

Pruning, Cleansing, Fruit-Bearing, and Eternity

It's time (again) for "Spring Cleaning." You know, the time when we hastily "cut back" all the branches and trim up all the bushes and flowers that we were supposed to have done last Fall or during the dormant Winter months (for some species- not so much for others). And it is also time to begin the yearly (losing!) battle to keep that yellowish green "dust" off our patios and vehicles, and hopefully out our sinuses. Yeah, I know, me too! But these things reminded me of the Lord's words to His disciples on the night of His betrayal in John 15:1-8...

He sets for the foundational metaphor in v.1a for several application points to follow, "***I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.***" He, rather than the corrupted form of Judaism to which they had been accustomed, was the "*true vine*" from which all spiritual *life and production* would follow. Thus, these men would have to maintain a healthy connection to Him in order maintain spiritual life and vitality, cf. vv.4-5. Additionally, but not in any sense less importantly, He establishes that *His Father* was/is "*the vinedresser.*" Thus, the decisions about *branch removal* and *pruning/cleansing* as well as the actions themselves *decided by and carried out by Him*, cf. v.2a,2b,6.

But there is an important distinction in v.2 that we need to consider. Typically, when we *prune* a branch, either part or all of it is also *taken away* and *burned* (v.6) or otherwise disposed. So we (or at least I) tend to think of "*pruning*" and "*taking away*" as one continuous process. But in v.2 these are two separate words. To "***take away***" (*airo*) means to *take up, remove, to take from among the living; to cause to cease*. Although this "*taking away*" involves *cutting* as does *pruning*, a different but related word is used for "***prune***" (*kathairo*). It means to *cleansed of filth, impurity; to remove useless shoots from trees or vines*. Thus both involve a *cutting off*, but one involves *complete removal* and the other includes only partial trimming. Either way, the "*cut off*" part is headed to the fire. So...

Here's the critical part: It matters tremendously **which side of the cut you're on**- the part that is **still attached to the vine**, or the part **that is headed to the fire!** Obviously, the determining factor is **production**. If there is **no fruit being produced**, the **whole branch** is "*taken away*" (*airo*) and "*he is thrown away as a branch,*" and, thus separated from the life-sustaining *vine*, "*dries up,*" is "*gather(ed),*" then "*cast into the fire,*" and is "*burned,*" v.6. However, **if a branch is "bear(ing) fruit,"** it is "*pruned*" (*kathairo*) or *cleansed of impurities* (the *cutting off* of parts that either aren't producing, or are inhibiting/preventing additional production) that "*that it may bear more fruit,*" v.2. The **purposes** for these separate procedures are very different: one is **eternal punishment;** and the other is **improvement by "pruning."**

Additionally and related to these things, in v.3 Jesus tells His disciples that they are "***already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.***" Sometimes I'm a little slow on the "uptake" of things, so this verse bothered me for a long time. Why is Jesus talking about *cutting off* and *pruning branches* in the previous verses and *cleaning* in this one? The word translated as "*clean*" by most of the major translations is *katharos*, which basically means "clean" or "pure." It FINALLY dawned on me that the "*pruning*" of v.2 actually is a *cleaning* or *purifying* of the branch by the removal of the *impurities* preventing additional *fruit production*. V.2 and v.3 are talking about the same thing: the

“pruning” is *“cleansing,”* and both are accomplished by the *purifying “word of God,”*
1Pet.1:22-23.

Now, here’s a couple of things we really need to consider from all of this: 1) Are we *firmly attached to the vine?* Is our *connection* to Him *constant* and *strong* or *occasional* and *hanging by only a couple of fibers?* And, 2) If our *connection* to the *Vine* isn’t what it ought to be, then our *fruit production* will be non-existent or at least not what it could/should be, and therefore we’re in danger of being on the **wrong side of the cut...** so, *prune, cleanse, and purify* yourself by obedience to the Word! (Philip C. Strong; Viking Drive Church of Christ; 3791 Viking Drive, Bossier City, LA; online at vikingdrivechurchofchrist.com; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)