VINEYARDS OF THE LORD and SPIRITUAL POACHERS

A Biblical Study on Spiritual Boundaries, Pastoral Stewardship, and Protecting God's Vineyard

MATTHEW 21:33-41 • JOHN 15:1-8

JOHN 10:1

He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.

The North Jersey United Pentecostal Church

PASTOR GARY EVENSEN

pastor@njupc.org

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Matthew 21:33-41, John 15:1-8

In Scripture, the vineyard often represents God's people.

Jesus uses vineyard imagery in several of His parables (like Matthew 21:33-41, John 15:1-8) to describe God's relationship with His people — with God as the owner, and His people as the vineyard meant to produce fruit.

If we extend that picture, it makes good sense to view each local church as a kind of individual vineyard within the larger Kingdom of God — each with its own pastor as the keeper of that vineyard.

The pastor tends, nurtures, guards, and cultivates the vineyard, ensuring the people grow spiritually, stay rooted in truth, and produce good fruit.

Here's how that fits biblically and spiritually:

• 1 Peter 5:2-4 calls pastors to "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof… being examples to the flock." That sounds very much like a vineyard keeper watching over and caring for their assigned portion.

• Hebrews 13:17 speaks of spiritual leaders who "watch for your souls, as they that must give account," much like a vineyard keeper would to the owner of the vineyard.

• John 15:5 reminds us that Christ is the vine, we are the branches, and apart from Him, we can do nothing — the pastor's job is to keep the branches healthy, connected, and fruitful.

This also emphasizes the divine authority structure — God as the owner, Jesus as the True Vine, the pastor as the keeper of the vineyard (appointed shepherd), and the saints as the branches.

Every vineyard (church) is part of one Kingdom, working together for the same harvest.

If we extend that vineyard imagery, there's a serious issue when other vineyard keepers (leaders, pastors, or ministries) start taking from your vineyard — meaning drawing away your people, influence, resources, or even spiritual authority — without right, permission, or in the wrong spirit.

Let's build this idea out:

Biblical Parallels:
• Song of Solomon 1:6
"They made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept."
This verse speaks to the danger of being so busy tending to others' vineyards (ministries, churches, works) that you neglect your own. It also hints at others possibly exploiting your labor while your own vineyard suffers.
• Proverbs 27:23
"Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds."
Every keeper is responsible for their own vineyard — their flock, their spiritual field. No one should be reaching into another's to harvest what doesn't belong to them.
• John 10:12-13
Jesus talks about the hireling — one who does not own the sheep and flees when danger comes because he cares not for the sheep. A true keeper will protect his vineyard, while others may come to take, scatter, or exploit.

Spiritual Application:

When other leaders or ministries:
• Sheep stealing — persuading people from another pastor's congregation to leave their church and join theirs
• Exploit relationships — using connections in your vineyard for their personal gain or influence
• Undermine leadership — sowing discord, criticism, or confusion in your vineyard while appearing to help

…it's like one vineyard keeper reaching into another's field, harvesting their fruit, or uprooting their vines.
They literally become Spiritual Poachers

God's Order and Respect for Boundaries:
God's design is for every vineyard keeper (pastor) to be responsible and accountable for their own vineyard.
The pastoral role is sacred — a charge given by the Chief Shepherd (Jesus), and crossing into another's vineyard without divine order brings disorder and spiritual harm.
Paul said in 2 Corinthians 10:13:
"But we will not boast of things without our measure, but according to the measure of the rule which God hath distributed to us, a measure to reach even unto you."

In other words — stay within the boundaries of your God-given ministry field.

A Healthy Vineyard Network:

It's one thing for vineyard keepers to work together, support each other, and share wisdom.
It's another to invade another's vineyard, take what isn't theirs, or destabilize the work God entrusted to someone else.
Biblical Prohibitions Against Taking from Another's Vineyard

1. Deuteronomy 23:24-25 (Respecting Boundaries)

"When thou comest into thy neighbour's vineyard, then thou mayest eat grapes thy fill at thine own pleasure; but thou shalt not put any in thy vessel. When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbour, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbour's standing corn."

Principle:
You may enjoy fellowship or hospitality in another's field (ministry, church), but you may not harvest or gather for yourself from what belongs to them.
No taking people, influence, or resources for your own vineyard.

2. Proverbs 22:28 (Respecting Established Boundaries)
"Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set."

Principle:
God establishes spiritual and natural boundaries. Ministry fields (vineyards) have spiritual "property lines." Moving those landmarks — invading someone else's work or flock — is spiritually out of order.

3. John 10:1 (Illegitimate Access)
"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber."

Principle:
Jesus taught that anyone trying to enter a flock (vineyard) by an illegitimate way — not through God's order and authority — is a thief and a robber. Spiritually harvesting from another's vineyard without proper authority or relationship is theft in the eyes of God.

4. Romans 16:17-18 (Avoiding Division and Exploitation)

"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple."

Principle:
Those who disrupt churches or relationships to serve their own ministry goals — stealing members or dividing churches — serve themselves, not Christ. God condemns this divisive, self-serving spirit.

5. Galatians 6:4-5 (Tending to Your Own Work)

"But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear

his own burden."

Principle:
Each leader is responsible for their own vineyard — not trying to harvest fruit from another's labor. Joy and reward come from faithfully tending to what God has entrusted you, not by gathering from someone else's.

6. Numbers 16 (Korah's Rebellion)

Korah, Dathan, and Abiram overstepped their God-given roles and tried to claim spiritual authority that was not theirs (Moses' and Aaron's). God judged them severely for this.

Principle:
Trying to take over, control, or reap the fruit from someone else's assigned field or ministry brings God's judgment. Ministry must stay in the order God established.

Summary of Prohibitions:
• Do not move boundaries God has set.
• Do not gather fruit from another's field for personal gain.
• Do not divide flocks or draw people away from their spiritual shepherd.
• Do not seek ministry position, influence, or harvest outside your God-given field.
• Respect spiritual order and authority God places in His vineyard.

Those who disrupt churches or relationships to serve their own ministry goals — soliciting members or dividing churches — serve themselves, not Christ.
God condemns this divisive, self-serving spirit.

1. Ministry is about God's Kingdom, not personal empires.

When a leader, preacher, or church worker prioritizes their own platform, influence, or numbers over the health of another church or the spiritual well-being of saints, they're no longer serving Christ — they're serving their own ambition.
Philippians 2:3
"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."
When people start poaching members or undermining leadership to grow their own group, they're driven by vainglory, ego, or insecurity rather than humility and kingdom-mindedness.

2. Division is a work of the flesh — not the Spirit.

Galatians 5:19-21 lists "seditions" (divisions) and "heresies" among the works of the flesh.
Creating factions, turning saints against their pastor, or subtly persuading them to leave their God-assigned place is spiritual sabotage — and God's Word warns that those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God.
It's one thing for someone to be led by God into a new season.
It's another for them to be manipulated into leaving by a self-serving voice.

3. God condemns those who cause division.

Romans 16:17-18
"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.
For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly…"

Paul doesn't mince words here:
• "Mark them" — identify them
• "Avoid them" — don't entertain them
• Why? Because they're not serving Jesus — they're feeding their

own appetite for recognition, followers, influence, or control.

Their words may be smooth, their tone gentle, their message persuasive — but the intent is to divide and gather followers to themselves.

4. True shepherds protect, they don't prey.

John 10:12-13 speaks of hirelings who don't care for the flock — they're in it for themselves.
But Jesus modeled true shepherding:
• Protect the sheep
• Feed the sheep
• Keep the flock together
• And lay down your life for them if needed
A true minister guards other leaders' flocks as well, respecting God's order and working together for the health of the Kingdom — not poaching for personal gain.
5. Judgment awaits those who divide the Body.

Titus 3:10-11
"A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject;
Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself."
The word heretick here literally means one who causes division or chooses factions.

Spiritual poachers will say:
"It's not about your church or my church — it's about the Kingdom."
or
"We're all one body, so it doesn't matter where people go, as long as they're in the Kingdom."

At first glance, it sounds spiritual — but it's actually a twisting of Kingdom principles. Let's carefully, biblically, and wisely rebut that

kind of reasoning.

Rebutting the "It's for the Kingdom" Excuse

1. God's Kingdom is built on divine order, not ambition.

The Kingdom isn't an unstructured free-for-all where anyone can gather from wherever they want.
The New Testament repeatedly teaches about spiritual authority, local church structure, pastoral care, and accountability.

Hebrews 13:17
"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account."

If someone bypasses that authority — enticing saints away without the consent or blessing of their spiritual leadership — they're not advancing the Kingdom, they're subverting God's order.

You cannot violate divine order in the name of Kingdom work.

2. The early church respected ministry boundaries.

Paul didn't just randomly gather people from Peter's churches, or vice versa.
In fact, in 2 Corinthians 10:13-16, Paul says:

"But we will not boast of things without our measure, but according to the measure of the rule which God hath distributed to us… not boasting of things without our measure, that is, of other men's labours…"

Paul refused to build on another man's foundation.
If anyone had the authority to say "It's all the Kingdom," it was Paul

— yet he respected other men's labors and vineyards.

True Kingdom workers honor the labor of others.

3. The fruit of the Spirit does not produce division.

Anyone truly motivated by the Kingdom will exhibit the fruit of the Spirit — including love, peace, gentleness, meekness, and temperance (Galatians 5:22-23).

If someone's actions cause:
• Division
• Offense
• Broken trust
• Disloyalty
• Confusion in the flock

…it is not of the Spirit, and therefore not truly for the Kingdom — no matter what they claim.

James 3:16-17
"For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits…"

True Kingdom work is done with purity and peace, not strife and ambition.

4. You don't harvest where you didn't labor.

John 4:38
"I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours."

Jesus acknowledged here that entering another man's labor is a special, divine arrangement — not something you just take upon yourself.
There's a difference between God sending you into a field for harvest with honor and order, and you harvesting from another's vineyard for personal reasons.

Unauthorized harvesting is theft, not Kingdom work.

5. The Kingdom isn't just about numbers — it's about discipleship, covenant, and order.

God places people in churches under pastors for shepherding, discipleship, accountability, and covering.
When someone draws people away from that covering in the name of the Kingdom, they're removing people from the place God planted them.

1 Corinthians 12:18
"But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him."

If God set them there — who are we to uproot them without God's clear direction and the agreement of their spiritual covering?

When someone says:

"I'm doing this for the Kingdom."

You can respond:
• The Kingdom operates by divine order, not ambition.
• True Kingdom workers honor other men's labor and spiritual boundaries.
• If your actions produce division, confusion, or offense — it's not the Kingdom of God at work.

• The Kingdom is about discipleship and covenant, not merely where people gather.
• If God placed them under a shepherd, it's spiritual theft to take them without order