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Sermon preached by Mr J H Gosden
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on 18 April 1937

JOHN 15 v 2

"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"

How exceedingly solemn is this word. How unspeakably awful to be a fruitless branch, withered, to be taken away, and to be burned. This word of Christ concerning fruitless branches, refers doubtless to nominal christians, people who have taken up with religion, and how many there are who have taken up, and do take up with, an orthodox religion, christianity, and never have, never will have, union with Christ. An awful condition to have religion without God, to be an unregenerate professor. Who can express the awfulness of this state. And yet, so far as our sight, our observation goes, it would appear that there are thousands in this condition, and satisfied, because they know it not. "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away". Self-satisfaction, self-righteousness, nominal acknowledgement of the gospel, an understanding, outward understanding of the things of the Scriptures, a working knowledge of the Bible, an acquiescence in the doctrines of grace, under some religious zeal, there may be, but all of it arising, not from the Spirit's work, but from mere natural acquisition. And how far a man may go in this natural religiousness, it is impossible for us to say. Doubtless it has been, and will be, to the people of God, a solemn matter to consider this, how far we may go in all understanding of things logically, without life. How far we may go in a profession among the people of God and be a reprobate. It does not appear that Judas was suspected of being a reprobate among the twelve disciples. He went on with them, went about with them, preached as they preached doubtless, professed love to Christ and to be a follower of the Lord Jesus, until that terrible time came when the veil was taken off his presumptuous and hypocritical heart, and it was manifested what he was. The Lord knew; He permitted him to be among the twelve until

then. It is not for us to judge; blessed be God we have no right to sit in judgment upon men. There is One that judgeth and He judgeth righteously, for it is written: "He knoweth them that are His". And it will be an unspeakable mercy if you and I prove really to be the Lord's, to be living branches in Him, the true Vine. "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away". The day is coming when all the secrets of men will be uncovered, hearts uncovered, and then what a discovering will be made. The solemn hour, not far, dissolves each golden dream. Death will distinguish what we are from what we only seem. To be a seeming christian and not a real one is an awful deception, nor will it be a matter of indifference to the people of God whether they have vital union with Christ, or whether they are nominal believers, and indeed, in these days, when for the most part vital godliness is at a low ebb and, as a consequence, the world has very largely encroached into the churches, it behoves all who pretend any seriousness concerning eternity, to very closely examine themselves in this matter. Every branch that beareth not fruit He taketh away. He taketh away; it is not for you and me to take away. A minister may do it ministerially, unknown to himself. It has been done many many times through the ministry. Offences come because of the Word. That is one way whereby the Lord takes people away. There is an impatience of the narrowness of the way to heaven. It does not lie straight with the natural comprehensiveness of religious men. They often would have a little more license here and a little more liberty there and they become offended. O how many went away and walked no more with the Lord Jesus under His teaching. They were offended when He spoke to them of spiritual things and especially when He named to them the truth of His sovereign disposal of men. The doctrines of grace when enforced in their spirituality and discrimination sooner or later become an offence. They were offended. The disciples asked whether they should pluck up the tares that were growing with the wheat and the Lord's reply was: "Let both grow together until the harvest", which makes it appear that some will still continue more or less identified with the truth in its vitality, that is identified with it outward who will not be separated and taken away until the last. How solemn it is to feel in your own soul, facing this question: Shall I be right at last? Will that word cut me off? "He that endureth to the end shall be saved" We know not yet what troubles may come upon the professing church, what

further offences may come, what separations, what persecutions, may yet come upon the church. To endure will be a great thing. To be made a conqueror, a victor, an overcomer at the last, will be a great thing, but this will be impossible without union to Christ. "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away", and of them it is said "These shall go away into everlasting punishment". If there is a nominal christian here, who is no more than a nominal christian, self-satisfied and satisfied with his nominal religion, let me tell you that your nominal christianity won't save you. These shall go away, equally with those who live licentious and wicked lives, into eternal punishment.

"And every branch that beareth fruit He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." Now these are the true branches, the living branches, those who are engrafted into Christ, who have a union with Him that never will, never can, be dissolved, and they all bear fruit. Christ has no fruitless branches. Where there is life in Christ, there must be, will be, some fruit. We read of different measures of fruiting in the parable of the sower. Some thirty, some sixty, and some an hundred-fold, but there must be some fruit bearing. Every branch that beareth fruit. Now this being a branch in Christ is the consequence of the electing purpose of God, for the union which is between the people of God and Christ had its beginning, its inception as it were, in Eternity. This is a doctrine that nature cannot abide, because this union, this covenant union in Christ is a sovereign election by Jehovah of certain persons, and absolutely decreed their everlasting blessedness in and through Christ. Election, predestination, the choice of some men unto eternal life by Jesus Christ. And the union was mystical in the gift to Christ by the Father of these chosen, these elected people. They were His by that gracious gift to Him of them by His Father. "Thine they were and Thou gavest them Me". O, this union can never be broken. It is mystical, it is indissoluble. The decree of God must come to pass. It can never be broken, altered in any degree whatsoever. But that union which was mystical, and which was in the covenant, is manifested in time. It is manifested by the regenerating act of the Spirit of Christ in an individual soul. An instantaneous act passed upon this and that person in time when the result of election is conveyed in the gift of life. "The Lord knoweth them that are His", and He goes to them in His

own time and quickens them individually so that they pass from death unto life. They begin to know and to feel and to apprehend the things concerning God. Life, which is accompanied with feeling, with need, with desire. Life, by which things are perceived, for there is light with this life. Life conveyed to the soul. Little do the people who are subjected to this vital operation of the Holy Ghost think, when this act is passed upon them, that it is because they are chosen of God unto eternal life. Usually, almost universally, this act produces in the heart and conscience of the subject of it, terror. It produces a solemn and awful sense of sin, of being a sinner in the presence of a sin-hating and holy God. How great is that day that comes to the child of God when, as it is in the Ephesians: "You hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins", and my friends, whatever religion you may acquire without this act of God, is worthless and unsaving. "Ye must be born again", said the Lord Jesus to Nicodemus, and to be born again is not an act of the flesh. It is an act of God, unsought, undesired, sovereign and invincible, never to be repeated, never to be reversed. Thomas Goodwin has a word concerning this which expresses the matter wonderfully well. He says that the change which is made in a person when he is regenerated is a greater change than is made upon a person, a child of God, when he is translated from time to eternity, from grace to glory, because it is a change of nature. It is the communication of a new nature, a divine principle, which is as holy as God Himself. And that holy principle in the heart, that principle of life, is that which sees light in God's light, and feels things in God's life, and sees sin and feels sin as never before. Has that act been passed upon us? How did we come by our religion? It may be very trying to have to face such a question but, my friends, it is terrible to be deceived. To be undeceived, if deceived, would be a great mercy. Undeceived, all will be sooner or later who are deceived, but to be undeceived, so as to be emptied of false religion and to be brought to realise before God our need of mercy, and to be led in that simple, but all embracing and effectual prayer of the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner" would be a great mercy for those who might be deceived. Nor would it be unprofitable for those who are not deceived to face this question, and to review their past and to go back to the beginning, for that word therein may be verified in their experience, as it is indeed to be verified. Paul, writing by divine inspiration, said that the Lord God would confirm us unto the

end. "Who also shall confirm us unto the end, that we may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ". We need to be confirmed that we are in the right way. We need to be confirmed concerning the beginning of our religion being of the Lord. Today, I take it, so far as my little observation goes, to be exceedingly necessary to make these observations, for there are many running to and fro and natural knowledge is increased, religious knowledge, but where is the fruit of union to Christ. Now fruit is a vastly different thing, yea a contrary thing, to legal works. I know the reply of formalists, immediately the precepts of the gospel are named. We are saved by grace and grace is free. Well, if you are saved by free grace, where are your evidences of being saved? Fruit, I say, is different from legal works. It is the result of life, not the labour of a dead sinner to create life.

"Every branch that beareth fruit". Now this may be, and will be, very trying to some. It is trying to me. You look for fruit; you look in your heart, and you review your life, and what is the result? Well you say, I am ashamed. My heart is full of sin, my life is full of faults, I can find nothing upon which I can stand with confidence as a ground of acceptance before God. Well, even that painful conclusion of your search of yourself may not be unprofitable, if it bring you back to this, a real, humble, simple hearted confession of your sin before God, and I believe that one of the chief fruits of union with Christ is, not only conviction of sin, but confession and forsaking of it. Repentance, it is a real fruit of union with Christ; godly sorrow for sin, which is not always accompanied with dread of hell. At the first it frequently is accompanied with that painful dread of hell. Without repentance there is no salvation. Without a knowledge of sin and repentance toward God on account of it, there is no evidence of vital union with Christ, nor do those who repent at the beginning, that is to say who are convinced of sin and lie pent up in their guilt, feel union with Christ as a comfort. What they feel is this, the need of salvation, and none but those who are condemned in conscience, and to whom conviction of sin is granted by the Spirit, are capable of feeling their real need of a Saviour. It is the Spirit's work to convince of sin and He does that work as He is the Spirit of Christ. One of our hymn writers prays for this and it would be better with many professors had they a heart to pray with him

Convince us of our sin
Then lead to Jesus' blood

To be convinced of sin is a great mercy; by the Spirit to be convinced.

And another fruit of union with Christ, still not enjoyed in the comfort of it, is faith. Faith is not always accompanied with comfort. Faith's object is God as He reveals Himself. Faith has to do, therefore, with God's threatenings in the law. Faith in Christ, when Christ is revealed to faith, delivers from the law, but faith in God, as He reveals Himself to a convicted sinner, this is very solemn. It makes a man believe what God says concerning himself. Even though God condemns him, even although He tells him what he is as a polluted and helpless and ruined sinner, he believes it; he feelingly believes it. But faith's proper Object is Christ. Men's eyes are not opened to see only a condemning sentence, God in the law; they are not only opened to see hell, which they deserve; not only opened to see the hell of sin which is in their nature; not only are they quickened into life to feel their utter helplessness and that eternal death belongs to them by nature; but they are quickened and have eyes and light to see another Object and that Object is the Lord Jesus. Faith. Now faith in Christ as He is revealed in the gospel is a hunger; it is a desire, it is a motion of the soul. And that hunger, that desire, that motion in the soul, is prayer-wise. The poor sinner goes to prayer; he feels his heart going after the Lord if so be he may find Him. This is fruit. It is the consequence of union. Life is in His soul and the secret union that is between him and Christ has a power that draws him after Himself. "My soul followeth hard after Thee". Now some of you, if you cannot find any fruit upon which to pride yourself, no piety or any goodness, or any righteousness, you may not be able to deny but that you have these two things. You have conviction of sin and you sometimes feel starving for the bread of life. You hunger for the righteousness of God. You say "O that I knew where I might find Him", the Lord Jesus. Well now, that is fruit. It is the consequence of the effect of life and life only comes from union with Christ. No person is regenerated by the Spirit who is not in the covenant of grace and who has not an interest in the electing

love of God. The Trinity are not disconnected in the work of salvation. Christ did not atone for the sins of the non elect. The Spirit does not quicken the souls of those for whom Christ did not suffer, bleed and die. I say, the Trinity is inseparable in the work of salvation, though their works are distinguishable, and that is what I take it the Lord Jesus means where in the 17th chapter of this Gospel He says, "I in them and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one." O what a union this is. "Every branch that beareth fruit". Another fruit is this, love. You cannot really separate love from life, spiritual life, and yet there are thousands of the Lord's people who have felt that they would give the world if they could love the Lord. But what is love in its acting? It is this. It is being unsatisfied without contact with its Object, and that state of dissatisfaction, wherein is felt the absolute indispensability for satisfaction of love's Object, brings the soul to earnestly, diligently, patiently wait for the Lord, and that waiting is love, the result of love. The Apostle Paul quoting out of the 64 Isaiah in the Corinthians puts love for waiting, and says "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard neither hath entered into the heart of man to conceive the things that God has prepared for Him that loveth Him" Isaiah said "for him that waiteth for Him". Now if you are really waiting for Christ, sorrowing, mourning, longing, hungering, pressing after Him, that may prove to be a real fruit of love.

"Every branch that beareth fruit". Another fruit is gratitude, thanksgiving, praise. Some here may say, I cannot praise the Lord as I would. I feel more inclined to weep. Well, mourning is a fruit. Sorrow for sin is a fruit. It is not contrary to praise. One might truly say this, that none but those who mourn over sin are capable of praising, of bearing the fruit of praise. The prophet Hosea speaks of the calves of the lips. That is the the best praise you can offer to God. And that praise, these calves of the lips that are to be rendered to the Lord, is the consequence of His mercy felt, His love enjoyed, His salvation in possession. And it is only that that produces this fruit of praise, when the Lord's goodness, and mercy, and love are conveyed to the heart.

"Every branch that beareth fruit He purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit". Every branch in Christ bears fruit. Every branch

in Christ bearing fruit will be the subject of this purging in order to an increase of fruitfulness. Now this is the work of the Holy Spirit, for the Father here is said to be the Husbandman and He purgeth every fruit bearing branch in Christ, and He does so by His Spirit. What then is this purging? Well, it is correcting, it is rebuking, it is cutting things off, it is overturning, it is finding fault, it is debating with the vine as it is in Isaiah, the Lord opposing His people. This is a strange thing to the religious world generally, but not strange to the people of God. He purgeth it. There is need of this purging else the Lord would never administer it. There is need of this purging in every child of God for He says "Every branch in Me that beareth fruit He purgeth it" And why is this? One great reason is that the child of God is a sinner, that his old man is not changed, that indwelling sin is not dead, that he is liable to many evils, that, even with the real grace of God in his heart, he may go astray in many directions, both in erroneous doctrines and in a wrong spirit and experience, and in wrong practices, and so the Lord sees the wisdom and the need and He feels love enough and interest enough in His people to purge them. The flesh is not to prevail. Sin is not to have dominion, grace is to have dominion, and to prevail, and to reign unto eternal life through Jesus Christ in every one of His people, and so there must be this purging. And this purging the Lord administers in many ways. He does so by His Word. In the next verse Christ said to these disciples and to His living people, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you," and I take it that that means regeneration. "He that is washed" said Christ to Peter "needeth not save to wash his feet but is clean every whit". Regeneration is not to be repeated. The life given can never die but a living soul can become unhealthy, a child of God may wander far into wrong things. And so the Lord uses His word in order to purge, to correct. Conviction of some wrong things in you may be like a purge to much false confidence. When the Lord sees a child of His walking in formality and vain confidence He may send some solemn conviction, or He may withhold the light of His countenance, or He may suspend the gracious comforting of the Holy Spirit, and these, all these will result ultimately in a purging, for it makes the poor sinner feel afresh His need of Christ. It is that principally that the Lord's discipline aims at and effects in the child of God. We wander from the Lord, we become strong and thereby prayerless, and

thereby impenitent, and thereby our religion becomes dry, our profession is little more than outside, a name to live and yet dead. It may be a description even of a child of God dead as to present vital contact with Christ. Now this is a diseased condition, an overgrowth which needs to be cut back, a confidence that the Lord sees is not good, and which, if walked in, He will reject and so He sends solemn conviction, suspends the illumination and the teaching and comfort of the Holy Ghost. And where is the poor creature? His confidence is shaken, his soul is benighted, he feels withered, far off and miserable, and he gropes for the wall at mid-day, in the gospel day, as those that have no light. This is very solemn, but very salutary, very wholesome. The Lord is determined that His people shall not destroy themselves utterly. They do destroy themselves as to comfort, and confidence, and as to all that which is pleasant, and then the Lord brings them back. I will purge them. He purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit. Our religion would soon wither if we were left to our own resources. We should soon become mere formalists because of the power of the flesh and the love of ease, and the de-relish of that separation from the world. We should soon become mere formalists unless the Lord did, from time to time, minister this purging to us. Bitter things are purging things and the Lord sends bitter things to His people to bring them back, to empty them of much of their religiousness which is false, so that they shall come again to His footstool with godly sincerity, with earnest desires, with strong appetite. It is a good thing to have a good appetite in religion. If we have lost our appetite in religion and we are the Lord's, if we are satisfied with form, which is little better than the husks that the swine did eat, the Lord will purge us, so as to make us hungry for the truth. He purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit. Purgeth it of self confidence, of vain glory, of pride, of prayerlessness and of erroneous doctrines. Some of you may feel so fortified by long usage in hearing the truth in the purity of it that you may, for a time, be in danger of neglecting this point, that sound doctrine must be known afresh by the unction of the Spirit. It is by a necessity of the doctrine in our experience that we are brought back to the doctrine, in the purity and in the power of it. You take, for instance, this, the doctrine of Christ's atoning sacrifice. How far we may get from that and if we do our religion will be very unsavoury to the people of God. It will be a dry religion without the

atonement. We may hold fast the doctrine naturally, but it is only by contact with Christ, it is only by the Lord bringing us to a fresh sense of the need of the atonement, that we shall come with earnestness to the Lord Jesus for a fresh application of His atoning sacrifice, and that makes the poor sinner fruitful. That purging makes him fruitful in faith. Faith is not a dead thing, not a mere creed, held in the judgment. It is a life: "The just shall live by his faith". And, says the hymnwriter

'Tis by Thy death we live O Lord

And what does that produce when a person is brought back to the atonement? This; it produces more love, contact with the Lord Jesus by faith. A poor guilty sinner, brought to the throne of grace seeking for the blood of Christ once more to sprinkle his conscience and getting that sprinkling and that redeeming love shed abroad in his heart, it rekindles his love, and he bears more fruit. He does not bear more fruit by an effort of nature, but just as a branch bears fruit from the root, so the people of God only can bear fruit as they have vital contact with, and communications from, the root, Christ Jesus.

AMEN.