Husbandman, cleanse and cut
away all that there is in us that would make a
fair show, or could become a source of self-
confidence and glorying. Lord, keep us very
low, that no flesh may glory in Thy presence.
We do trust Thee to do Thy work.*

