

The Branch Life #6 John 15:1-11
The Grace of Pruning

Christian Smith study

<https://albertmohler.com/2005/04/11/moralistic-therapeutic-deism-the-new-american-religion-2/>

Dominant spiritual viewpoint is Moralistic Therapeutic Deism

According to sociologists Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, most American teenagers believe in something dubbed “**Moralistic Therapeutic Deism**” (MTD). [1] Within this MTD “religion,” God is a cosmic therapist and divine butler, ready to help out when needed. He exists but really isn't a part of our lives. We are supposed to be “good people,” but each person must find what's right for him or her. Good people will go to heaven, and we shouldn't be stifled by organized religion where somebody tells us what we should do or what we should believe. [2]

Kenda Creasy Dean, in *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*, argues that **American teenagers have bought into MTD, not because they have misunderstood what the church has taught them, but precisely because it is what the church has taught them.** She writes,

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism has little to do with God or a sense of divine mission in the world. It offers comfort, bolsters self-esteem, helps solve problems, and lubricates interpersonal relationships by encouraging people to do good, feel good, and keep God at arm's length. [3]

MTD

- MORALISTIC: Object is to be a good person and be around good people
- THERAPEUTIC -“I am a person with a team of people who help me be the best I can be- parents, teachers, coaches, counselors, and God- are all a part of this team to help me do me?”
- DEISM - There is a God who made world and wound it up and let it go, but not involved. I don't relate to or need God unless I want him to be a part of my team to help me have a better day.

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/mtd-not-just-a-problem-with-youth-ministry/>

Nothing flies in the face of MTD more than John 15:1- 6.

1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

8 By this is my Father glorified that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.

9 Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.

10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. **11 These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.**

God is not just involved, He cuts, casts and burns on the one hand, and He prunes for more fruit on the other. This is a God who is involved, even intrusive. He will inflict discipline, not pay back or retaliation, but he'll use hard things to grow us and change us. That is the God of the Bible.

We receive discipline from God Heb 12:5-11- because He loves us. Discipline is proof that we are His children.

In reality, we all need God to parent us. We need His loving instruction and discipline.

We all need pruning AND Heb 12 and John 15 show us that God brings out the pruning shears because He loves us and He wants us to be MORE FRUITFUL. The pruning is for our good and His glory.

We must know this through the eyes of faith because it doesn't always seem that way. Pruning can be painful.

EX If a branch had feelings it would certainly experience some "discomfort" when you start cutting with the pruning shears.

The one abiding in Christ will accept the pruning in order to bear more fruit for the glory of God. **Our response to pruning reveals whether we are ABIDING in Christ or abiding in something else.**

**CAVEAT: Don't base your evaluation on your first response, which is often NOT your final response

When we are abiding, we learn to pray this way: This is a prayer of faith. It is easier to pray for someone else than for yourself.

THE DEEPS

Plough deep in me, great Lord,
heavenly Husbandman,
that my being may be a tilled field,
the roots of grace spreading far and wide,
until thou alone art seen in me,..
I am nothing but that thou makest me,
I have nothing but that I receive from thee,
I can be nothing, but that grace adorns me.
Quarry me deep, dear Lord,
and then fill me to overflowing
with living water.

EX: When you quarry deep enough, you hit water: Limestone quarry (Breaking Away) or Kaolin mines in central Georgia.

As we abide in Christ, the water of the Holy Spirit will be the reservoir in our heart. JOHN 7

37 Now on the last day, the great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. 38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" 39 But this He spoke of the Spirit,

Pruning often comes through trials and one result is to expose our idols. We can't grow spiritually and turn from our idols if we don't know what they are and admit them. Trials simply reveal what is already in our hearts.

EX: SQUEEZE TOOTHPAST OUT OF TUBE onto a plate. Why is there toothpaste on the plate? Because it was in the tube.

If you are abiding and fruitful, you need pruning. **No matter how "mature" and fruitful you are as a believer, your "biggest" sin may still be ahead of you, and mine may be ahead of me.** That is not what we want to hear, but real life shows it is true. EX: David ; Peter

I point that out because none of us is beyond the need for pruning. BE DILIGENT TO GUARD YOUR HEART

**DON'T USE THAT AS AN EXCUSE - "the pastor said my biggest sin is ahead of me, so..."

PRUNING:

<https://rcfmedilag.files.wordpress.com/2017/07/for-our-dark-times.pdf>

'When God Wants a Man'
When God wants to drill a man and thrill a man and skill a man...
When God wants to mold a man to play the noblest part;

When He yearns with all His heart to create so great and bold a man
That all the world shall praise,
Watch His methods, watch His ways!

How He ruthlessly perfects whom He royally elects;
how He hammers and hurts him,
And with mighty blows coverts him into frail shapes of clay that only God understands.
How his tortured heart is crying and he lifts beseeching hands....
How He bends but never breaks when His good He undertakes.
How He uses whom He chooses....
with every purpose fuses him;
By every art induces him to try His splendour out
God knows what He's about!

WHAT IS THE THING THAT YOU KNOW NEEDS TO BE PRUNED?

You know it because you're afraid God is going to bring the pruning shears to it one day. You know it is there and it is hindering your walk with God, your relationships, it infects your mind, your thinking, your perspective on others, etc.

It may not be some red-light district sin; it may seem harmless to others, but you know that it reflects your own stubborn self-willed approach to life.

It may be a respectable sin or an understandable attitude or stance on something. Friends will support you in it. They'll tell you that you have a right to feel this way, but deep down you know that it is THE true battleground of your soul in terms of yielding to God.

It may be something or someone you are seeking, or it may be some area of obedience where you are saying, "No, God, I'm drawing the line right here. You have no right to expect that of me. Lord if there is anything else I'll do it, but not this."

Sound familiar?

Christ the vine points us to God the gardener and just as he trusted God, so we too should trust God that he will do in us and for us what we need that we might be fruitful.

This raises the reality of how the gardener works. He works by pruning and in some cases tearing away and throwing into the Fire. If we feel like our lives are being pruned and torn apart then perhaps we need to stop and ask God if he is pruning us and how we need to respond.

The Christians first response to trials, difficulty, or testing should be that of seeing it is pruning from the hands of a wise Gardener rather than ascribing bad motives to God.

EX: I think about the rose bush at our house in Palaiseau when The Neighbor first pruned it.

The good news and the grace of pruning is that, no matter what our sin, or when we sin, God will be there to prune and repair.

In all our sin, abiding means Repentant Faith and Forgiveness. The Abiding person still sins, but he/she moves toward confession and repentance.

Remember that growth in grace is not DWJD, but DWJND (Do What Jesus Never Did)- REPENT; It's where we meet Christ.

The reality of abiding has been described by Eugene Peterson as "A long obedience in the same direction."

<http://redeemernw.org/blog/learners/a-long-obedience-in-the-same-direction-part-1>

“One aspect of world that I have been able to identify as harmful to Christians is the assumption that anything worthwhile can be acquired at once. We assume that if something can be done at all, it can be done quickly and efficiently.”

The Bible and real-life experience shows us that the life of abiding obedience is not one and done; it is not an overnight accomplishment. It is a marathon, not a sprint

DISCIPLE AND PILGRIM

“There are two biblical designations for people of faith that are extremely useful: pilgrim and disciple

Pilgrim (parepidēmos) tells us we are people who spend our lives going someplace, going to God, and whose path for getting there is the way, Jesus Christ. We realize that “this world is not my home” and set out for “the Father’s house.”

Disciple (mathētēs) says we are people who spend our lives apprenticed to our master, Jesus Christ. We are in a growing-learning relationship, always. A disciple is a learner, but not in the academic setting of a schoolroom, rather at the work site of a craftsman. We do not acquire information about God but skills in faith.”

This brings us to the concept of spiritual disciplines. We don’t like the word “discipline”, but if we are going to abide in Christ, we must be intentional in our thoughts and affections. There is something organic about bearing fruit, just as there is something intentional about it.

We don’t have to tell branches to abide or remain on the vine

EX: I never heard Linda saying that to the plants in her garden.

The metaphor is organic as it applies to real vines and branches. But it becomes intentional when it becomes a command – Abide in me.

MORE ON SP DISCIPLINES in two WEEKs...

Don’t overlook the goal of JOY- Jesus spoke these things (v. 1-10) so that we would have His Joy in us. As James would later put it, “Consider it all joy when God prunes you”. There is a grace in the pruning of God and when we lean into that grace, we will know the supernatural joy of Christ.

MTD remains a problem in the American church. It channels the method of ministry from gospel to gimmick. But the English Puritan John Flavel points to God’s far better plan:

“The intent of the Redeemer’s undertaking was not to purchase for his people riches, ease, and pleasures on earth; but to mortify their lusts, heal their natures, and spiritualize their affections; and thereby to fit them for the eternal fruition of God.” [4] Brian Cosby TGC article

We sang this earlier in the service... Prayer Answered by Crosses - Newton

That song expresses how God answer our prayers for growth in faith and love by pruning us so that we’ll find our all in Him.

This prayer manifests a heart that is being shaped for eternal fruit for God....I came across this prayer in October 2007 on one of the worst days of my life. It struck me then as it does now.

Christian calling

Grant that I may be salted with suffering,
with every exactment tempered to my soul,
every rod excellently fitted to my back,
to chastise, humble, break me.

Let me not overlook the hand that holds the rod,

as thou didst not let me forget the rod that fell
on Christ,
and drew me to him.

PRAYER, CONFESSION, LORD'S TABLE

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