

**Teaching Series:** Saved for Eternity

**Title:** Session 8 – Abiding in the Vine

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## Chapter 2: Objections against Eternal Salvation

### John 15:1–6 (Abiding in the Vine)

#### **John 15:1–6 (NKJV)**

- <sup>1</sup> *I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.*
- <sup>2</sup> *Every branch in Me that doesn't bear fruit **He takes away**; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*
- <sup>3</sup> *You are already clean because of the Word which I have spoken to you.*
- <sup>4</sup> *Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.*
- <sup>5</sup> *I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.*
- <sup>6</sup> *If anyone doesn't abide in Me, **he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.***

This passage is often used to teach that Christians can lose their salvation. It's easy to see why they would think that way, especially when you look at verses 2 and 6: "Every branch in Me that doesn't bear fruit He takes away"; "anyone who doesn't abide in Me, he is thrown into the fire, and burned." In particular, the phrase "in Me," which is used twice, apparently suggests a loss of salvation. The branches that don't bear fruit—the signs of salvation—are gathered and "thrown into the fire," a clear symbol of eternal judgment. The question is though, since these hell-bound branches were initially "in" Jesus, does that mean they represented true believers who lost their salvation? Is being "in" the vine in this parable the same thing with being saved? I would suggest the answer is no and I feel this is the correct conclusion for a few reasons. First, the Greek word translated into the verb "takes away" in Verse 2 is *airo*, which actually means "to lift from the ground" or "to lift with a view of carrying." The Passion Translation (TPT) of the Bible seems to provide a more accurate rendering of that word in the first two verses of John 15:

#### **John 15:1–2 (TPT)**

- <sup>1</sup> *I am a true sprouting vine, and the farmer who tends the vine is my Father.*
- <sup>2</sup> *He cares for the branches connected to Me **by lifting and propping up** the fruitless branches and **pruning** every fruitful branch to yield a greater harvest.*

The same Greek word *airo* is used in John 5:8 for the verb “take up” when Jesus tells the lame man from the pool of Bethesda to take up his bed and walk. Then, in Matthew 16:24, when Jesus says, “If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me,” the *airo* is used for the verb “take up” again. As a matter of fact, every other instance of this Gr. word *airo* in the New Testament is translated as “lift up” or “take up” except in John 15:2, where it is interpreted as “cut off” or “remove,” and I have an explanation for why. The theological “lenses” of the translators really matters. All of us wear certain “lenses” of interpretation when we read the Scripture, whether we are aware of it or not. I hear sometimes believers saying, “I only obey what the Word says” when in fact they obey whatever they think the Word says most of the times. And what they say the Word says is filtered through the “glasses” they use. Blessed are those who know what kind of glasses they use! So, I believe the translators chose to render *airo* as “cut off” or “take away” because of their theological understanding, but it should have been translated as “lift up.” Why? Because the vine is a creeper or a crawling plant. You often see a vinedresser picking up the branches from the ground and tying them up with strings to the pillars of the vine. If the branches sit on the ground in the dust, they don’t bear fruit. In this passage, Jesus is saying the Father lifts up every fruitless branch to help it bear fruit. He is not waiting for a given opportunity to cut people off, but to make them bear fruit. That is the Father’s job. Jesus is the vine and the Father God is the vinedresser Who is making sure we bear fruit.

Furthermore, Verse 2 of this passage says God, the Father, prunes every branch that bears fruit so that it will bear more fruit. When God prunes, He always does it with the purpose of life in mind. Even His so-called discipline is life-giving. Jesus seems to have understood our potential and capacity to misinterpret scripture here. So, immediately in the next verse He tells us what He uses to prune. “You are already clean because of the Word which I have spoken to you” (John 15:3). The Greek word for “to prune” or “to clean or cleanse” is the same: *kataros*. The instrument God uses to prune us is His Word and not a cancer or a life-changing car accident in which you lose one of your limbs.

Moreover, the dust talks about serpent mentality. In the garden of Eden, God cursed the serpent, saying: “From now on, dust shall be your food.” Whenever the branch is in the dust, it does not bear fruit. Whenever we feed with what the serpent feeds itself, when the serpent’s food becomes the atmosphere of our living, we do not bear fruit. If we keep feeding on the lies of the enemy, we will not bear fruit. That is why God lifts us up and cleanses us by His Word—to bear fruit. Just because a couple has a legal marriage certificate does not necessarily mean they have a great marriage. The certificate validates the union, but life in the union is purely relational. A certificate does not give birth to babies. It is not the legal union that brings fruit, but the relational intimate union. Likewise, in our walk with Christ, it is our relational intimate union with Him that brings fruit and life.

The second reason I believe John 15 is not a passage about the possibility of believers losing their salvation is because metaphors are only meant to go so far. Jesus here is speaking in a parable. He uses an illustration to make a point. As with any picture or parable, one can take it too far. In His wisdom, Jesus uses an everyday image—especially for ancient Easterners—to make a spiritual point, that is, our continual spiritual fruition and growth here on earth. The picture of vines, branches, and gardening was

a reference the commoner could understand. The whole thrust of John 15 is to prove Jesus is the source of all spiritual life. This is clear since the punch line is that bearing fruit comes only from staying in Jesus. Just as a branch separated from the vine will wither and die, so will people who are separated from Christ. In this context of fruitfulness, separation from the vine or Christ, as well as withering or death does not refer to being without God and unsaved, but to having certain parts of the whole body of truth, which is fully revealed in Scripture, "turned off" in our lives about what Christ has accomplished for us, what we have a right to, who we really are in Christ, and what our lives should look like. And this may be due to lack of knowledge, revelation and understanding because of wrong teachings or due to failure to keep the faith fresh and strong always in the areas where we have been enlightened. The Bible says in John 8:32 that we will know the truth and the truth will make us free. There is a truth about sanctification, about healing, about blessing, about walking by the Holy Spirit, etc. We can sanctify ourselves either through faith in the grace provided by Christ or through our own efforts. We can live either in healing and physical health through faith in what Jesus won on the cross or in fear and suffering. We can have a life that is prosperous and blessed by faith, or one dominated by poverty and want, or one in which we try to prosper only by our own efforts. We can make any life decision by letting ourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit or relying only on our human wisdom. In any area of life where we do not live by faith in the spiritual truth about us, there comes separation from the vine and partial fruit bearing or temporary cessation of fruiting, but not irreversible separation from God. Perhaps the summary statement of Jesus's teaching is Verse 5: "I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; *for without Me you can do nothing.*"

A parable is not meant for every single detail to correspond to some sort of spiritual reality. It's rather meant to make a single, central point. The fact that the branches were already "in" Jesus to begin with is not the main point, so it's not good to build a doctrine based on a secondary point or a limited metaphor.

Third, the branches didn't require attachment first. If one was to take the phrase "in Me" literally to refer to someone who is already saved, it creates another problem with the metaphor: how did the branches get attached to Jesus in the first place? If the branches represent people and attachment to the vine symbolizes salvation, then the branches should first be separated from the vine at the beginning of the metaphor since everyone is born apart from Christ and needs to put their faith in Him before salvation.

Let me give you an example to clarify. Imagine Bill is twenty-five years old when he believes in Jesus as His Savior. Using Jesus's imagery, Bill was a dead and shriveled branch for twenty-five years before connecting with the vine. Yet Jesus's parable completely glosses over any branches needing to be attached to begin with. If we consider the removal of fruitless branches a loss of salvation, then we must also notice that every branch started already attached to Jesus. This means everyone is already saved unless they depart from Jesus later. Yet this is not what Scripture teaches. Instead, the Bible says everyone begins apart from Christ and must be united to Him by faith. The reason this reality is not illustrated in Jesus's metaphor in John 15 is because Jesus was not trying to make that point. Neither should we jam

meaning into every detail of this parable in ways that betray the basic intended meaning.

Fourth, it doesn't reconcile with the rest of Scripture. If Jesus meant to teach in John 15 that Christians can lose their salvation, we have a problem because other scriptures seem to say the exact opposite. Perhaps the most explicit text in the whole Bible on this issue is 1 John 2:19, which says:

**1 John 2:19 (LEB)**

<sup>19</sup> *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us. But they went out, in order that it might be shown **that all of them are not of us.***

John teaches that those who profess to be Christians but eventually walk away from their faith reveal they were never saved to begin with. Jesus Himself confirms this truth when He says the following about believers in John 10:28–29,

**John 10:28–29 (NKJV)**

<sup>28</sup> *And I give them eternal life, and **they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out** of My hand.*

<sup>29</sup> *My Father, who has given them to Me, **is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out** of My Father's hand.*

In other words, once a Christian, always a Christian. These two passages and others teach this truth clear as the light of day.

As a rule of thumb, when seeking to interpret the Bible, we should always aim to interpret less clear texts (such as the parables) in light of more straightforward passages. In this case, John 15 should be interpreted considering other passages that address that subject more directly and without the complication of a metaphor. Parables can teach beautiful truths clearly, but only when peripheral details are not taken too literally. Always allow the whole of Scripture to guide your thinking and make its clarity come to surface by cross-referencing passages that speak to the same issue. In that way, we can avoid making mistakes and causing the Bible to say something it doesn't.

**John 8:31 (Abiding in His Word)**

**John 8:31 (NKJV)**

<sup>31</sup> *Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "**If you abide in My Word, you are My disciples indeed.***

A typical interpretation of this passage from those believing salvation can be lost is that the true disciples of Jesus will be known only at the very end and only if they continue to abide in the Word until the end. In other words, they will remain disciples and saved only if they continue to abide. However,

here Jesus distinguishes between Jews who were true disciples and those who were not but affirmed they “held to His teaching.” Notice the passage doesn’t say, “If you abide in My Word, you will be My disciples, or you will remain My disciples, but you are My disciples.” Believers are not saved by holding to His teaching, but they hold to His teaching if they are saved and because they are saved. Their abiding in the Word confirms what they already are: true disciples of Jesus.

### Acts 5:32 (The Condition of Obedience)

#### **Acts 5:32 (NKJV)**

<sup>32</sup> *And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given **to those who obey Him.***

Acts 5:32 says God has given the Holy Spirit to “those who obey Him.” Some Christians say this verse implies that if you stop obeying God, the Holy Spirit will be taken away and you will lose your salvation. However, what is true obedience to God in the New Testament? It’s not obedience to the Law, but rather obedience to the faith (or obedience of faith), based on Romans 1:5:

#### **Romans 1:5 (NKJV)**

<sup>5</sup> *Through Him we have received grace and apostleship **for obedience to the faith** among all nations for His name.*

That means the obedience that precedes the receiving of the Holy Spirit is the obedience of faith in Jesus Christ. This is the new birth in Christ. The verse doesn’t say one can lose the Holy Spirit or his salvation through an act of disobedience. If this were true, no one would ever be saved. Moreover, if anyone could obey God first before receiving the Holy Spirit, why would anyone need the Holy Spirit in the first place? One of the Holy Spirit’s primary roles is to help believers walk in holiness and godliness.

### 1 Corinthians 9:26–27 (Becoming Disqualified)

#### **1 Corinthians 9:26–27 (NKJV)**

<sup>26</sup> *Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus, I fight: not as one who beats the air.*

<sup>27</sup> *But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself **should become disqualified.***

Again, in this passage, many Christians interpret Paul’s prospect of becoming disqualified as a possibility of losing his salvation through lack of discipline. Was Paul afraid he might be eternally separated from God if he messed up late in life, although he had loved and served Jesus for many years? The short answer is NO. Let me explain why. The point of the entire context is not the receiving of eternal

life nor Paul's making it to heaven when he dies, but rather his faithfulness and usefulness to God in what God wants to accomplish through Paul's life. It's the joy of hearing Jesus say, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matthew 25:21, 23). The prize is not eternal life, because eternal life is a free gift of God. The prize, or the crown, is significance in the Kingdom of God, blessing in his life and ministry, and praises from God when Paul would stand before Him after a life well lived in His service. Paul is not concerned about losing his eternal life, but he's very concerned about not being disqualified for ministry. Since he desires to continue his ministry and run in a way that is pleasing and honoring to God, he runs with care and perseverance.

The same thing is true for your life. Being disqualified doesn't mean losing your eternal life but losing your ministry or your opportunity to serve God in this life. It's these things Paul could lose and which any of us could lose as well if we fail to keep our bodies in discipline and self-control.

## 2 Peter 2:20–22 (Going Back to the World)

### **2 Peter 2:20–22 (NKJV)**

<sup>20</sup> *For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world **through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning.***

<sup>21</sup> *For it would have been better for them **not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.***

<sup>22</sup> *But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire."*

The objection here to the eternal security of the saints is that there can be these people who come to the Lord's knowledge, get to know the way of righteousness, and then turn from the holy commandment, being again entangled in the world and thus losing their salvation. However, 2 Peter 2 talks about false prophets, teachers, and evildoers (verses 1 and 18 from the same chapter) who attempt to lead others into adopting their lifestyle. These people are associated with Christians and have begun to understand the way of righteousness, but they are not yet born again. Being born again means a change of nature. The proverbs quoted in Verse 22 talk about a dog and a pig going back to their uncleanness. However, the dog remained a dog both after forsaking the uncleanness and after coming back to it. The same is true of the pig. They didn't experience a change in nature. The same was true of people who came in contact with the knowledge of the Lord but didn't experience a core change of nature, and then they went back to the defilements of the world. They were never saved in the first place.

## Romans 8:10–13 (The Deeds of the Body)

### **Romans 8:10–13 (NKJV)**

<sup>10</sup> *And if Christ is in you, the **body is dead** because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.*

<sup>11</sup> *But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead **will also give life to your mortal bodies** through His Spirit who dwells in you.*

<sup>12</sup> *Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.*

<sup>13</sup> *For if you live according to the flesh **you will die**; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, **you will live**.*

The common objection from this passage to the believer's security is that Verse 13 refers to born-again believers and dying or living there refers to eternal death and eternal life. According to this understanding, Verse 13 reads in the following way: "If believers live according to the flesh, and do immoral things, they will die eternally and lose their salvation; but if by the Spirit they put to death the deeds of the body—the immoral things, they will live eternally, and retain their eternal salvation to the end." Is this true? Of course not. Let's see together why.

It's true this passage clearly refers to brothers in Christ based on how Verse 12 addresses the audience as brethren. However, the context of Verse 13 is not about eternal salvation but about the physical body and about the life and death here on earth. Here are a few clues: "the body is dead because of sin" (Verse 10), the Spirit of God "will give life to our mortal bodies" (Verse 11), and if we put to death "the deeds of the body," we will live (Verse 13). When Verse 11 says the Holy Spirit will give life to our mortal bodies, it doesn't mean He will replace our mortal bodies with new glorified bodies only at the second coming of Jesus. If it were so, it would have said it differently. However, the construction of words shows the Holy Spirit will give life to our mortal bodies as they are here on earth before they are replaced with glorified bodies. He will rejuvenate and energize our mortal bodies with life from the spiritual realm so they will live longer and sickness-free.

Paul uses the terms "die" and "live" to convey temporal effects, which result from sin or obedience, respectively, but don't reflect eternal truths. Sinful deeds, especially those against the physical body, like excessive drinking, drug addiction, sexual immorality, smoking, and overeating, produce various forms of death here and now: premature physical death (1 John 5:16; James 5:19–20), mental distress and guilt (1 Samuel 15–16; Psalm 51:2–9), broken relationships, etc. However, putting to death the various fleshly desires and passions of the body can produce multiple blessings of life like physical wellness and longevity (Psalm 119:144; Proverbs 4:4, 7:2, 15:27; Ephesians 6:3), psychological wellness (Psalm 69:32), and abundant quality of life in general (John 10:10, 15:11).

Let's suppose Romans 8:13 had in view eternal salvation. How do we measure the level of our fleshly living? What is the level of living according to the flesh that will cause us to lose salvation or still keep it? No one knows, right? Even the Bible is silent about this lethal dose of fleshly living, if I may say so. In other words, you could strive your whole life to live as morally and healthily as possible, from your point of view (because we all have different and relative levels of morality and right living), and find out at the end, to your eternal dismay, that you have actually lost your salvation along the way and you didn't

even know it. God is not like that. He would be much clearer on such a matter of eternal damnation and eternal life.