

Christian Retirement

Part 35

By [Thomas Reade](#)

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ON UNION TO CHRIST

How beautiful is our Savior's parable of the vine! It illustrates in the most convincing manner this great truth, that "he who has the Son, has life; and he who has not the Son of God, has not life." We have in this parable a striking view of the true Church of Christ, which grows out of Jesus the true vine; hangs upon him; and derives all its nourishment and fruitfulness from him, just as the branches do from the parent stem.

Until the soul be united to Christ by faith, it cannot produce one fruit of the Spirit; any more than a branch can bear fruit of itself when severed from the vine. A soul out of Christ, and a branch cut off from the parent stem, must be alike barren and withered.

Hence it is evident, that before the great act of justification by faith, that spiritual ingrafting of the soul into Christ, there can be no holy fruits in the heart or life. By this gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, the sinner becomes a living branch in the true vine; a part of Christ's mystical body, and immediately receives spiritual nourishment and strength; for "without me," says Christ, "you can do nothing."

But we read of barren branches in him, which are taken away. These are nominal professors of the Gospel, which abound in the visible church. They become members of the outward church, by the ordinance of baptism; but being destitute of true faith, they yield none of the fruits of righteousness to the glory of God. These characters form the great bulk of the people in nations denominated Christian.

They may be called branches in Christ, considering the church in its present condition, as represented by fruitful and barren branches, by wheat and tares, by good and bad fishes, by wise and foolish virgins, in the several parables of our blessed Lord. These barren branches easily fall off in time of temptation. Being only attached to Christ by the slender thread of an outward profession, they are soon blown away by the stormy winds of persecution. Like Demas, they forsake Christ, either through the fear of man, or the love of this present evil world. But

what says our blessed Lord? "Every branch in me, that bears not fruit, he takes away." The Almighty Husbandman at length cuts them off in his providence, by the hand of death. But, ah! where are they cast? "Into the fire of hell, to be burned!"

Oh! how should this awaken all my fears and apprehensions, lest I should be found at the last to have been only a barren branch: full indeed of the leaves of profession, and the worthless fruit of head-knowledge and party zeal; but destitute of those heavenly graces of humility, love, and purity, which prove the reality of a union to Jesus.

"Every branch in me," said our divine Savior, "that bears fruit, he purges it, that it may bear more fruit." Thus, the pruning-knife of affliction is applied to the true branches, to cut off all their exuberances, and to render them more abundant in the fruits of holiness.

Hence it is worthy of remark, that the very trials which take away the unfruitful branches, do, by a skillful operation of spiritual husbandry, promote the fertility of those branches which derive their nourishment by a vital union to the parent stem.

This blessedness is closely connected with perseverance. "Abide in me, and I in you." There must be a constant abiding in Christ, until the hour of death; otherwise there can be no perpetuity of fruitfulness. Let a branch be in a vine for a hundred years, and every year be loaded with fruit, yet if it be severed at the last, it must wither and die.

So our union to Christ must be perpetual. Being once in him, we must abide in him, or all our fruitfulness will be at an end. "He that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit; for without me, (or severed from me,) you can do nothing."

How careful, then, I ought to be, lest I am deceiving myself with mere temporary feelings and impressions. Nothing will abide but true faith. Nothing but true grace can endure unto the end. What sweet privileges are connected with this union and this fruitfulness.

"Herein is my father glorified, that you bear much fruit." Thus the more fruit we bear, the more God is glorified. What wonderful condescension!

"So shall you be my disciples." This fruitfulness proves us to be the genuine disciples of the Lord Jesus.

"You shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you." Our prayers will then be graciously heard and answered.

"As the father has loved me, so have I loved you." Thus, if fruitful believers, we shall through eternity enjoy the Savior's constant love.

These beautiful sayings of Jesus are closed by an exhortation to perseverance; "Continue you in my love."

Thus Christ is all and in all to his believing people. He is the true vine, from which proceeds all the grace, which, flowing through the branches, produces fertility and beauty. He is also the sun of righteousness, whose bright and nourishing beams cause the trees of righteousness to abound in fruitfulness.

Every image is thus used by the divine Spirit, when guiding the pen of inspiration, to set forth the all-sufficiency both of the power and grace of Jesus.

As there is no spiritual life separate from him, so without him there is no blessedness in time or eternity. In him "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." In him "dwells the fulness of the godhead bodily." Are any chosen unto salvation? "They are chosen in him before the foundation of the world, that they, should be holy and without blame before Him in love." Are any adopted into the family of God? It is "by Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will." Do any receive pardon? It is "through his blood, according to the riches of his grace."

How great, then, is the love of God, in thus giving his well-beloved Son to die for us: that through his precious death upon the cross, he might save us from sin and hell.

But, Oh my soul, how great soever the love of God to perishing sinners may be—how rich soever the promises of mercy—how glorious soever the inheritance of the saints; what will all this avail, if you are destitute of that faith, without which it is impossible to please God; and of that holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord? I would ask myself, with all seriousness, as in the presence of that God, who searches the heart and tries the thoughts; have I received the Lord Jesus into my heart by a humble loving faith?

His name is as ointment poured forth, healing the wounded conscience, and shedding a rich fragrance through the soul. But have I felt the deadly wound which sin has made? Have I with joy received the atonement, and thus obtained peace through believing? I may have a knowledge of the way of salvation, but have I been brought into this way by the Spirit of truth, and am I walking therein by faith? Do I now experience the power of the cross, in the crucifixion of my lusts, and the mortification of every sinful desire? Do I know Christ in the power of his resurrection; being raised from a death in sin, to a life of righteousness?

"As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." Am I daily led by the Spirit, through the light of the revealed word, into a saving

acquaintance with Jesus Christ, as my wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption?

"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." Have I experienced a spiritual change in my understanding, will, and affections? Are my views, purposes, motives, desires, inclinations, and pursuits quite different from what they once were? Can it be said, in the strong language of Scripture, that "I am born again?" Is the change visible to others? Is it felt by myself?

Am I devoted to the service of God, ardent in my love to the Savior, and anxious for the happiness of all around me? Are my religious views and feelings thus influential, pervading, like the hidden sap, all the branches of personal and relative duties?

The doctrines of the Gospel are practical in their tendency. They at once humble and elevate. Like rays emanating from the sun, they enlighten, warm, cheer, and fructify. Shine, then, blessed Savior, with your bright beams of grace into my heart. Preserve me from everything that is false and insincere. Let your work be deep and abiding. Nothing can uphold me but your sustaining grace. Without you, I am like the chaff before the wind; like a withered branch, ready to be carried away by every blast. Abide in me, blessed Lord, that I may abide in you. Unite me to yourself, and never leave me nor forsake me; then shall I praise you with unceasing hallelujahs, when my happy spirit shall be transplanted to the Paradise above.

Jesus, true and living vine,
Unite my soul to thee;
Oh! let my barren, withered heart,
A fruitful scion be.

Too long, alas! my guilty soul
A fruitless branch has been;
Fit fuel for the eternal fire,
The slave of lust and sin.

Oh! may I now, through sovereign grace,
This blessed union know,
From where all peace and pardon too,
And endless glories grow.

Grafted by faith, my joyful heart
Shall be forever thine;
While clustering fruits of heavenly growth
Will prove the work divine.

Come, Holy Spirit, you Lord of life,

Make all these blessings mine;
Make me a fruitful living branch
In Christ, the living vine.

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