

GOD'S PRUNING

Scott Richards

A number of years ago, while having some trees removed near our house, we also had an overgrown tree in the backyard trimmed. It resembled an overgrown bush more than a tree. The next Spring, we were surprised to find it full of beautiful blossoms. That year, it produced hundreds of plums. The prior year, it had produced no fruit and we did not even know it was a plum tree. Without pruning, the tree produced no fruit, but afterward, it was very fruitful. All of the dead and unfruitful branches had to be removed in order for the tree to produce its bounty once more.

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit" (John 15:1-2). God's people, the church of Christ, is subject to God's pruning. How God does the pruning is not always clear to us, but we know that He is working through the church to maximize the harvest.

The church plays a role in the pruning process. As we learn from the instructions to the church in Corinth (1st Corinthians 5), the church must, on some occasions, exercise discipline. It is to be done in a spirit of love and concern for the soul of the subject to be disciplined. God's desire is for the wayward soul to repent and return to the faith. To the Thessalonian Christians, Paul by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote, *"But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us"* (2nd Thessalonians 3:6). While we want the erring brother to repent as a result of withdrawal of fellowship, we can also see that it is a means of pruning off the dead and dying branches in order for the church to produce a more abundant harvest.

God's word also reveals that He works providentially to do His will. This is also true when His people need pruning. God can turn any event to His advantage and accomplish what is necessary.

When Elijah was fleeing for his life and was feeling isolated and rejected, God reminded him, *"Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, an every mouth that has not kissed him"* (1st Kings 19:18). Elijah, in his despondency, could not see the faithful through the multitude of the unrighteous. God's

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pruning would come in the form of the conquering Assyrians. The dead branches would be removed, the faithful few would become more apparent by their worship and service of God. Their lives would serve as a beacon of God's light to both Jew and Gentile.

A similar pruning would happen to Judah about 130 years later, when the Babylonians would conquer them, as well. The result of that pruning prepared them to be the people through whom the Savior of the world would come. The brightness of God's love would then shine for all the world to see.

For the past several years, the church in America has been shrinking. Young people, when leaving their parents' home, left the Lord's church, as well. Congregations have become older, and many of them have closed their doors. Have we become apathetic to our mission of local evangelism? Perhaps the hearts of the people have become hard and unreceptive to the message of the cross. Some congregations view door knockings, gospel meetings, and other efforts to reach the lost as unproductive, so they have stopped making any effort to evangelize at home. They will support foreign preaching work, but local efforts are almost totally abandoned. Has a time for pruning arrived, and could God use a pandemic to accomplish it?

Since early 2020, most congregations have put greater effort into streaming services. As a result, many members are now comfortable with staying home and worshipping in their living rooms. Scripture still says, *"When you come together in one place"* (1st Corinthians 11:20). Has God been pruning the dead and dying branches? If the pandemic has been used by God as a pruning event, a time of reaping should be prepared for. In the meantime, we must be about the Father's business of soul winning in the harvest fields. *"Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest"* (Matthew 9:38).

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When attacks on our faith come, the erosion process continues. After so much erosion takes place, in due time we find ourselves experiencing a spiritual landslide, which may be deadly. Growing deep spiritual roots is essential if we are to avoid the landslide that Satan has in mind for us. For our roots to remain strong they must receive nourishment. God helps us, but He also expects us to help ourselves.

"As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving" (Colossians 2:6-7).

**"WHAT MUST I DO
TO BE SAVED?"**

ACTS 16:30

LEARN THE GOSPEL

John 6:45; Romans 10:17

BELIEVE IN CHRIST

Hebrews 11:6; John 3:16

CONFESS CHRIST

Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10

REPENT OF SIN

Acts 3:19; 17:30

BE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST

Mark 16:16; Romans 6:3-6

REMAIN STEADFAST

1st Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10

**"THE ASSEMBLING OF
OURSELVES TOGETHER"**

HEBREWS 10:24-25

SUNDAY

Worship @ 10:00 a.m.

Studies @ 11:45 a.m.

WEDNESDAY

Studies & Worship @ 7:00 p.m.

THURSDAY

Men's/Women's Studies
@ 6:30 p.m.

75 Sherrod Boulevard
Belen, New Mexico

**"IF A MAN IS OVERTAKEN IN
ANY TRESPASS..."**

RESTORE SUCH A ONE"

GALATIANS 6:1

CONFESS TRESPASSES

James 5:16; 1st John 1:9

REPENT OF SIN

Acts 8:22

PRAY FOR FORGIVENESS

Acts 8:22

REMAIN STEADFAST

1st Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10

**"A WORD FITLY SPOKEN IS
LIKE APPLES OF GOLD IN
SETTINGS OF SILVER"**

PROVERBS 25:11

"At some point, it has to go from
being highlighted in your Bible
to being written on your heart."

"WHOLE COUNSEL"

ACTS 20:27

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ROOTED

Jay Dixon

In April of 1952, a landslide killed 11 people in Menton France. This tragedy occurred because farmers replaced olive trees, with carnations. Carnations were more profitable, but shallow rooted. Olive trees while less profitable possessed deep roots.

In the example above, the roots of the olive tree ran deep and tied multiple layers of soil together. Therefore, when the elements of weather, such as the wind and rain would come, those slopes remained intact. However, when the deep-rooted olive trees were removed, and replaced with a shallower rooted plant, that stability was weakened, leading to a deadly landslide.

Spiritual erosion in the life of a Christian happens, when the deep spiritual roots that are found in the Gospel of Jesus are replaced with things considered needful and more satisfying. If we are strong in the Lord, like the Psalmist writes, as a tree planted by the water that cannot be moved (Psalm 1:3), we do not abruptly trade stability for instability, it is a process. Decisions made over time lead to weakening the deep roots that we have in Christ. These decisions may appear necessary and provide some form of satisfaction, however, they assist in diminishing the depth that we have in Christ. Therefore, when the storms of life come, and they will, the erosion process begins. When temptation comes and we give in, the erosion process continues.
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