

THE BEAUTY OF THE OLIVE TREE

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“His beauty shall be as the olive tree.”
Hosea 14:6

[This sermon was one of several preached by Mr. Spurgeon after various visits to the Riviera. He had intended to prepare a volume upon the olive, but illness and the pressure of other work prevented. He had revised nearly half of the manuscript of this discourse and the revision of the remainder has followed as closely as possible the lines laid down by him.]

OUR present objective will be to bring out the resemblance in point of beauty between the godly man and the olive tree. But please note that the parallel does not hold good of all who profess and call themselves Christians—it is only true of those whose backsliding has been healed—to whom the Lord has been as a refreshing dew. It is the believer in a healthy, growing, and useful condition whose beauty is “as the olive tree.”

Things of beauty were evidently intended to be gazed upon. God created beauty on purpose that it might enchain our eyes, rivet our attention, and command our thoughts. Whether it is the beauty of a tree or the beauty of a man, it was meant to be a joy forever, but this it cannot be if it is left unnoticed. Beautiful objects are intended to be thought upon and spoken of—and we shall not be doing ill if we now consider and commend a Christian.

We shall be doing no dishonor to the Master if we admire the disciple, if we confess, at the very outset, that our whole intent is, not to magnify believers, but to glorify God in them. There is no beauty in anything which charms our eye but what the Creator has put upon it, and assuredly, there is no spiritual beauty about any man but what the Holy Spirit has worked in him, “for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.”

If the olive tree be beautiful, we are not so doting as to fall down and worship it. And if a man be made comely by the grace of God, we do not worship the man, but we praise the Lord on his behalf. Glory be to God who has done such marvelous things for poor human nature that he has made it lovely—so lovely that even He Himself beholds a beauty in it, for be it remember that the text is not the word of a prophet only, but the word of JEHOVAH Himself, who says, “I will be as the dew unto Israel...and his beauty shall be as the olive tree.”

Having spent many months under the olive trees of the Riviera, my soul has them still in remembrance. From morning till sunset I have rested in the peaceful groves—at one time basking in the sunshine, and soon seeking the shade to escape the heat of the sun which gave to the invalid summer in the months of winter.

The very color of the olive tree rests the eye. I delight in its emerald grey, its silver green, its unique foliage—and the song of the birds which sing among its branches refreshes the ear. As I have looked upon the olive trees and thought of them over and over again, my mind has sought for matter whereby I might edify the people of God. Ever have my observations been made with that desire. And as I now present them to my readers, it is with many prayers that they may minister grace to those who read them.

I. The believer in a healthy spiritual state, refreshed by the Holy Ghost as with the dew of heaven, has a beauty like to that of the olive tree in this respect, that IT IS A BEAUTY WHICH GROWS UPON YOU.

Louis Figuier, in his "*Vegetable World*," says peremptorily, "The olive is of a sober greyish green aspect, and without beauty, having a rugged stunted aspect." We object to this verdict, but we freely admit that at first sight, there is little or nothing attractive about the olive tree. We have even heard persons pronounce it an unsightly tree which has quite disappointed them. We were sure that they had never sought its company and conversed with it hour after hour as we have done, or they would not have spoken so slightly of what we have found, "a gracious tree for fruit, for leaf, for flower."

Truth to tell, it is not the most shapely of the sons of the forest. And though the trees, as we are told in Jotham's parable, sought it for a king, it does not, like Saul, lift its head above its fellows. Neither does it, like Absalom, claim to be praised beyond all others for comeliness. It is not a tree which would at once strike the beholder with admiration, like some giant oak or lofty elm—nor charm him with its elegance, like a weeping willow—nor astonish him with its grandeur, like a cedar of Lebanon.

In order to perceive its beauty, you must linger a little. You must look and look again. And then, if you do not at last feel a deep respect for the olive, and a quiet delight in its beauty, it must be because you are not of a thoughtful spirit, or else because you have little poetry in your soul. The more familiar you become with the olive tree, the more will you take pleasure in it.

Now all this is also abundantly true of the lively Christian who is full of the grace of God. He may not at first charm you. Your prejudices may lead you to avoid, if not to oppose him. He appears to be somewhat singular and perhaps rugged. He differs materially from the rest of mankind, for he does not run with the multitude—and you are apt to think that his singularity is an affectation.

Possibly, at first, he is somewhat cold and distant in his manner towards you. That is the way of many Christians until they know those to whom they are speaking, for they do not wish to cast their pearls before swine. As you watch them, you will perhaps, at first sight, see more of their imperfections than of their virtues—it being a habit with them not to parade their own attainments, either by wearing professional phylacteries or by sounding a trumpet before them.

They often put their worst foot foremost out of the very desire not to be seen of men in any Pharisaic fashion. Persevere, however, in observing the spiritual man and you will surely see much that is beautiful about him. Look and look again, and perhaps in time you will come to admire as an excellence that which you now think to be a defect.

Be not in a hurry—the best things are not usually glittering and superficial in their attractions. A Christian is assuredly the noblest work of God. In heaven itself, there stands nothing superior in the way of a creature to a man of God. And on earth there is nought that can match him. Watch you, therefore, the believer in Jesus, for his moral beauty will repay your study.

The olive grove is, to my mind, supremely lovely when the sun darts his beams through it in long slants of brightness, so that you see here a golden lane of light, and there a mass of silver shadows directly beneath the trees. I do not know anything that charms me more than to look into the spotted shadow and light created by the irregular planting of a forest of olive trees.

They are all the more delightful because of their disorder, and the varied dark and bright hues which meet the eye, and gratify them with their exquisite checkered work. In like manner, when Christians enjoy the light of God's countenance, and it is sunny weather with them, then will you see their beauty if you have true spiritual insight. When their faith is flourishing and their hope is beaming—when their love is full of freshness and the joy of the Lord flashes on them—then, if you have a spiritual eye for such beauty as angels care to gaze upon, you will wish to be numbered with good men and to mingle in their sacred society.

Perhaps the finest idea of the beauty of olive trees is obtained when you see them in a mass. Stand upon the open common at Bordighera, and look beneath you towards Ventimille and Mentone, marking where the mountains shelve to the sea, and all their sides are clothed with olive groves—and you will clap your hands with delight. Before you is a very sea of olives, with billowy waves of silver verdure, reaching as far as the eye can see—with here and there a stately palm rising up above them all.

Even thus, when we shall be privileged to look upon the entire church of God, gathered in one countless multitude at the last, what a sight it will be! Then shall all the trees of the wood sing out before the Lord, and the mountains and the hills shall join their rapturous song. What a sight will that complete church be to the pure eyes of holy men when they see all the trees of the Lord's right hand planting standing together in one glorious garden far excelling Eden before the Fall!

Yes, the perfection of the church of God, and of each individual member of it, will be seen at the last when the separated ones shall be gathered together in one great general assembly and the beauty of holiness shall be over them all. Till then, let us always believe that Christian men are lovely objects to look upon.

Some seek the company of the rich and the great, but it is cold comfort that any will gain from mere rank and birth. Some delight in the society of the witty, but their sparks, though they glitter for a moment, are too soon extinguished to minister comfort to mourning spirits. Some delight to associate with those who are highly esteemed among men, but surely, he is wiser who selects his companions from those who are precious in the sight of the Lord.

O beloved, whatever others may say of the people of God, and of the church of God, let us each one say,

*“There my best friends, my kindred, dwell,
There God my Savior reigns.”*

There, then, is the first point of resemblance between the beauty of a Christian and the beauty of the olive tree. It grows upon you—the more you are with the excellent of the earth, the more will you delight in them.

II. Secondly, in the case both of the olive tree and of the Christian, IT IS A BEAUTY OF A VERY SOBER KIND.

The color of the olive foliage is a grey green or, if you will, an emerald drab. I do not quite know how to speak of it, but would remind you that it belongs to the same family as the ash, and is of somewhat similar color, only of a lighter green—one side of the leaf being much paler than the other.

I have heard giddy people observe that the olive groves are very dreary. These are the ladies and gentlemen who prefer the fashionable esplanades, where they can display their finery—or the deadly gambling saloons of Monte Carlo, where they can ruin others or be themselves ruined. Everyone to his taste—ours lies in another direction.

In an olive grove, where all sounds are hushed but the singing of birds, I prefer to sit the whole day with a good book, or even without one, and muse the hours away and feel a deep serenity of soul akin to the everlasting rest. Truly, good Lord,

*“The calm retreat, the silent shade
With prayer and praise agree,
And seem by Thy kind bounty made
For those that worship Thee.”*

If you want to see true beauty, you will find it in the olive gardens, but it will be of a serious quiet type—not the luxurious beauty of the orange or the lemon with their apples of gold, nor that of the goodly cedar with its regal dignity, nor even of the stalwart oak with its glory of strength, much less of the flowers of spring which, in the land of the olive, rival the hues of the rainbow—but an unobtrusive, calm, rugged beauty, dearest to those who seek restfulness of heart, and shrink from “the madding crowd's ignoble strife.”

Thus far the olive and the true believer are like to the letter. There is nothing showy about him, but much that is serious and reposeful. He has thought of things and gone to the roots of matters. He has sorrowed under the burden of sin and the delight he has known in being delivered from it is a deep mysterious joy. His happiness does not display itself like the anemones and wild tulips which grow in

such profusion on the terraces of Mentone, but it is content with more subdued tints which will last when flowers and their comeliness will be forgotten.

The true Christian is not always simpering—he can laugh as every honest man can and should, but he is not a constant giggler and hunter after childish merriment, as many are. His is real, substantial, thoughtful happiness, which can bear the test of meditation and examination. He can give a reason for the hope that is in him.

He does not need to dance and fiddle in order to enjoy himself. His joy is made of nobler stuff. It is such merriment as angels have when they see prodigal sons returning and rejoice before the Father's face. Give me the quiet delight of the genuine Christian. Oh, that some professors had more of it! Not so fast, good friend, take your joy more calmly! Not quite so much fire and fury—pause for a little thought at least now and then. If you go too fast, today, you will be out of breath before tomorrow.

You are so very sanguine, disappointment, I fear, will tame you into despondency. “Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him.” Believe God and act according to the common-sense guidance of faith and go calmly through the world as God enables you, for if you do, you will have the beauty of the olive tree—and what more would you have?

III. Thirdly, the beauty of the olive and the beauty of the Christian are alike in this respect, *they are ever-abiding*. You saw yonder plane or beech, a few months ago, adorned with luxuriant foliage. But there came a chilly blast and the leaves began to fall—and when you passed the other day, the tree was like a vessel in a storm, under bare poles—not a green leaf was to be seen. In these wintry days you will see the trees lifting their naked arms into the frosty air as if they longed to be clothed upon once more.

Not so the olive. Its leaf is always green and its branch never bare. No wintry wind ever strips its boughs and though it looks more full of foliage at some periods than at others, yet it always seems well clad and in flourishing condition. Perpetually it clothes the bare hills as with the downy feathers of the dove's breast and knows no nakedness.

Such is the true Christian—he is evermore as a green olive tree in the courts of the Lord. You shall find him, not always alike happy, but always blessed. Not always alike restful, but still at peace. Not always alike useful, but still fruitful—always rejoicing in a blest estate such that, even at his worst, he would not change with the proudest sons of earth. His branches may be at times disturbed and tossed about, but his heart is not troubled, nor his joy taken from him. At bottom, he still believes in God, and rests in the covenant promises, and rejoices in Christ Jesus.

Many professors know nothing of this constancy of joy. They rejoice for a season and then lose their first love. Like the deciduous tree, which puts on its verdure in the early spring, but is stripped in winter, so do they lose their zeal, love, earnestness, and joy.

This is not as it should be with you who profess to be God's children. This is not having the dew of the Lord upon you. Final perseverance is the test of vital godliness. To continue in the truth, grounded and settled—to abide in Christ Jesus, to constantly bring forth the fruits of the Spirit—this it is to be a Christian. Constancy is the beauty and glory of a Christian.

We all like the man of whom we can say that we know where to find him, but there are some whom we never know where we can find them. And if we did, they would not be worth finding. He is the man who really adorns his profession who is consistent and persistent, who abides steadfastly in the truth which he has received, and is not “carried about with every wind of doctrine.” The Lord grant unto us the grace to have a perpetual spiritual health, which shall be our beauty, just as constant verdure is the beauty of the olive tree!

IV. Let us now notice, in the fourth place, that the beauty of the Christian is like that of the olive tree **IN ITS DELIGHTFUL VARIETY.**

Each season, each day, and I might almost say each hour, the olive presents a new aspect.

I have recently watched olive trees almost every day for three months, but they always appeared somewhat different, varying in color and tint as the day was cloudless, overcast, or decidedly wet. Even

the position of the sun caused a change in their appearance. And a little wind, turning up the silver side of the leaves, presented a new phase of beauty.

After a shower of rain, the green appeared predominant, but on a hot and dusty day, the grey was in the ascendant. In the evening, they sometimes seemed slaty or drab, and another time they wore a silvery sheen. Like certain other colors which vary with the light, the tint of the olive leaf is peculiar in yielding to its surroundings. I cannot describe it, for it does seem as if it follows the mood of nature and blends it with its own. I do not think I am very fanciful, but it seemed to me that this tree was in wonderful sympathy with the weather, the sun, the sky, the clouds, the morning, and the evening.

Even thus, believers in Christ Jesus, if they are the right kind of believers, when you come to know them, have peculiar lights, and shades, and differences of mood, and temperament—but in each variation there is beauty. The true Christian is a Christian in all his moods and therefore is worthy of careful observation.

When he is brightly happy, see how grace sobers him. And when he has a heavy heart, see how that same grace brightens his spirit. Watch him in the world and see how unworldly he is—observe him in the midst of his brethren and note how unreserved he is, even as a child is at home. On his knees or at his work in the house of God or in his own house, in controversy or in communion, at rest or in labor, he is always the same. Yet you constantly see a new phase of his character and scarcely know which one pleases you the most.

There are sometimes strange lights glowing around Christian character and if you study the biographies of the godly, or watch the living saints, you will continually find fresh charms in them. I am old enough to be weary with observing the imperfections of my brethren and sisters in Christ—I prefer to spy out their excellences and to take delight in them. I find it better to think too well of God's people than to think too ill of them—and better to commend my brethren, and to help them by commending them, than to censure them and dispirit them by the censure.

Do you the same. You will see some beauty even about the feeblest of God's own people if you will but watch them long enough—and especially if you will study the lives of the saints given to us in the inspired Word—you will not fail to see lights and shades which are only new forms of the same "beauty of holiness."

The olive tree changes with the seasons. Just before I left Mentone, it had put forth new shoots and slender branches which drooped like the boughs of the weeping willow. In a few weeks, that same olive will be covered with a vast multitude of flowers—little white stars countless in number—somewhat like the flowers of the lilac.

Near each leaf, they tell me, there is a bunch of blossoms with a host of very tiny flowerets. The whole tree becomes one great mass of bloom and whitens the ground with a snowfall of flowers. A very lovely sight is the olive tree in bloom. I do not doubt, however, that the peasants like best to see the fruit. The brown beads of the ripened olive have a beauty too, and when these are gone, the foliage is still attractive.

It does not matter to an olive tree whether it is spring, summer, autumn, or winter—it is a thing of beauty and joy all the year round and every day of the year. And such is the Christian when the dew of the Lord is upon him. He has his changes, but he does not lose his beauty, though men do not always have the eyes to perceive it.

Look at David, especially as he is revealed to us in the Book of Psalms. There you see him like a green olive tree in the courts of the Lord. Look at the joy-blossoms that are on him, covering him with a beauteous garment of praise. When you read the 103rd Psalm, and similar joyous odes, he seems to be smothered with the delicious bloom which yields a most pleasing perfume of thanksgiving.

Watch him at another time, when he is putting forth the green shoots of holy desire—his heart thirsting after God as the panting hart thirsts for the water brooks, his inmost soul longing to drink a deep draught of the grace that comes from the Most High.

Then see him at another time when, as an old man, his fruit grows ripe, and you observe his rich experience, full of unction, bearing fruit unto the Lord. Everywhere David is beautiful, except when he sins—and so are all those who seek to follow David's Lord and make Him their All-in-all.

Some Christians seem to be always the same. I wish I could be always the same by being always at my best, but it is very bad to be always the same at your worst. And I know some professors who appear to be just like that. They have a faulty string in their harp, yet they always want to play on that string whenever we are with them. Indeed, they seem to think that that particular string of theirs is the one upon which we all ought to play. And if our harp strings do not happen to be faulty like theirs, they fancy that our harp can scarcely be right—that our spot is not the spot of God's children.

Yet you know that if one child in your family happens to have a defect somewhere or other, you would not think it essential or desirable that all of your children should have the same defect. It is well that they should all have the family likeness, but there is no need that there should be a family deformity peculiar to them all.

Yet some Christians seem to think that there is such a need. I hardly think that many Christians are always at their worse, though, in another sense, I hope some are, because if they are ever worse than I have seen them, they must be bad indeed. But I do wish we could all be always as we are at our best—only then I should wish that we could be something even better than that and keep on advancing “till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Yet it may be that these varying modes of feeling and ways of looking at things are, after all, as far as they are not sinful, the various parts that help to make up the complete beauty of the Christian character.

V. Now, fifthly, (I hope you will not be wearied with so many divisions. I cannot help having them, for the olive tree has so many branches)—another point of resemblance between the olive and the genuine, lively, healthy Christian—and another point of beauty in each case, is INDIVIDUALITY.

I think no one ever saw two olive trees that were exactly alike. They are wondrously varied. The twists and turns of the branches, the singular way in which they grow down where you think they never can grow, and the equally remarkable way in which they do not grow where you think they should—the curious shapes and the shapeless shapes that they take, I cannot describe to you—it would be necessary for you to see them to understand what I mean.

Sometimes some of the branches seem as if they were turned to serpents, coiling themselves around the bigger branches. The olive trees always appear to me to be in an agony—twisting and turning like one in excruciating pain, as if they remembered the griefs and woes of Him who sweat as it were great drops of blood when He agonized beneath the shade of the olives in Gethsemane.

The trunk of the olive is often split into many separate parts and each part seems to be full of vitality. You scarcely ever see one that appears to be entire—they are rent and torn, as though sundered by volcanic eruptions—and they are turned into all manner of shapes so that no one of them is like its fellows.

Here and there, one sees a young tree that seems, for a while, to have a definite shape and to grow up in some sort of comely form. But you see another, by its side, smaller still, which has not grown three feet above the ground before it takes a twist, and goes down again, and then comes up again once more, forming letters something like a W, or an S, or a V, but never reaching the shape that you would have thought it might have done.

This individuality in the olive tree is a part of the charm of the olive grove. And so it is among Christians. There are certain sets of professing Christians about who are very much of one type. You must have noticed them if you have gone about with your eyes open. There is a Methodist type, a Particular Baptist type, and a Bible Christian type, and a Church of England type, and many others.

Somehow or other, they are cut and trimmed according to certain prescribed rules and regulations—like the lines of little olive trees that we pass on our way to Mentone, which have nothing of the

grandeur and glory of the beautiful olive groves with which we are familiar. The more we get out of this attempt at securing uniformity, the better will it be for us and for the whole church of God.

Egyptian art laid down certain laws that had to be kept—the nose must bear such and such a proportion to the mouth, and the eye must be of just such and such a form and so on—and hence Egyptian art remained forever where it was. True art knows that there must be individuality and that no rule can be made of universal application.

It is so among Christians. Here is one man who is naturally of a cheerful spirit, yet he condemns himself because he does not mourn like his sorrowful brother over yonder. But my dear friend, God did not intend you to be like him. Here is another brother who is naturally of a very desponding spirit and he often blames himself because he has not the exhilaration that he sees manifested in others. My dear friend, you were not to be as they are and it is no use for you to try to imitate them. Be yourself for that will be much better.

I have sometimes compared myself with my fellow Christians until I have felt, not only humbled, which is a good thing, but I have been despondent, which is a bad thing. And I have found that the better plan is to remember that in a great house there are many different kinds of vessels and they are not all of the same size or shape because they are not all to be put to the same use.

In a large garden there are various orders of flowers, but they are not all of the same color, neither do all exhale the same perfume, neither do their seeds, when they come to perfection, all assume the same form. So is it among Christians—there are some who sing sweet, solemn melodies with a strain of despondency always running through their matchless music, for to me, it seems the sweetest of all harmonies. There are others who are more like the lark. For as they sing, they soar. The Countess of Huntingdon was a singer of this sort and therefore she sang,—

*“Teach me some melodious sonnet
Sung by flaming tongues above.”*

Well, shall I chide the lark because it is not a nightingale, or the linnet because it sings not like the canary or the goldfinch? No, let every bird have its own distinct note. Let every flower have its own special hue, let every tree have its own peculiar form, and let all the Lord’s people grow as they are guided by the divine nature that is in them, and then one shall grow in this shape and another shall grow in that style, and others shall grow differently from either of them.

Although there is not one olive tree that is exactly like another, yet all the olives are olives and you never mistake them for any other tree. And in like manner, though no one Christian is exactly like another in all respects, yet they are all Christians and you should not be able to mistake them for worldlings.

The all-important matter is not that you should be like me, or that I should be like you, but that both of us should be like Christ. “Ah! but then,” you say, “we shall be like each other, shall we not?” No. It is strange, but it is quite true that Christians may be like Christ and yet very little like each other. There may be a thousand minor diversities in the imitators of the one great Exemplar—and the individuality of everyone of them shall be as definite as the identity of the whole of them as followers of Christ.

VI. Sixthly, much of the beauty of an olive tree, and much of the beauty of a Christian, is found in the fact that **THE OLIVE TREE IS FULL OF LIFE AND SO IS THE CHRISTIAN.**

In the olive, it seems to be always a struggling life. It is true that it is full of life, but as you get a glimpse of some olive trees, you say to yourself “That tree must have had a hard time of it.” The gnarled and knotted old trunk is split up just as if an axe had been driven through it. You can see the white wood inside and on the surface the rugged bark appears in places as if it were rotten, yet you find that it is still alive.

Then you see the branches that grow out of these various divisions of the trunk, twisting, twirling, and wriggling in and out as if they lived in perpetual agony, for they have to draw oil out of the flinty

rock. It would involve much hard labor for men to accomplish that task, yet the olive tree is continually doing it, yielding the precious oil which not only makes the face of man to shine, but which supplies him with food and light the whole year round. This the olive tree often does in a sterile soil where there appears to be no nourishment for it whatever.

It seems as if the olive tree, though always in an agony, is always full of life. It is not an easy matter to kill an olive tree—even if you hew it down, yet leave the stump, or a portion of its roots in the ground—it will begin to sprout and grow again. If you let the tree stand for a thousand years or more, it will still bring forth fruit in old age. And when it is at last worn out and decayed, its children will have grown up into a fruitful grove all around it.

The olive must live and it will live. And to my mind, it is one of the beauties of the olive tree that, under the sternest circumstances, it seems invincibly to live. And that is also the glory of a true Christian, he must live, and will live. The grace of God within him will enable him to live when men would think he must die. Persecute him, but the axe, or the stake, or even the lions have no terrors for him.

Try to crush the church of Christ and the more you try to crush it, the more it will live and flourish. Seek to exterminate the Christians and in the futile attempt you shall multiply them like the stars of the sky or the sands of the seashore. There is no way of killing the life of God when it is once implanted in the heart of a believer in Jesus. All the devils in hell, if they set all their demoniacal power to work to blow out the feeblest light that ever glowed in a Christian's heart, could not put it out even if they took an age to do it.

The Christian must live, and must grow, and must bring forth fruit unto God. I love, therefore, to study the lives of believers and to watch the struggles of the saints of God. You may study this conflict in your own heart and see how the divine life within you struggles on under affliction, and adversity, and trial, and temptation, and conquers all.

You may watch it also in your fellow Christians who are poor and despised, who have to suffer much sickness, and pain, and weakness, and who, perhaps, are bed-ridden year after year—yet you will see how the divine life lives still and triumphs over all obstacles. Is there not a wondrous beauty in it upon which we delight to look and for which we praise God with all our hearts?

VII. Now, seventhly—and coming to the number of perfection, we come to that which the olive tree might well regard as its greatest beauty, namely, ITS FRUITFULNESS.

“Oh, yes.” the peasant says, “the olive is a beautiful tree, for it bears its berries full of oil and the olive crop is the best crop that can possibly be grown.” There is no known root or seed that can be grown by the most skillful farming that can produce anything like so much return in a year as the olive does with little or no labor from its proprietor. It simply stands still and makes him rich.

When he eats his bread, he uses no butter or animal fat as we do, but he spreads a little olive oil upon it and so is nourished by it. When he lights his lamp at night, he does not use the pungent petroleum that we burn—but he takes some good sweet olive oil and so gets all the light he needs. Mosquitoes and other insects sting him, or he has some irritation of his skin, and he anoints his flesh with oil and obtains immediate relief.

When he is sick, or his body is wounded, he anoints himself with oil and it proves to be one of the best medicines in the world. And at any rate, it is not so disagreeable as some of the medicines of modern invention. If he is working a machine, the olive oil helps to prevent both the danger and the discomfort caused by the friction. In fact, the man puts the tree to so many uses that he says it is a lovely tree because its fruitfulness helps him in so many ways.

In like manner, the most beautiful Christian in the world is the most fruitful one. Our old proverb is true, “Handsome is that handsome does” and in the sight of God, those who do the most good works, and who thus most glorify their Father who is in heaven, are the most lovely of all Christians. It is not every Christian who is lovely in this way, but if you have the “dew” of which this chapter speaks, if the roots of your spiritual nature are refreshed by the river of the water of life and if, by blessed fellowship

with God and the entire consecration of your body, soul, and spirit to Him, you bring forth an abundance of fruit unto God, then you have the beauty of the olive tree, whose greatest glory is its fruitfulness.

You may, perhaps, have stood in an orchard in the autumn when the apples are getting rosy red and are weighing down the boughs, so that they would break if the owner did not prop them up. Or you may have been in a cottager's garden and he has said to you, "Look at that tree, sir. Ain't it a beauty?" Possibly, you had not been thinking of the beauty of the tree, for you were admiring some of the lovely flowers that were growing at your feet—but the cottager does not care much about them—but he does care about those apples which are so abundant. After a good look at the tree so well laden with ruddy-cheeked fruit, you agree with him, for there is a practical beauty in the tree's fruitfulness.

Try to have that beauty, dear friends. To be commended for the eloquent way in which you speak, or for the elegant way in which you dress, or for the admirable way in which you practice deportment, is praise that is empty as the wind. But to be useful in your day and generation—to glorify God by doing something to benefit your fellow creatures, instructing the ignorant, helping the poor and needy, bringing the lost and erring ones to the feet of Jesus—is a practical kind of beauty that is worth having. Let your beauty in this respect, be as the olive tree.

VIII. Eighthly, THE BEAUTY OF THE OLIVE TREE OFTEN LIES IN ITS PROGENY.

The writer of the 128th Psalm says of the man who fears the Lord and walks in His ways, "Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table." If you have ever been in the olive groves you must frequently have noticed around the parent olive tree, two, three, four, sometimes as many as eight, ten, or twelve little trees all growing up from the old root—some of them also beginning to bear fruit, and standing there ready, when the old tree in the middle is taken away—to do all they can to supply its place.

I have occasionally seen an olive tree felled and the white trunk left flat like a table, with several little trees growing all around it—and that sight seemed to bring the text I just quoted very vividly to my mind, "thy children *like olive plants round about thy table.*" May your children, beloved, be like young olive trees springing up around your table, to bring forth fruit unto God when you have done with fruit-bearing. Or even like the old and young olive trees, may you all be fruitful together!

It is to me a very beautiful sight to see a godly man succeeded by gracious sons and daughters. It is a privilege beyond comparison, a delight beyond description, to see those whom you have nursed and nurtured come under the nurture and admonition of the Lord and be so taught in His ways as to become true disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. The aged apostle John wrote, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." Do not you, dear parents, desire this joy for yourselves? I believe you will have it if the dew of the Lord is upon your souls.

I have frequently heard it said that many children of professing Christian parents do not turn out well. How is this? We know that Solomon said, "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Now I do not wish to say anything unkind or too severe, but I have noticed that in many such cases, the children have not been trained up in the way they should go.

The father was a very good man—so people said—yet he never had family prayer. But how could he train up his children aright without it? No prayer in the family? Why, the training of a tree on a wall requires that you should have some shreds of cloth and some nails so as to fasten securely every little branch or shoot as it comes out. And I call family prayers our shreds and nails to help to train up our boys and girls as they begin to grow.

Besides, if a professing Christian finds his children turning out ungodly, let him ask himself this question, "Did I ever personally pray with my sons? Did I ever personally plead with my daughters? Have I been loving and kind in my conduct towards my children?" If you cannot say, "Yes," to these and similar questions, then you did not train your child up in the way he should go.

I verily believe that there are many fathers who make religion nauseous to their children. A young man said to me, "My father is a good man, but he will never let his children have any sport or mirth, and he condemns everybody who indulges in anything of the kind. His religion consists in saying, 'Thou

shalt not; thou shalt not; thou shalt not; thou shalt not.” Well, that may be Mosaic, but according to the religion of Jesus Christ, there is something else beside the negative.

There is a positive joy and a real delight in true religion—and where that is set before our young people in a proper spirit, we may expect that God’s grace will bring them to desire the same joy and delight for themselves. We have proved that God often gives us the happiness of seeing that, instead of the fathers, shall be the children, whom He makes princes in the earth.

He who loved Abraham loved Isaac, and loved Jacob, and loved Joseph, and loved Ephraim and Manasseh, for although grace does not run in the blood, it often runs side by side with it. And when you once get God to be Friend of your family, it is not easy to get Him out of it. If His grace calls the father, is it not likely also to call the son, and the grandson, and the children’s children’s children—not only unto the third and fourth generation, but as long as the earth remains?

Yes, blessed be His name, it shall be so and this is one of the beauties of the life of a Christian—that his beauty is perpetuated through his progeny, as he stands like an old olive tree with the young olives growing up around him, and so “his beauty shall be as the olive tree.”

IX. Now, ninthly, I must remind you that **THE BEAUTY OF THE OLIVE TREE SOMETIMES SUFFERS DIMINUTION.**

At Mentone, I went up a valley between the mountains and I came to an olive garden which certainly did not charm me by its beauty. The natives had been lopping the olives and they had cut them most mercilessly, hacking away huge branches here and there, and leaving the poor trees standing there piteously lifting up their mutilated arms to heaven as though they were imploring someone to take pity upon them, and deliver them from their present wretched condition.

Why had they been lopped and cut about like that? Simply because some of the branches had ceased to yield fruit, so they had to be cut away. And then, where one old branch was cut off, there might come five or six smaller branches, all of which would in due season bear olive berries. So all that cutting and hacking and hewing was intended to improve the olive and make it much more beautiful by making it far more fruitful than it would otherwise have been.

Christians do not look very pretty when they are thus lopped. You had better not come to see some of us when we are full of aches and pains, when the brain is so weary that we cannot think, when the breath is short and the throat is so dry that we cannot sing the high praises of our God. Do not say concerning any of your dear relatives who are very, very ill, “I cannot see much that is Christlike about them.”

Ah, dear friend, they are under the rod, and about the only thing a child can do when he is under the rod, is to cry. At least that is what I used to do when I was under the rod and I suppose that is what most of you would do under similar circumstances—there is not much else that seems in season then. The olive certainly does not look very lovely when it is being lopped, but remember this text, “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”

So, then, you may expect to find fruit afterwards, and you may expect to see the beauty of the Christian afterwards, and not while they are under the pruning process. “Father.” said a child, “Did you not cut those fruit trees this morning?” “Yes, my child, I did.” “Why did you cut them, Father?” “To make them bring forth more fruit.” “I thought so, Father, so, after dinner I ran down the garden to see if they had brought forth fruit, but there is not a single pear or apple on any of them.” “No, dear child,” replied the father, “it is not immediately after the cutting that the fruit comes, we must wait till its proper season, and then I hope we shall see it.” You all know how to interpret that little parable. Do not expect to see the full results of sickness and trial immediately, but believe that in due time they will be seen.

X. Lastly, dear friends, to me the very choicest beauty of the olive grove is that **IT ALWAYS REMINDS ME OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.**

This also is the point in which every Christian who has the dew of the Lord upon him has a beauty like that of the olive tree, namely, that he reminds those about him of his Master. They take knowledge

of him that he has been with Jesus. When you are under the olives, you cannot help thinking of Gethsemane, of the dark night in the garden, of the disciples asleep, and of our Savior Himself in an agony of grief. A poetess sweetly sings,

*“But thou, pale olive, in thy branches lie
Far deeper spells than prophet grove of old
Can ere enshrine. I could not hear thee sigh
To the wind’s faintest whisper, or behold
One shiver of thy leaves’ dim silvery green
Without high thoughts and solemn of that scene
When in the garden the Redeemer prayed,
When pale stars looked upon His fainting head,
And angels ministering in silent dread
Trembled, perchance, within thy trembling shade.”*

Well, just as all right-minded people would be sure to think of Christ when under the olive groves, so ought we to compel men, whether they are right-minded or not, to think of the Lord Jesus Christ when they come into association with ourselves. Not because we are always talking about religion, but because we are always practicing it. And as frequently as we can, adding suitable verbal expression to the practical testimony of our lives—speaking and singing of our beloved Lord whose name should never long be off our tongue.

We should so act when we are provoked, bearing it so gently that observers should be compelled to say, “How Christlike they are!” We should, when offended, so readily, so truthfully, so thoroughly forgive the offenders that, if they do not say, they should at least feel, “How Christlike they are!” We should be so unselfish, so generous, so anxious to serve others, and to please them rather than ourselves, we should be so kind in our judgment, so truthful, so tender, so upright, so calm, so strong, so brave, and yet so free from all Pharisaism and affectation that men should not have to look at us long before they would be obliged to say, “They have been with Jesus. They never learnt that lesson anywhere but at the feet of the Crucified.”

The Lord bless you, dear friends, and give you faith in Jesus. And then, by His Spirit, impart to you all this beauty of which I have spoken—and a great deal more of which no tongue can adequately tell—even the beauty of holiness—and so your beauty shall be as the olive tree. God grant it for His dear Son’s sake! Amen and Amen.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.