



# THE VINE & the Branches

Part 5: The Cost of Not  
Abiding in Christ



# Introduction

As Jesus speaks to His beloved disciples on the way to Gethsemane, He commands them to continually abide in Him so that they may bear much fruit. Then, in a study of contrasts from the first five verses of John 15, He suddenly introduces a **conditional sentence** with the phrase, “**If** anyone does not abide in Me.” The element of uncertainty (“If”) requires the subjunctive mood, which is exactly what we have here. The premise of Jesus’ statement is either true or untrue. “The point is in the air,” as Greek scholar A.T. Robertson suggests, “and the cloud gathers round it.” It is a cloud of “hovering doubt.” In other words, will they abide or not? The language is futuristic, meaning action will be taken in the future which is dependent upon their choice.

# Introduction

To clarify further, consider Jesus' words in John 12:32. "And I, **if I be lifted up** from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." This condition is confined to the *future* after Jesus has been tried and then nailed to a Roman cross. Since the condition is certain, it could be rendered as "And I, **when** I am lifted up, will draw all men to Myself." Jesus uses the same construction when He says, "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; **if** he listens to you (protasis, in the future), you have won your brother (apodosis)." We may add: And if he *doesn't* listen to you (in the future), you have *not* won your brother. The condition was not met. In John 15:6, Jesus uses this mode of expectation. If anyone chooses *not* to abide, what can they expect to happen? In other words, what is the cost of not abiding in Christ?



# Introduction

What follows in Jesus' apodosis is extremely sobering. One minute He is talking to them about fruit-bearing, lifting up unproductive branches, cleansing them to make them more productive, and what it means to abide in Him. We sense His unconditional love for the branches, His genuine interest in fruit, the Father's tender mercies, and His invitation to be in constant union with Him. Suddenly – and it is sudden - He changes the subject and turns to *judgment*. Why this? Why now? "People sometimes do turn away from Christ after professing Him," theologian John Frame affirms. "You probably know people who have fallen away, after seeming like faithful Christians for years. And such defections, called *apostasy*, occurred during the NT period as well."



# Introduction

Sometimes, the study of God's Word brings us face-to-face with hard truths. We would prefer to focus on God's good promises or the passages which bring encouragement and help us through each day. Focusing on the "positive" divine attributes of love, kindness, gentleness, omniscience, omnipresence, peace, grace, and mercy brings us comfort and assurance – and we really do want everything to go well in our lives. However, we are not given the privilege of picking and choosing the passages that make us feel good. God does not have any favorite verses. Let us, then, approach what Jesus revealed to His disciples with open hearts and minds so that we may be sufficiently warned and learn how to take refuge in Him as our Redeemer and Lord.

# John 15:5-6

- “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned” (John 15:5-6, NASV).
- “If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned” (John 15:6, ESV).

# The Darkest Part of the Allegory

*The Five Elements in the Punishment  
of the Person Who Rejects the Light:*

The branch is **thrown away**

The branch **withers**

The branches are **gathered**

The branches are **cast into the fire**

The branches are **burned**





# First Element: The Branch is Thrown Away

- The adverb accompanying “to throw” means *outside*. It is, therefore, easy to see the connection with the verb, which gives us our translation of ***to throw outside or away***. Functioning as a noun, the two words (verb + adverb) together mean *those outside* or *the outsiders*. Therefore, Kittel provides the following translation: **“Those who are without, who stand outside, those who are banished.”**
- Jesus speaks of ***outsiders*** in Mark’s Gospel: “And He was saying to them, ‘To you (the disciples) has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God; but **those who are outside** get everything in parables; in order that while seeing, they may see and not perceive; and while hearing, they may hear and not understand; lest they return again and be forgiven’” (Mk. 4:11-12).



# Who Are the Outsiders?

- “Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward **outsiders**, making the most of the opportunity” (Col. 4:5).
- “Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you; so that you may behave properly toward **outsiders** and not be in any need” (I Thess. 4:11-12).
- “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. **Outside** are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying” (Rev. 22:14-15).

# List of New Testament Items “Thrown Away”

- Unfruitful trees (Mt. 3:10; 7:19; Lk. 3:9).
- Tasteless salt (Mt. 5:13).
- One’s right eye or right hand (if either causes one to stumble; Mt. 5:29-30).
- Stumbling-blocks and lawless people (Mt. 13:41-42).
- Bad fish (Mt. 13:48).
- The wicked (Mt. 13:49).
- The Great Dragon, the serpent of old, the Devil and Satan (Jn. 12:31; Rev. 12:9; 20:2-3,10).
- The Beast and the Prophet (Rev. 19:20).

# Four Supporting Texts

- “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing any more, except to be **thrown out** and trampled under foot by men” (Mt. 5:13).
- “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a drag-net cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind; and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down, and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they **threw away**” (Mt. 13:47-48).
- “So it will be at the end of the age; the angels shall come forth, and **take out** the wicked from among the righteous” (Mt. 13:49).
- “Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world shall be **cast out**” (Jn. 12:31).



## Second Element: Wither

- The word John uses for *wither* is found in the New Testament 16 times and means (in the passive mood) “to become dry, dry up, wither.”
- It is used of plants without good roots (Mt. 13:6; Mk. 4:6; Lk. 8:6); a lone fig tree which withered at Jesus’ command (Mt. 21:19-20); a withered hand (Mk. 3:1,3); and vine branches when they are removed (Jn. 15:6).
- “The last show of life disappears...God’s grace and Word no longer enter the heart....It is terrible to see a poor, stricken human body wither under the blight of death; it is unspeakably worse to see a similar process going on in the soul” (Lenski).



# Third, Fourth and Fifth Elements: Gathered, Cast Into the Fire & Burned

- “So it will be at the end of the age; the angels shall come forth, and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will **cast them into the furnace of fire**; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt. 13:49-50).
- “And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out, and **throw it** from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than having two eyes, to be **cast into the hell of fire**” (Mt. 18:9).
- “And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was **thrown into the lake of fire**” (Rev. 20:15).







# Our Assurance of Salvation

- “All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me; and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out” (Jn. 6:37).
- “And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son, and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day” (Jn. 6:38-39).
- “And I give eternal life to them; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand” (Jn. 10:28-29).
- “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6).

# Our Assurance of Salvation

- “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (Jn. 3:36).
- Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” (Jn. 5:24).
- “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life” (I Jn. 5:13).
- “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).



# Our Assurance of Salvation

- We are “protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (I Pt. 1:5).
- “The firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, ‘The Lord knows those who are His...’” (II Tim. 2:19).
- “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you” (Jer. 31:3).
- “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?...Nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:35,39).

# A Comforting Reality



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“Everyone who believes in Jesus – not hypocritically, but who sincerely believes – will have eternal life. Jesus will raise him up on the last day. So if you have believed in Jesus now, you cannot lose your salvation. Be confident that Jesus will raise you up on the last day.”

# Perseverance of the Saints

- “They whom God has accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved” (WCF, XVII, Section 1).
- “This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ; the abiding of the Spirit, and of the seed of God within them; and the nature of the covenant of grace: from all which arises also the certainty and infallibility thereof” (WCF, XVII, Section 2).

# Perseverance of the Saints

- “Nevertheless they may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins; and for a time continue therein; whereby they incur God’s displeasure, and grieve his Holy Spirit: come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts; have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded; hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves” (WCF, XVII, Section 3).



# A Summary of the Doctrine

In essence, the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints “teaches that if you have saving faith you will never lose it, and if you lose it, you never had it.”

“They went out from us, but they were not really 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 they all are not of us” (1 Jn. 2:19).



**R.C. Sproul**  
1939-2017

# The Foundation of Our Confidence

1. “Salvation is of the Lord and we are His craftsmanship. He gives the Holy Spirit to every believer as a promise that He will fulfill what He begins. He has likewise sealed every believer by the Holy Spirit. He has marked us with an indelible mark and given His personal down payment that guarantees He will finish the transaction” (R.C. Sproul).
2. The provisions of the Covenant of Grace are eternal, not conditional.
3. God’s decrees are immutable.
4. Jesus’ finished work on the cross assures our salvation.

# When It Is Too Late

“When the author walks on the stage the play is over. God is going to invade, all right: but what is the good of saying you are on His side then, when you see the whole natural universe melting away like a dream and something else – something it never entered your head to conceive – comes crashing in; something so beautiful to some of us and so terrible to others that



**C.S. Lewis**  
1898-1963



# When It Is Too Late

none of us will have any choice left? For this time it will be God without disguise; something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature. It will be too late then to choose your side. There is no use saying you choose to lie down when it has become impossible to stand up. That will not be the time for choosing: it will be the time when we discover which side we really have chosen, whether we realized it before or not. Now, today, this moment, is our chance to choose the right side. God is holding back to give us that chance. It will not last forever. We must take it or leave it.”

- *Mere Christianity*