

"Ye Are the Branches"

"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"—John 15:1-2.

These words exhibit the close connection between the Lord Jesus Christ and ourselves, illustrating how God freely gives all things with Christ. The vine and the branches are alike the husbandry of God. As the vine consists not of individual branches but of a main stem, so we observe the distinct personality of Christ.

We could not help noticing, as we drove through the vineyards of the state of Ohio, how CLEAN they were kept. Here we found the ground well-prepared, and after the seedlings branch out, the continuing process of weeding out and the pruning out of that which was a detriment to the growth of the vine till at the last the trailing branches produced the luscious fruit. To the ground we likened ourselves after we had been prepared for the waters of baptism. We were—

"Buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we should walk in NEWNESS OF LIFE.

"For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall also be in the likeness of his resurrection" (Rom. 6:4-5).

We find God, as the Husbandman, gave particular attention to the formation of the VINE. We see the Spirit of the Living Deity, which gave form and life to the vine, pass through the stem into the branches:

"God in Christ, and Christ in ourselves. Know ye not of yourselves that CHRIST IS IN YOU (except ye be reprobates)?" (2 Cor. 13:5).

The story of the vine and the branches will not be fully known until it is perfected at the resurrection, for there are branches that abide and branches that are taken away. As the stem is of stronger construction than the branches which it supports, so the Lord Jesus was made stronger for the greatness of his work. For it pleased the Father that "in him should all fullness dwell." So that when persecution, temptation or trial beat upon the branches they cast their burdens upon the stem (Christ) and are sustained.

"These things have I spoken unto you that IN ME ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer— I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD!" (John 16:33).

As the vine and the branches are made of the one substance, so Christ and his brethren are constituted alike. Yet in the days of his flesh he was stronger than they who put their trust in him. And the difference is immeasurably greater since he ascended to the right hand of God, and all authority was given to him both in heaven and earth.

RAISED INTO THE SUNLIGHT

In looking at the natural vine we observe that the branches are raised by the stem into the sunlight and air, and so it is written—

"God, for His great love wherewith He loved us, hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:4-6).

As the winds of temptation beat upon the branches we perceive the husbandry of God, for the winds obey His voice and the tempests are stilled. Brethren and sisters, there hath no temptation taken you but such is common to man. But God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able to bear, but will with the temptation also make a way of escape.

"Abide in me," says Jesus "and I in you." As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can we except we abide in Christ. Through the stem of the vine there is a way from the root to the branches—a way of roads and avenues, running between the absorbent root and all the branches. Not a single branch from the least unto the greatest is beyond the reach of these communication lines.

Through these channels the Spirit of the Deity, the Word which is Spirit, as the nutriment of life and fruitfulness is directed; the water of life circulates to the utmost bough. We perceive this in the words of the Master:

"Whosoever shall drink of the water that I shall give him, it shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14).

The branches are strengthened, and increase and bear fruit, by the assimilation of that which maketh for increase—a fruitfulness, the Spirit of Truth, which the world cannot receive because they know not God.

THE FACULTIES ACT AS CENSORS

Joined to, or adjusted with, the eye and the ear are our faculties. There is perception, discernment, understanding, reason, power of judgment, conviction. As it is written, the meat of the Word is for perfect men those who by reason of use have these faculties exercised to discern good and evil (Heb. 5:14).

Behind the ear and the eye, hidden (except it be from God, to Whom ALL things are open), these faculties act as censors. If acting faithfully, they are receiving and storing in the fleshy tablets of the heart, the things which are the oracles of God, rejecting imaginations, reasonings, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God; and are exercised to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Jesus Christ. These faculties, as lines of communication, should be jealously guarded, and the facility with which they work improved.

FRUIT-BEARING BRANCHES

There are fruit-bearing branches in our ecclesia. In some it may not be so manifest as in others, and so we have to more urgently consider one another to provoke unto good works, so much the more as we see the day approaching. As the branches develop they partake more and more of the root of the vine. So in measure are the Words of the Spirit operative:

"Whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have" (Luke 8:18).

There is ALWAYS room for the improvement of the senses by use. Using these faculties will not only apply to the gaining of the knowledge of the Spirit of life, but also to the using of that knowledge in DOING those things that please our Heavenly Father.

It will apply to the quickening of the Word unto all OBEDIENCE of the faith that works by love, having our senses exercised to become full-grown men and women in having set our hearts to understand the Scriptures, using the eye and the ear and every faculty to the glory of God:

"Glorify God in your body and in your spirit—which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:20).

Let us once again remind ourselves of the Children of Israel, who are spoken of in Jeremiah as a NOBLE vine, wholly a right seed, and again:

"Israel was holiness unto the Lord, the firstfruits of His increase."

ISRAEL'S FAILURE

But the record shows that they fell away from the high esteem in which they were held. The apostle Paul, to the Romans (and to all that should come after his day of the ecclesia in Christ), says:

"Because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear. For if God spared not the NATURAL branches, take heed lest He also spare not THEE."

"Behold therefore the goodness AND SEVERITY of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee goodness—IF thou continue in His goodness; otherwise thou also shalt be cut off" (Rom. 11:20-22).

The vine of which Jesus speaks in John 5 is tended and cared for by God, Whom he pictures as the Vine-dresser. We have here a clear recognition by Jesus of the fact that the work in which he was engaged was GOD'S work. How lovingly and tenderly God watched over His Beloved Son is seen in the gospel narratives.

In the same manner as God watched over the Master, "THE VINE," so He will watch over His children, "THE BRANCHES." The hopelessly-dead branches will be cut out; the branch which is proving fruitful will be purged so that it will bring forth more fruit. His purging is not a pleasant process, but let those who are enduring it think of the rich clusters of fruit it will produce, and bear it patiently. No chastening is pleasant at the time, says the apostle.

"But afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are exercised thereby" (Heb. 12:11).

The purging is intended to help us in the war against sin. The Word of God reveals the hidden works of darkness, the evil things that lurk in the minds of the natural man. It can help us to recognize them and, still more, it can help us to OVERCOME and vanquish them and thus bring forth much fruit to His honour and glory.

Any man or woman who simply TINKERS at Christ's work, who simply compliments the Truth with a nominal adhesion, who is a mere PATRON of the Truth, who does not feel it a privilege of the highest order to lay himself on the altar of its service, may be forced to hear the words, "I never knew you."

God grant, brethren and sisters, that we lay hold and buy up our opportunities to do His will, praying for wisdom, strength, and guidance to abide IN THE VINE until the end, and finally to be found worthy of being raised up together and to sit together in heavenly places with Jesus Christ, and to partake anew with him of the fruit of the vine in the Kingdom of God. —F. G. P.
