

Relationship with God



The Vine and the Branches (Part 1)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again at the beginning of anew week, sharing with you Keys to Successful Living which God has placed in my hand through many years of personal experience and Christian ministry.

The title for my talks this week is: The Vine and the Branches. It will provide you with a beautiful, scriptural picture of the relationship that we can have with God through Jesus Christ.

This beautiful picture is contained in a parable of Jesus in John chapter 15. But before we turn to the actual words of Jesus, it'll be helpful to say a word about the nature and purpose of a parable.

One of the great problems that we all have in apprehending spiritual truth is that we are tied to our senses. For most of us the only things that are real are the things that we can see, and hear, and feel and so on, that is the things that we apprehend by our five physical senses. But paradoxically, these are not the real things. The things which are truly real and truly important are spiritual, and they are not apprehended by the senses. Listen to what Paul says about this in 2 Corinthians 4:18:

> "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

You see, that's a paradox for natural man. What is seen, what we receive through our senses, is temporary, it's transient, it's not permanent. But, what is unseen is eternal. It's that alone which is truly real.

And then again in the next chapter of 2 Corinthians 5:7, Paul makes this simple statement:

> "We walk by faith, not by sight."

You see, we don't apprehend the truly real, the spiritual and the eternal by sight, but we apprehend them by faith. Now, Paul says we fix our eyes, not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. That raises a very important question. How can we fix our eyes on what is unseen? Obviously there is a deliberate paradox. When it speaks about fixing your eyes on what your eyes can't see, how do you do that? Well, the

answer is simply, by faith. But one way that the Bible helps us to do this is through parables. In the teaching of Jesus there are many parables. It was a form of teaching that He loved to use because He realized the problems that His hearers had and this was one of the ways that He could help them escape from the realm of the senses into the realm of the spiritual, that which is truly real and eternal. You see, in a parable, the material and the familiar becomes a kind of mirror reflecting the spiritual and the unfamiliar. In a parable, Jesus speaks about things that were very familiar to his hearers, things that they had seen and heard and touched many times. But in speaking about those things, He used them as a mirror to reflect the things that they could not apprehend by their senses.

So in a parable there is usually a fairly definite set of correspondences, something in the familiar corresponds to something in the unfamiliar. Something in the seen corresponds to something in the unseen. In this way, Jesus led His hearers from the known and the familiar, to the unknown and unfamiliar, which is one of the great principles of good teaching.

Now with this in mind, let's turn to this particular parable that we are going to be dealing with this week, the parable of The Vine and the Branches. Here is the actual parable as Jesus related it in John 15:1-8.

> "I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit, he trims clean so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

Out of that picture there, one great and important basic truth emerges. The truth is this, that Christianity is primarily a relationship involving God and man. It is not primarily theology or religion. Here is where the thinking of many professing Christians has to change. They think in terms of what they believe, or the creed they repeat, or the doctrines they embrace. Or if they are more intellectual, they think in terms of theology, Lutheranism, Calvinism, Catholic theology, whatever it might be.

Now, I am not saying that those things have no place in Christianity. What I am saying, and it is so clearly illustrated by the words of Jesus which we've just been hearing, that that is not primary. And if we make it primary, we're probably going to miss the real truth and the real kernel and the real purpose of the Christian faith. What is primary, is a relationship that each of us has with God through Jesus Christ. Without that relationship all the doctrine in the world will do us very little good. Let me say this, theology and doctrine is correct only if it produces the right fruit.

Returning to this parable of the Vine and the Branches, I want you to see that it represents, even in those simple words, that familiar picture, it represents the total nature of the Godhead. When I say the Godhead, that's a kind of technical phrase in the New Testament, "for all that which is truly God." So in this picture of the vine and the branches, we have a representation of all that is truly God. And in the New Testament God is revealed as one God, but three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And in this picture of the Vine, we see a picture of all three persons. I wonder if you picked them out while I was reading the parable.

Let's begin now and see what are the things that correspond to each person of the Godhead. Let's begin with the vine. Jesus says, "I am the vine." So that's very specific. He's kind of given us a point of orientation in interpreting the whole picture. Jesus Himself is the vine. Now in the vine, to make it living and fruitful, there has to be the sap which flows up from the roots, through the trunk and into the branches. Unless the sap reaches the branches, they wither and are unfruitful. So the key to the whole life of the vine is the sap.

Now the sap is a picture of the Holy Spirit. In Romans 8:10, Paul says, "The Spirit (capital "S," the Holy Spirit) is life." This is what he actually says, the whole verse is:

> "And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness."

We experienced Christ's death because of our sins, but having experienced His death we enter into His life because of His righteousness imputed to us through faith, and having His righteousness we partake of His life. We partake of the life that flows from the roots, through the trunk of the vine and into the branches. And Paul says in Romans 8:10, that life

is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit is life.

And then we have, what is called in the translation I read, the gardener. But actually the Greek word is normally used of a "farmer." The problem is that in English we don't think of a farmer often dealing with vines. But the Greek word covers anyone who owns land and produces crops or has flocks or herds, who is not only the farmer, but the owner. Of course, that's God the Father, the One who owns it all. And we'll see that He has a very special part in the life of this vine. Later this week I'll be explaining that He's the One who does the pruning.

Then we're left with one other major element in this picture which is the branches. Again, Jesus has interpreted that for us. He says, "I am the vine, you are the branches." You, His disciples, His followers.

So we could say that true disciples or real Christians, whatever phrase you want to use, are the branches that are in the vine. The essence of the message is as long as we branches remain in the vine, we have the life of the vine and we bring forth fruit and we please God. But if ever we lose our contact or our association with the vine, if we become separated from it, then we lose the life, we die and the ultimate end of that is to be burned.

Well our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this same time. Tomorrow I'll be dealing with the vital question: What does God expect from us as branches in the vine? What is the evidence that we really do have this kind of relationship with Him?

Radio Program

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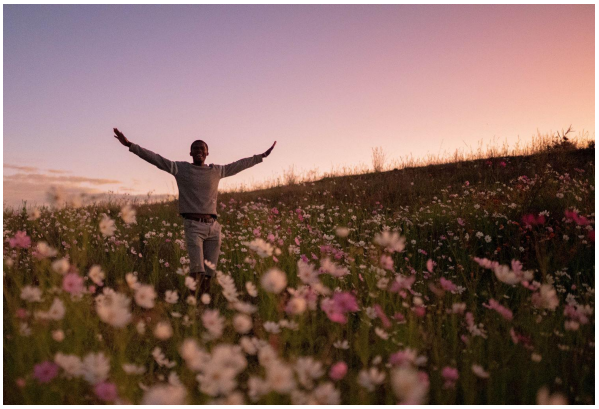

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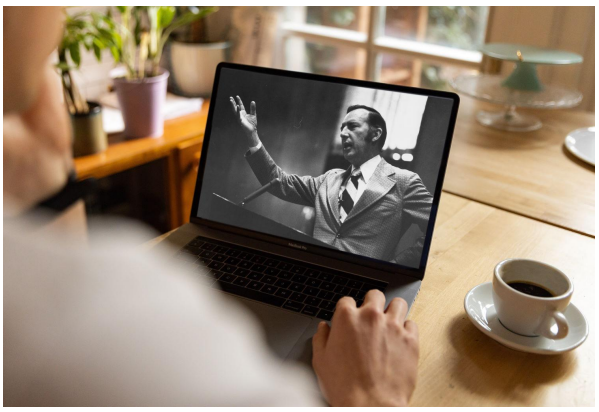

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