

# The Lord's Vineyard

Excerpts from a sermon by the Rt. Rev. Louis B. King

The Old and New Testament scriptures are a Divine revelation, the Word of God directed to each one of us, that we may receive this Divine message and by living according to it be conjoined with our Creator and live eternally in the kingdom of heavenly uses. This is the Word that was in the beginning, from which all things were made. This is the Word which became flesh and dwelt among us in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. And because this is the Word, it is in human form. It has an inner spiritual life, a Divine doctrine, and it has an outer body, a literal sense which clothes that spirit, just as each person has a living spirit and a physical body. So the Word of God has both a living eternal sense and an external sense that contains and displays it.

But if we are to receive this message, as the Lord would have us, the Divine doctrine, the living spirit, must be drawn forth, which the Lord has done for us through His servant Emanuel Swedenborg. We have the living, inner spirit of this Word in the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church. In obeying the message of Scripture in all three testaments, we find that the Lord accomplishes a miracle. He causes each one of us to be born again that we may enter into heaven.

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Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches; whoever abides in Me and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit, for without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). The vine represents love of the neighbor or a love of uses. Its fruits are good works of charity. When the Lord differentiates between Himself as the vine and people as the branches, He is pointing out that the origin of all good and truth, whether in thought or act, is from Him. Nevertheless, we must receive His good and truth as if it were our own, and from conscience carry it forth into good works. It is through the branches that the vine produces wholesome fruit.

So in us the Lord plants an innocent vine of love for the neighbor. He plants this tender vine in our minds when from the Word He teaches us to love each other. At first this is a doctrinal concept, but if it becomes a growing principle in our minds, we will begin to act from it and produce spiritual grapes or good works. So this presence of the Lord's love in us produces our love to Him and toward each other.

Tenderly the Lord cares for this vine, which is His Divine with us. He shields its delicate leaf from the scorching heat of self-love. He wards off the withering winds of conceit. He refreshes it with innocent remains, descending each day as the gentle rain. And the practical works of love which He brings forth to benefit the neighbor are the goodly grapes, truly the fruit of His vine in us.

The productivity of any vine is dependent upon careful pruning. Old branches must be removed and new branches trained upward upon a trellis or wall if there is to be a harvest. Branches growing out from a vine can be likened to perceptions of truth springing forth from love to the Lord and the neighbor. If these perceptions are trained upward by looking to use and acknowledging the Lord, their tendrils or affections will cling to the trellis and produce a rich harvest. If the perceptions of truth, however, are seized upon by our love of self, the very weight of their self-centeredness will drag them down. Like an unpruned branch they will seek the lowest possible level, strangling other living plants and producing only small, sour fruit.

It is our duty, our privilege, and our eternal source of blessing, to labor faithfully, sincerely, and justly in the Lord's vineyard, to bring forth good fruit from His vine in us.