

Surrender 103

Andrew Murray's Last Chapter in "Absolute Surrender" (adapted by Chris)

Sunday Afternoon Reading:

There is nothing more important in the Christian life than being found in Christ. If we want good apples, we must have a good apple tree. If we care for the health of the apple tree, the apple tree gives us good apples. It is the same with our Christian life and work. If we are to live as Christ wishes us to, we must be fully connected to Christ. Can we learn from instruction and training for the various aspects of God's work? Of course! But only once we are grafted as a branch receiving full life in Christ. In other words, to have Christ in us and working through us. There are many things that can cause disruption to our lives and anxiousness, but our Master has such a blessing for every one of us, perfect peace and rest, and such joy and strength. That is, if we can be found in and kept in an attitude of dependence on him.

I wish to guide us through a brief reflection on Jesus' parable in John 15:5, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." Especially Jesus' words, "you are the branches."

It is a simple thing to be a branch. A branch in a tree or in a vine. The branch grows out from the vine, or tree, and lives and grows, and in due time, bears fruit. It has no great responsibility to be anything but the branch of the vine or tree. Receiving sap and nourishment from the vine. If we became partakers of that sap which flows into us, God's Holy Spirit, and by the Spirit knew our relationship to the true vine Jesus, our work would shine as the brightest and most heavenly thing on earth. We would no longer experience the soul-weariness and exhaustion so common. Our work would be like a new experience, linking us to Jesus as nothing else can.

How often now does our work come between us and Jesus? This is a mistake! The very work that Jesus has to do in us, and we for Jesus, we often take up in a way that separates us from Christ. Many laborers in the vineyard have complained that they have too much work to do and are too busy for close communion with Jesus. And that all the work for fellow humans darkens our spiritual lives. This is a sad thought. How can the branch bearing fruit possibly separate the branch from the vine? It can only be because we have looked upon our work as something other than the branch bearing fruit. May God deliver us from every false thought about the Christian life.

Sunday's Reflection:

Take some time tonight to read and reflect quietly on John 15:1-11

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Monday's Reading

Now, just a few thoughts about this blessed life of being a branch.

Absolute Dependence

The life of being a branch is one of absolute dependence. The branch has nothing for itself. It depends on the vine. This is of central importance to the christian faith. One theologian in particular even wrote a two volume work showing how this one thought is the summation of all John Calvin's teachings. Others have pointed out that absolute dependence is the one theology of angels as depicted in the scriptures. Shouldn't it be humanity's as well? If we can learn to be dependent on God every moment of every day, our whole lives will be made right.

Jesus uses the illustration of the vine and the branch. Every grape or vine you see from hereon out should remind you that the branch is absolutely dependent on the vine. The vine does all the work while the branch bears forth the fruit.

What work does the vine do? Quite a lot. The vine sends the roots out into the soil to hunt underground. The roots can extend a long way out to find nourishment and water. The vine takes that nourishment and water to form sap that used used to grow the branch and produce leaves and fruit. The vine does all that work and the branch receives it. In Hampton Court, London, there is a vine that was planted in 1768 which is known as the largest grapevine in the world. Its roots reach to the nearby famous Thames river for water and doing its work producing fruit, it can produce upwards of 600 pounds of grapes in a year. The vine does all the work in searching out the rich nourishment and food from the river so that the branch may bear fruit.

That should be our understanding of the work we are called to do. It is rooted in Christ and brought forth in us. Whether we are leading worship, teaching a Bible study, visiting the homebound, helping the poor, or any other task. Our consciousness must be blessed by one thought: Christ must care for all.

How does Jesus do this? By sending forth the Holy Spirit to dwell in us. Just as the sap flows constantly from vine to branch, so the Spirit is poured out to believers. Only by receiving the Holy Spirit's work and guidance in us, can we, in absolute dependence, do the work of Christ.

Our first lesson is to learn to be nothing and to be helpless. The one who has something they cling to as theirs, is not absolutely dependent. The one who has nothing is absolutely dependent. And, absolute dependence is the secret of all power in working for God. The branch has nothing but what it gets from the vine and so we have nothing but what we get from Jesus.

Monday's Reflection:

Purchase a bunch of grapes this week. Sit and eat them (if you can) and reflect on how that fruit was made.

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Tuesday's Reading

Deep Restfulness

Second, the life of the branch is not only a life of entire dependence, but of deep restfulness.

Imagine if a branch on a vine could talk. If we could ask it, "I want to learn from you how I can be a true branch of the living vine." What would its answer be? It would whisper,

"Hello human, I know that you are wise and strong and can do many wonderful things. But I have one simple lesson for you. In all you try to accomplish for Christ, your effort never truly prospers. The lesson you need to learn is to rest in your Lord Jesus. That is my one aim. I grow out of the vine and all I have to do is rest in that vine. I do not anxious or worry about how I will produce grapes. I receive all that as I rest firmly in the vine. When the gardener comes to pluck the grapes, I also have no concern. If the fruit is good or bad, it wasn't me who produced it, I simply bore it for the vine. The same should be for you in Christ, your vine."

Some might respond, "But doesn't that make one lazy?"

No it will not. No one who comes to rest in the living Christ is lazy and unproductive. The closer your contact with Christ, the vine, the more of God's Spirit and Christ's zeal and love will be manifest in you. The great mystery is that the more we work in our own effort the less productive we are but when the work is born in us from our restfulness in Christ, great things are done. Only by absolute dependence can one find this kind of restfulness. Sink down into it daily.

If you want to be a productive branch, take your place at the feet of Jesus every day. Be found in his presence and find deep restfulness in being held by him.

Do you find it difficult to love everyone at all times? That is because you do not have what it takes. Only Jesus has this kind of love. You must receive it from him so that you can love even the most unloveable. Paul says in Romans 5:5, "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" and in 2 Corinthians 5:14, "For the love of Christ urges us on". Let Christ become for you a fountain of love. Overflowing that love into you that it may then overflow from you into others. Rest in Christ, who alone can give wisdom and strength to love like he loves.

Tuesday's Reflection:

Pick a day this week to practice sabbath. Do no work of your own that day. Take the day to rest in Jesus and meditate on his presence in your life through the Holy Spirit. Listen for his word to you and be filled.

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Wednesday's Reading

Much Fruitfulness

Third, the branch teaches a lesson of much fruitfulness.

Jesus speaks often of fruitfulness in John 15. Go back and read it again and count how many times. Who is responsible for the fruitfulness? The Vinedresser, who is Jesus' Father in Heaven. God the Father will watch over you and work to bring about the greatest fruitfulness you can bear.

Jesus said in Luke 10, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few," and we know from our experience that there are fewer and fewer laborers for the gospel these days. Even more so, we know that there are fewer laborers who are fruitful with power beyond this earth. We need laborers, and laborers living into a stronger power, a different kind of life. Only by this will we carry the blessing of fruitfulness to the world. Imagine a dear friend of yours laying on their deathbed. Imagine that only a specific kind of grape could save them and it is out of season. Wouldn't you go to great lengths to get that grape at any cost so that you might save your friend? The world lies on its deathbed in sin. And only the fruit of a branch living in the true vine, Jesus, can save them. Shouldn't we be willing to learn whatever it takes that we might become the bearers of that grape for the world?

What must we learn? We must learn a closer connection between us as the fruit bearer and the heavenly vine who supplies the nourishment for fruitfulness and the vinedresser who does the work of pruning to make us more fruitful. Jesus makes it clear in John 15, "apart from me you can do nothing."

Do not make fruit equal to work. There may be a good deal of work for Christ that has no connection to fruit of the heavenly vine. Do not seek work only. Study what it means to bear fruit. It means the very life and power and spirit and love within the heart of the Son of God. It means the vine himself coming into your heart and mine.

Let us be reminded that none of our labors can produce fruit. The fruit must come from our connection with the vine. It is the very fruit of the vine being made in us that is real fruitfulness.

Wednesday's Practice:

Read Galatians 5:22-26 for Paul's list of what Spirit filled fruitfulness looks like in the life of someone absolutely dependent on the one true vine.

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Thursday's Reading

Close Communion

Fourth, the life of the branch is a life of close communion.

What has the branch to do? You know that precious, inexhaustible word that Christ used: Abide. Your life is to be an abiding life. And how is the abiding to be? It is to be just like the branch in the vine, abiding every minute of the day. There are the branches, in close communion, in unbroken communion, with the vine, from January to December. And can't we live in abiding communion with the heavenly vine?

Someone might say, "But I am so busy, how will I find time?"

You may have ten hours' hard work daily, during which your brain has to be occupied with temporal things; God orders it so. But the abiding work is the work of the heart, not of the brain, the work of the heart clinging to and resting in Jesus, a work in which the Holy Spirit links us to Christ Jesus. Believe that deeper down than the brain, deep down in the inner life, you can abide in Christ, so that every moment you are free the consciousness will come:

"Blessed Jesus, I am still in Thee."

If you will learn for a time to put aside other work and to get into this abiding contact with the heavenly vine, you will find that fruit will come.

Abiding means close fellowship with Christ in secret prayer. I am sure there are Christians who do long for the higher life, and who sometimes have got a great blessing, and have at times found a great inflow of heavenly joy and a great outflow of heavenly gladness; and yet after a time it has passed away. They have not understood that close personal actual communion with Christ is an absolute necessity for daily life. Take time to be alone with Christ. Nothing in Heaven or earth can free you from the necessity for that, if you are to be happy and holy Christians.

Many of us look at it as a burden, a tax, a duty, and a difficulty to be often alone with God! That is the great hindrance to our Christian life everywhere. We need more quiet fellowship with God, and I tell you in the name of the heavenly Vine that you cannot be healthy branches, branches into which the heavenly sap can flow, unless you take plenty of time for communion with God. If you are not willing to sacrifice time to get alone with Him, and to give Him time every day to work in you, and to keep up the link of connection between you and Himself, He cannot give you that blessing of His unbroken fellowship. Jesus Christ asks you to live in close communion with Him. Let every heart say: "O, Christ, it is this I long for, it is this I choose." And He will gladly give it to you.

Thursday's Practice

How much time and when will you commit to sit daily in the presence of Jesus for connection?

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Friday's Reading

Absolute Surrender

And then finally, the life of the branch is a life of absolute surrender.

Remember the words the little branch preaches to us. We need absolute surrender to the Lord Jesus as the branch is surrendered to the vine. Maybe we need some additional clarity on just what absolute surrender is.

Christ was absolutely surrendered to the Father. This is the same kind of surrender we are called to. Is that too strong a call? Many would say it is impossible. There is no way for normal human beings to be surrendered to God in the way that Jesus surrendered to the Father. Jesus sought the Father's pleasure only and depended upon the Father entirely. I am called to the same with Jesus. But we do not accomplish this in our own power. Remember, the vine sends the sap and so Jesus sends the Holy Spirit.

We often find the Christian life difficult because we seek for God's many blessings while we live pursuing our own will. We live the Christian life as it suits us and choose where we are to work for God. Then we ask Jesus to come and protect us from sin so that it will not overwhelm us too much and that we won't stray too far from him. We ask him to come give us the blessing of full connection and communion while we do not attach ourselves like a branch to a vine.

But this is not how it works. We cannot seek the blessings of full dependence and connection to Jesus without being fully surrendered and dependent on him as our vine. We should live life saying, "Lord I am yours today. Show me as I go throughout my day places where you want to work in and through me. Guide me in my thoughts, words and actions that they may be your thoughts words and actions." Only when we give all that we have to do over to Jesus in this way, can he then bring us the blessing of connection.

Let your surrender to Christ be absolute. Hold nothing back and wait on Christ to fill you with his life giving Spirit, that you might experience the true blessings of being the branch on the vine.

Friday's Practice:

Find something that you can hold in your hand and drop safely. Maybe a small rock in your garden or a stick. Hold it as tightly as you can. Then let go? How much effort was there in letting go? Was it difficult, or was holding on to it more difficult?

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Saturday's Reading

In conclusion, let us gather up this whole lesson in one sentence. Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches." Putting it another way, "I (Jesus, the vine) have given myself entirely to you. You can never place too much trust in me. I am the almighty worker, full of divine life and power." If you sense that there is something missing in your connection to Jesus. Maybe it is not as strong as you hoped or anticipated. Listen to these words of Jesus, "I am the vine" and realize that it is an invitation. He has given himself fully for us, to nourish us and water us so that we might become fruitful. He has held nothing back but offers us everything. His invitation is to trust him and receive by fully surrendering to him.

What will your answer to that invitation be? Will you let go of control and surrender all that you are and have to him? Let it be a prayer from the depths of our hearts, that the living Christ may take each one of us and link us close to himself. Let our prayer be for that full surrender that we might experience what it means to live as the branch in the vine and we can then go on singing, "He is my vine, and I am his branches—I want nothing more—now I have the everlasting vine." Then find time to get alone with him, worship and adore him, praise and trust him, love him and wait for his love. "You are the vine, and I am the branch. This is enough for me. My soul is satisfied."

Saturday's Practice:

If you haven't practiced sabbath restfulness in God yet this week, make it today. If you have, strengthen your connection with a time of quiet surrender before God before you do anything else.