

Pruning the Vineyard

May 1996

Our recent trip to Canada took us to the fertile bridge of Ontario between Lake Erie and Lake Ontario. We drove past miles of orchards, vineyards and tree farms which were just being touched by the colors of spring.

One of the Christian families who invited us for a meal had a small orchard on the back of their property. At least they said it was an orchard; at the time it only appeared to be a bunch of brown stumps sticking out of the ground.

Nancy Lianga, our hostess, explained the pruning process. After the grapes are gathered, the entire vine is cut back except for four stems: two running along wires to the right and two running to the left. Then she said, *“If you let the vines go, they will produce the worst tasting grapes you can imagine.”* The spiritual application was not lost on us.

Jesus said, *“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”* (Jn 15:2). To those unskilled in horticulture, to drastically cut back an apparently healthy tree or vine seems senseless and hurtful. But there is something about new growth that keeps the fruit sweet, fresh and tasty.

Our objective is not merely to exist as a Christian but to bear fruit: *“By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples”* (Jn 15:8). The struggles, problems and difficulties which occasionally come to all of us in life serve a purpose. Without them, we can become a thick, stiff branch content to siphon nutrients from the vine without producing much fruit.

But the most precise and direct method of pruning involves God’s word. In a mixing of metaphors, God prunes with a living and powerful two-edged sword (Heb 4:12). His word is able to cut deep into our heart and lay bare the roots of complacency, apathy, selfishness or any other attitude which hinders fruit-bearing service.

If the preacher preaches the truth and it stings, don’t resent or attack him. Rather, thank God for His remedial pruning. If a brother or sister comes in a spirit of humility and offers a corrective observation, don’t swell up with “how dare you” pride. Be glad that someone cared about you and had the courage to show it.

Part of the thrill in being a Christian is the daily opportunity to grow and produce fruit which the Lord will find pleasing. If we become satisfied as we are, our grapes will turn sour.