

## ***Session 5 The Tragedy and Loss of Being Unfruitful (Jn. 15:2, 6)***

### **I. FRUITFUL AND UNFRUITFUL BELIEVERS**

A. In John 15:2, 6, Jesus contrasted fruitful and unfruitful believers—the distinction is in bearing fruit by abiding in Him until the end. Those who abide in Him can bear fruit that remains unto true greatness. He identified 3 types of believers in 15:2—those who bear no fruit, some fruit, and much fruit (15:8).

***<sup>2</sup>Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit...<sup>6</sup>If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they...throw them into the fire, and they are burned. (Jn. 15:2, 6)***

B. Jesus warned of the tragic consequences and loss in being unfruitful (15:2, 6). This is an unpopular subject—but we must speak “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). The branch that is burned in 15:6 is the branch that was taken away in 15:2. 15:6 interprets and expounds on 15:2. Many minimize the terrifying reality that Jesus set forth in these two negative statements (15:2, 6).

C. ***In Me*** (15:2): Jesus spoke of believers as being “in Me,” and Paul spoke of them as “in Christ.” The phrase “in Me” is used 16 times in John’s gospel (6:56; 10:38; 14:10 [2x], 11, 20, 30; 15:2, 4 [2x], 5-7; 16:33; 17:21, 23). This phrase always refers to believers. This is supported by the analogy itself—branches that share the life of Jesus, “the vine” (15:1). It is not consistent to say that those “in Me” refer to believers throughout John’s gospel except in 15:2 where it refers to an unsaved person.

D. ***That does not bear fruit*** (15:2): There are two main views to the branches that bear no fruit. Either Christians who fell away from their faith and lost their salvation or unbelievers who only appeared outwardly to be Christians—being involved in church and ministry activities, etc. This speaks of those who were not “currently” bearing fruit. He did not say that they “never” bore fruit.

E. ***If anyone does not abide in Me*** (15:6): Some believers start their relationship with Jesus with genuine zeal but later drift into a fleshy lifestyle of “non-abiding” in their walk with Jesus.

F. Some teach that all believers will *always* persevere to the end; if they fall away they were not saved.

1. Jesus taught that some people receive God’s word with joy, endure and believe for a while (Lk. 8:13), and later the word is choked in them, and they become unfruitful (Mt. 13:22).

***<sup>3</sup>...“Behold, a sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup>And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside...<sup>5</sup>Some fell on stony places...they immediately sprang up...<sup>6</sup>because they had no root they withered away...<sup>20</sup>[they] immediately receives it with joy; <sup>21</sup>yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while...<sup>22</sup>He who received seed among the thorns...hears the word, and the cares of this world...choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.” (Mt. 13:3-22)***

***<sup>13</sup>The ones on the rock are those who...receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.” (Lk. 8:13)***

2. Some unbelievers do engage with Christian communities and later renounce the Lord.

***<sup>19</sup>...they were not of us; if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. (1 Jn. 2:19)***

G. ***He takes away*** (15:2): Jesus warned of the tragedy of believers who became unfruitful. The Father takes away or removes branches in judgment in order to burn them (15:6). I believe that “He takes away” means that the believer loses his salvation; some see it as a reference to losing one’s reward or possibly their life. John the Baptist spoke of God cutting down unfruitful trees (Mt. 3:10).

***<sup>10</sup>“...every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (Mt. 3:10)***

1. The Greek phrase, “takes away,” is *airō*—it can mean “to cut off” (negative) or “to lift up” (positive)—to lift from the ground so the branch might gain exposure to the sun to be fruitful.
2. A.W. Pink promoted that view because he did not believe that a true believer could fall away from the faith. But there is no evidence that sagging branches of grapevines were regularly lifted up from the ground. Thus, Jesus clarified in 15:6 that the branches in 15:2 were burned.

H. Jesus repeatedly emphasized the need to “endure until the end” in our faithfulness to Him.

***<sup>13</sup>But he who endures to the end shall be saved. (Mt. 24:13)***

***<sup>22</sup>You will be hated by all...but he who endures to the end will be saved. (Mt. 10:22)***

***<sup>26</sup>He who overcomes and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give... (Rev. 2:26)***

***<sup>18</sup>When the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, he shall die...***

***<sup>19</sup>But when the wicked turns from his wickedness...he shall live... (Ezek. 33:18-19)***

I. ***He is cast out as a branch*** (15:6): The unfruitful believer is described as cut off from the vine and “cast out” of the vineyard (kingdom of God). Christianity is a relationship based on voluntary love, so a believer can exercise their free will to reject Him and the relationship. The responsibility and fault lies in the withering branch that eventually dies, and not in the Vine that gave it life.

***<sup>6</sup>“If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered...they are burned.” (Jn. 15:6)***

1. No one can snatch a believer out of God’s hand, but a believer can walk away from Him.

***<sup>29</sup>“...and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand.” (Jn. 10:29)***

2. Paul warned believers not to be haughty lest they also become like a branch that is cut off.

***<sup>18</sup>...do not boast against the branches [Israel]...<sup>20</sup>Because of unbelief they were broken off...Do not be haughty, but fear. <sup>21</sup>For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not***

**spare you either...<sup>22</sup>consider the goodness and severity of God... toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off... (Rom. 11:18-22)**

J. **He is withered** (15:6): There is a “slow” spiritual process that Jesus referred to as “withering.” It begins when one’s heart becomes like a dried-up branch without a sense of spiritual vitality. The signs of this process includes a lack of hunger (Mt. 5:6) to engage with Jesus in prayer and the Word, or to fellowship with godly believers and serve others in ministry. This withering process is often the result of our life choices and the use of our time—by not prioritizing time to cultivate an abiding relationship with Jesus. This can happen to those teaching the Bible or singing on a worship team. It is common for one who is critically ill in the ICU to have no physical hunger. Spiritually sick believers have little hunger for God. It is not normal for a believer to have no hunger for God.

## II. THEY THROW THEM INTO THE FIRE AND THEY ARE BURNED (JN. 15:6)

A. Jesus warned that unfruitful branches will be burned by the fire of God’s judgment (15:6).

Commentators interpret this passage in four different ways: First, the “burned” branches are Christians who lose their salvation. Second, these branches refer to those who professed to be a Christian but were never saved. Third, to believers who suffer loss of reward in the fire of the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:15). Fourth, to compromising believers in fiery trials.

**‘If anyone does not 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.’ (Jn 15:6)**

1. On the last day, Jesus will command those not in relationship with Him to depart (Lk 13:27).  
**27“He will say, ‘...I do not know you...depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.’ 28There will be weeping...when you see...the prophets in the kingdom...and yourselves thrust out.” (Lk 13:27-28)**
2. I highly recommend John Burke’s book called ***"Imagine Heaven"*** (see videos on YouTube)

B. Note that Jesus shifted from the singular “if anyone...he is cast out” to the plural, “they are burned.” The singular is used to emphasize the responsibility of each individual so they would sincerely ask, “Lord, am I becoming a dry branch?” The plural highlights that “many” will face this judgment.

C. **They gather them:** Earlier, Jesus said that angels will gather the “dead branches” and cast them into the fire (Mt. 13:41-42). At the end of the age, His angels will gather any who practice lawlessness to cast them into hell. It is indescribably tragic for a former branch (believer; 15:2) to end up in hell!

**41The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, 42and will cast them into the furnace of fire... 49So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, 50and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” (Mt. 13:41-50)**

D. Those who reject Jesus and His leadership will endure the fires of hell for all eternity (Mt. 25:46).

<sup>46</sup>“*These will go away into everlasting punishment...” (Mt. 25:46)*

<sup>43</sup>“*If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, than go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched...” (Mk. 9:43)*

<sup>9</sup>...“*If anyone worships the beast [the Antichrist]...<sup>10</sup>He shall be tormented with fire...*

<sup>11</sup>*The smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night...” (Rev. 14:9-11)*

<sup>10</sup>“*...the lake of fire...and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever... (Rev. 20:10)*

E. Practical ways to avoid deception or falling away include regular, prayerful Bible reading; setting our hearts to obey the Lord; staying in close relationship with others; regular involvement with a body of believers (Heb. 10:25) that has leaders who uphold biblical doctrines, values, and practices; and that we maintain a humble teachable spirit that receives instruction and correction from others.

### III. THE END-TIME APOSTASY IS THE GREATEST TRAGEDY IN HISTORY

A. The most tragic reality in human history is the end-time falling away from the faith (2 Thes. 2:3; 1 Tim. 4:1-2; 2 Tim. 3:1-7; 4:3-5; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; cf. also see Rom. 11:22; 1 Tim. 5:15; Heb. 3:12; 6:4-6; 10:26-31, 39; Jas. 5:19-20; 2 Pet. 2:20-22; 3:17).

B. Paul prophesied a falling away from the faith in the end times.

<sup>3</sup>*Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day [Jesus' second coming] will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin [the Antichrist] is revealed... (2 Thes. 2:3)*

<sup>1</sup>*Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits...<sup>2</sup>having their own conscience seared...<sup>3</sup>forbidding to marry... (1 Tim. 4:1-3)*

<sup>3</sup>*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine...<sup>4</sup>they will turn their ears away from the truth and be turned aside to fables. (2 Tim. 4:3-4)*

C. It is impossible for one to return to the faith after their conscience has been seared (Heb. 6:4-6).

<sup>4</sup>*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup>and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup> if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. (Heb. 6:4-6)*

D. Those who fall away are those who continue in unrepentant sin after receive the truth (Heb. 10:26).

<sup>26</sup>*If we sin willfully [persistently] after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, <sup>27</sup>but a certain fearful expectation of judgment...<sup>29</sup>How much worse punishment... will he be...worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant...a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?...” (Heb. 10:26-29)*

E. Peter warned of false teachers who once walked in the truth but fell away (2 Pet. 2:1-22). Their latter end is worse—there are different measures of intensity of condemnation and judgment in hell (Mt. 10:15; 11:22-24; Mk. 12:40; Lk. 12:47-48; 20:46-46; Jn. 15:22).

*<sup>15</sup>They [false teachers] have forsaken the right way...<sup>19</sup>They themselves are slaves of corruption ...<sup>20</sup>If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord... 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...” (2 Pet. 2:15-21)*

F. A genuine brother can commit “sin that leads to death” (1 Jn. 5:16-17).

*<sup>16</sup>If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask [pray], and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. <sup>17</sup>... there is sin not leading to death. (1 Jn. 5:16-17)*

G. It is wise to examine our heart and lifestyle so that we may not be self-deceived.

*<sup>5</sup>Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified. (2 Cor. 13:5)*