

STAY OUT OF THE FIRE!

Joe Slater

When I was twelve or thirteen years old, my dad bought some land a few miles southwest of Limon, Colorado. I think he paid \$60 per acre or thereabouts, then worried whether he could grow enough crops and cattle to make payments to the Federal Land Bank!

On the property were several out-buildings that had become run down to the point of being not only useless, but dangerous. One misty, drizzly day we set fire to them! Ironically, the property was worth more without them than it had been with them.

Our Heavenly Father also burns things that prove to be useless. Jesus said, “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away . . . If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned” (John 15:1, 2a, 6).

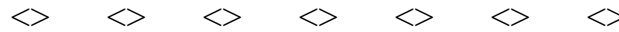
There were other buildings on my dad’s land that we didn’t burn. How did we determine which ones to burn and which ones to leave? If the building offered some benefit, we left it; if not, we burned it.

How does the Lord determine which branches are to be burned and which are not? He uses these criteria:

Are the branches abiding in the vine? The vine is Jesus, and the branches are disciples (vv. 1, 5). God requires every disciple to abide in Christ. Unlike branches in a literal vine, human beings have free moral agency; that is, we decide for ourselves whether or not to remain in Christ. People get into the vine (Christ) through baptism into Him (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27). They remain in Christ through faithfulness to Him and His word.

Are they therefore bearing fruit? Jesus said, “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches . . . without Me you can do nothing” (vv. 4, 5). Even if a branch is connected to the vine, it is useless unless it bears fruit. Vineyard owners grow vines for the fruit, not just for pretty foliage. When a branch produces no fruit, the vinedresser prunes it off, and it becomes fuel for the fire!

The fruit God requires includes such things as good works (Colossians 1:10), holiness (Romans 6:22), soul-winning (John 4:35, 36), benevolence (2 Corinthians 9:10), and worship (Hebrews 13:15). Abiding in Christ, you have the ability and the responsibility to bear fruit. By doing so, you will stay out of the fire!



My (Adopted) Prayer

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy;
O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand,
To be loved as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
It is in dying to self that we are born to eternal life.

--Attributed to Francis of Assisi

Ways I Deepen My Faith

(when I read Revelation)

I speak God’s truth more courageously (chapters 10 and 11).

These chapters can be hard to understand. How exactly can they help me in my Christian life? First, notice the main characters: John (chapter 10) and the two witnesses (chapter 11). Second, notice their activity. All three are commanded to speak the message of God. But all three discover that preaching is not all about congratulations and conversions. Notice the results: when John swallows God’s message, it’s bitter. When the witnesses finish speaking their testimony, they get killed. What does this teach me? Witnessing means telling God’s truth, no matter the consequences. As one African-American preacher put it, “The church must be prophetic or it will be pathetic.”

I don’t know about you, but I need reminded of that. Our world does not like to hear God’s truth and can get hostile. Somebody said, “If you are the light of the world, you’re going to attract a few bugs.” Or as Wayne Smith puts it, “If you carry the ball for Christ, you’re going to get tackled.” Sometimes, in the interest of keeping the peace, we can be tempted to keep silent. Nobody wants to be seen as intolerant or judgmental. It’s easier just to be quiet.

Which is why we need these chapters. Notice: John doesn’t write as much to instruct us *in* witnessing as to inspire us *to* witnessing. I don’t need more explanation. I need examples. It’s not information I lack. It’s courage. Seeing these witnesses speak boldly for God shoots adrenaline through my soul. They paid the price for faithfulness. Surely I can speak up for Christ to my neighbor. Though the world may reject, God will reward (11:18). When I read Revelation, I say, “Make me like these guys. Make me a witness.” I speak God’s truth more courageously.

--Matt Proctor (via *Christian Standard*)