

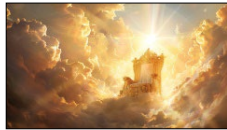
Chop-Chop Snip-Snip

The Sharp Reality of God's Love

June 18, 2025



Today we're talking about balancing sternness and kindness – both ours and God's!



We've been looking, lately, at the day "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ". (2 Cor 5:10) So, I'm curious: **Are you a little leery of facing the Lord?** Maybe even afraid? **If so, is it reverence or ignorance?** And, **if not, is it confidence or arrogance?**

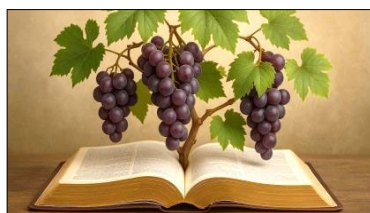


Both ignorance and arrogance are self-deceiving. **Only wisdom and humility can secure our connection and assure our calling.** But both of those are something we must all grow into. Just as Jesus, **the divine Vine, spread the light of God's love, and the fruit of God's Spirit,** to a dark and dying world, we who embrace and bond with Him **become His budding, blossoming, and blooming branches,** to continue to reach out with the fruit of His Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control) **to appeal to those within our reach,** who respond to our unique flavor, to come and taste the goodness of God. Jesus said:



"I am the True Vine, and My Father is the Gardener. [Why? Well, He made the Garden of Eden our home. And we were cut off. So Jesus prayed in a garden, was betrayed in a garden, and buried in a garden, and arose in a garden. Know what kind? A rose garden. And when He rose, Mary mistook Him for ... the gardener! But His Father is the Gardener, and] He cuts off every [false] branch in Me that bears no fruit, [Chop-chop!] while every [faithful] branch that does bear fruit He prunes [Snip-snip!] so that it will be even more fruitful. [But that's it? Chop-chop or snip-snip? What about coddle-coddle or pamper-pamper? Not the way of our Father] ... [So] Remain in Me, as I also [in the same way] remain in you. [How's that?] ... If you remain in Me and I [in the same way] in you, you will bear much fruit [because: Snip-snip!] ... [But] If you do not remain in Me, you are like a branch that is thrown away [Chop-chop!] and ... thrown into the fire and burned. [But] If you remain in Me and [here's how we remain in Him the way He remains in us] My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, [regarding bearing fruit] and it will be done for you. [Because] This is to My Father's [the Gardener's] glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples." – John 15:1-8 NIV

And thus, **we remain in His Word so that His Word remains in us.** And therefore, we bud and blossom and grow in wisdom, and mature in reverence and confidence, as His ambassadors.



Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others. ... For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that One died for all ... [and] All this is from God, who reconciled us ... and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world ... And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation ... [as] Christ's ambassadors – 2 Corinthians 5:11-20 NIV

[You see] Israel was a spreading vine; [but] he brought forth *fruit for himself*. ... [Because] Their heart [like every heart] is *deceitful*, and now they must *bear their guilt*. ... Then they will say, “We have *no king* because *we did not revere the Lord*.” – Hosea 10:1-3 NIV

“The *fear of Me* is not in *you*,” says the Lord God of hosts. ... “Yet I *planted you* as a *choice vine*, from the purest stock. How then did you turn degenerate and *become a wild vine*?” – Jeremiah 2:19-21 NRS

[And Paul warns us to avoid their error, saying] Do not *be arrogant*, but [rather] *be afraid*. For if God did not *spare the natural branches*, [Chop-chop!] He will not *spare you either*. [So “*be afraid*.” “*But, I thought perfect love drives out fear*.” (1 Jn 4:18) It *does*. But *driving* is a *process* that requires *wisdom*. And the *fear of the Lord* is the *beginning of wisdom*. (Prv 1:7)] *Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, [Chop-chop!] but kindness to you, provided that you continue in His [Snip-snip!] kindness*. Otherwise, [it’ll be chop-chop, and] you *also* will be *cut off*. And if *they* do not *persist in unbelief*, they will be *grafted in* ... After all, if you [gentiles] were *cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature*, and *contrary to nature* were *grafted into a cultivated olive tree*, how much more *readily* will *these, the natural branches*, be *grafted into their own olive tree*! – Romans 11:20-24 NIV



Except, *commentaries* seem to *enjoy* pointing out, that **olive farmers don’t graft wild branches into cultivated trees**. They graft *cultivated* branches onto *wild* trees. Because *each branch, wild or cultivated*, continues to *produce its own fruit*. Most give *Paul* a *pass*, by *noting* that he’s teaching *theology*, not *horticulture*, and therefore has *poetic license* for his *ignorance*. Though they word it more like respected theologian C.H. Dodd, who said: “**Paul had the limitations of the town-bred man ... and he had not the curiosity to inquire what went on in the olive-yards which fringed every road he walked.**” With all due respect, **the Bible isn’t a haphazard book**. Far from it. **It’s the trustworthy Word of the Author of salvation**. And *Paul* wasn’t an *ignorant city boy*. Far from it. Which is *why* he lets us know that he knows that what he’s describing is “*contrary to nature*”. And *Paul* and our *Creator* get the *last laugh*; because, an ancient grafting technique was *rediscovered* by Nobel Prize winner Sir William Ramsay, who found that: **When a cultivated olive tree ceases to produce any fruit, it can be reinvigorated by grafting a wild shoot into it**. Well, shoot!

Now, *discipline* always seems *painful [snip-snip]* ... but *later* it *yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness* to those who [remain and] have been *trained* by it. – Hebrews 12:11 NRS

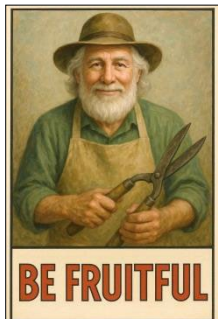
[Because] The *Root of the righteous* bears *fruit*. – Proverbs 12:12 ESV

[Because] “I [Jesus] am the *Root* and the *Offspring of David*” – Revelation 22:16 NKJ

[Therefore] The *fruit of righteousness* will be *peace*; [and] the *effect of righteousness* will be *quietness and confidence* [rather than *hotheadedness and arrogance*] – Isaiah 32:17 NIV

And [so Paul says] it is my *prayer* that your *love* may *abound* ... for the *day of Christ*, filled with the *fruit of righteousness* that comes *through Jesus Christ* – Philippians 1:9-11 ESV

[Because] The *fruit of the righteous* is a *tree of life* – Proverbs 11:30 NIV



So, how do we keep our faith safe from the chop-chop block? By remaining in God's Word, so it remains in us. Because **we must grow to bear the righteous fruit of peacemaking**. Which only comes with reverence and confidence when we "consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God". Because, **we tend to heavily lean to one side of God's nature**. But, would you tell a child only that the stove is our pal? Cuz it makes yummy cookies and pops popcorn. No. **We teach our children to fear the stove**. Because we'll burn ourselves with hot oil and foil if we fail to treat it with the respect it deserves. I think that's why it's called Revere Ware. And as we grow, **awareness of one aspect balances our awareness of the other**. Same goes for God. **If we focus only on Uncle God's kindness, we'll see Him as a big ol' softy on sin**; because, all kindness produces liberalistic self-condoning. And **we'll fail to appreciate how alarmingly, powerfully, He opposes our sin**. For those who reject Jesus:

No sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. – Hebrews 10:26-27 NIV

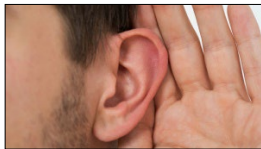
I cringe a bit when someone calls God the Big Guy or the Man Upstairs. But on the flip side, **if we focus only on General God's sternness, we'll see Him as impossible to please**; because, all sternness produces legalistic self-condemning. And **we'll fail to find the joy of our salvation**, or to feel the forgiveness He so freely offers, and to take to heart that:

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus – Romans 8:1 NIV

God is love. But, **love is something more stern than kindness**. Because **kindness simply desires to numb or alleviate pain**. Which is why a kind vet might help a suffering horse by shooting it. But we require something a bit more complex. Which is why **a kind but stern God helps us to face pain to find healing**. Which means **removing suffering is secondary to overcoming it**. Still, **we want a God who dispenses mercy without demanding change**. And yet, **that's a desire for less love, not more**. Which is why our Gardner won't let us off the pruning hook, if our desire for comfort is causing us to rot on the vine. So, do you have a proper respect for the sharp reality of God's love? Because, **a balanced awareness of His kindness and sternness produces righteousness**. And peacemaking fruit is so essential, that Jesus gives it priority over worship. Saying:

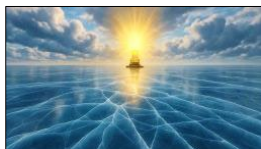
"If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother [or sister] has something against you, [rightly or wrongly] leave your [symbolic] gift there in front of the altar. [And] First go and [offer your true gift, and living sacrifice, and] be reconciled" – Matthew 5:23-24 NIV

Cuz it's kind of our #1 Job. And it's fairly painfully ironic for Christ's Ambassadors of Reconciliation to others, to try to worship Him while willfully ignoring what needs some reconciling pruning in their own life. So, here are some quick recommendations for reconciliation, for when you realize that someone has something against you. First, **take the initiative ASAP**. Make the first move and make contact fast, whether it's your fault or not. Because, **delay only deepens resentment**.



Put it on a **to-do list** with buying milk or weeding, and **train yourself to see it as just another simple task**. The *hardest part* is just getting that ball rolling; so text or call or email, and just say, **“Can we talk? I need to apologize.”** Do that and the *battle’s half won*. And it’s sure to get their attention. But, **don’t go in to convince or condemn**. Go in to – now listen close – to listen close and to please Jesus. **All it takes is two little ears instead of one big mouth**. And it turns out, **we can sympathize with those with whom we disagree**. And that’s when a *minor miracle occurs*. Because, when they know that you care how they feel, they’ll likely care how you feel. And that *grace feels amazing!* But whatever your offense, right or wrong, intentional, unintentional, or imagined, **own up to your own part with shockingly humble honesty**. Anything less just isn’t as fun. And **if you’re gonna do it, do it right!**

This is called *removing the log from our own eye*. And Christ is clear that *this comes first* in His book. And along those lines, let’s keep in mind: **we can’t make peace by making excuses**. God has called us as *peacemakers*, not *excuse-makers*. We have a *great memory* when it comes to those who’ve offended us. But, we *tend to forget* about the offenses that we’ve caused. So, **don’t mistake a poor memory for a clear conscience!** Ask the Lord to help you recall all those you need to reconcile. And allow a *healthy reverence* for our Gardner’s sternness to help you overcome your resistance to a little awkwardness or self-consciousness. And finally, if and when it’s your turn to share, **express your hurt with tender honesty**. Because, when we attack they will defend. So, **attack the problem, not the person**. And offer the Lord your *relational nuclear arsenal*, like: **sarcasm** and **insults** and **comparisons** and **belittling**. Because, **we won’t be persuasive when we’re abrasive**. And, more than that, we want to continue in His kindness. Did you happen to notice, that although we’re to “consider” both His “kindness and sternness”, we “continue” only “in His kindness”.



But, **a little reminder of His sternness now and then will send us running to re-embrace the security of His kindness**. Because, **the terrifying becomes awe-inspiring when seen from a safe position**. Have you seen China’s glass skywalk, built 4,000 feet up, on the side of a cliff? I showed it about five years ago. But I guess they don’t sue in China, because they added glass cracking sound and visual effects! **Fear is a good starting point**. Like causing a kid to be too scared to touch a hot stove. But we don’t continue in fear. **We continue to grow in His loving kindness**. We’ll all feel the sharp reality of God’s firm love – given that **every branch gets the blade**. The only question is: *chop-chop or snip-snip?* Since **some get the scalpel and some get the axe**. But our divine Vine is patient and precise and personally invested in the growth of every single sprout. So **don’t fear God’s pruning, fear avoiding it**. After all, **the snip-snip of conviction and correction reminds us that we’re connected**. So let’s get to work, and go out on a limb, and bear some *ambassador fruit* just for Him. It might simply begin with an awkward text, and end with a surrendered, **“I’m sorry.”**

Just keep in mind, when you’re standing on, what Scripture calls, the sea of glass before His throne, (Rev 4:6) you’ll want to hear Him say, **“Well done, wild branch!”** and **“Nice fruit!”** So, consider His sternness, and continue in His kindness, and let the pruning commence!