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**B0631.1 – August 6, 2006 – Jn 15:6 – Addendum To The Christian's  
Fruitbearing**

***Alternative Views***

**Loss of Salvation View**

The Arminian view maintains rightly that the branches are believers but faultily concludes that believers may lose their salvation if they do not continue abiding. God is able to keep one's salvation as long as that one does not take himself out of God's hand.

This view is impossible because John has already taught the eternal security of the believer in John 10:27-29, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will 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."

**False Professors Views**

*Variation 1: Lordship and Reformed View (MacArthur, Laney)*

This view proclaims that the passage is applicable to people who profess to believe but really never exercised "saving faith". Judas, son of Simon Iscariot is usually given as the example. MacArthur says, "the fruitless branches represent counterfeit disciples—people who were never truly saved. They do not abide in Christ, the True Vine; they are not truly united with him by faith. They are Judas branches. They can bear no genuine fruit. In the end the Father removes them to preserve the life and fruitfulness of the other branches."<sup>i</sup>

Unfortunately this has several problems. First, "abiding" is made to be the same as "believing". This has been shown multiple times to be impossible.<sup>ii</sup> "Abiding" means "to

remain, to stay” and one can only “remain” somewhere he already is. Therefore only believers are able to “remain” in Christ. This is a confusion of terms. Second, this passage is written to 11 believers. Jesus says “you are already clean” (cf. 15:3) referring to His 11 apostles. When Judas was present in ch. 13 Jesus said, “you are clean, but not all of you”, excluding Judas. Judas was still present but after the morsel he excommunicated himself from the group. Judas was never called to “abide”, for it was impossible to do so. Unbelievers cannot abide in Him whom they have no part!

*Variation 2: Shift from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> Person between v. 5 and 6 (S. Lewis Johnson, Daniel Wallace)*

A less extreme but equally implausible interpretation is held by those who claim significance in the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> person shift in vs 5-6. They take “abiding” in its normal sense of “fellowship” but claim that the shift from “you” (2<sup>nd</sup> person plurals) to “they” (3<sup>rd</sup> person plurals) indicates that Jesus is shifting from speaking to believers and now speaks of unbelievers. Wallace expresses this significant observation when he says, “The basic exegetical point here is that the NT authors distinctions between second and third person are not to be overlooked (because they will not be blurred in Greek as they are in English). Theologically, this is significant for it seems that in many of the texts which *on the surface* seem to suggest that a believer can lose his/her salvation, the “insecure” part of the text is in the third person (cf John 15:1-11 [note especially the change of persons between vv. 5 and 6]; Heb. 6:4-6, 9).”<sup>iii</sup> S. Lewis Johnson says it this way, the “consequence of not abiding in the vine is fruitlessness, but the result of not being in the vine is more serious still.”<sup>iv</sup>

This view is problematic because it takes “abide” to refer to fellowship in vv. 1-5 and to “believing” in vv. 6. Such a small shift in the person is not significant enough to change the consistent Johannine usage of the word “abide”. The fallacy of making “abide” the equivalent of “believe” is discussed under MacArthur’s view and has been ably refuted. This is simply inconsistent. As Johnson says elsewhere, how can one be called to abide who is not already “in Him”? How then, Dr. Johnson, can you ask the non-believer of v. 6 to abide when he is an unbeliever?

### **No Rewards at Judgment Seat of Christ View**

Ryrie and Fruchtenbaum both hold that these are believers who live a barren life and therefore their works are burned at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Ryrie says, “John 15:6 contains a strong warning against disobedience (not abiding in Christ) and the barrenness

that results. Such believers lose further opportunities to bear fruit. Their branch withers, and if the barrenness continues unchanged, then at the Judgment Seat of Christ they will not receive rewards (1 Cor. 3:15; 2 John 8). (In my opinion the last part of verse 6 refers to that coming judgment).”<sup>v</sup> Fruchtenbaum expresses it this way, “it is not the believer who is burned, but the works of wood, hay and stubble (John 15:6; 1 Cor. 3:10-15).”<sup>vi</sup>

The problem with this view is that the text states that the branches are burned, not the bad fruit. The whole point is that these believers lack fruit and so the branch itself is burned in order to discipline the believer and cause him to return to an abiding relationship so he can bear fruit.

### **Discipline Views**

#### *Variation 1: Congregational Discipline (Chafer, Couch)*

This first variation was popularized by Chafer who did not know Greek and based his interpretation on the KJV of John 15:6, “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned.” The underlined phrase “men gather them” is not in the original Greek text but was added by the translators. It better reads “they are gathered”. The KJV leaves open the idea that it is the world that is judging these believers as Chafer asserts, “The judgment of the world upon the believer is described in the severest of terms—Men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.” To read into this passage the idea that God casts them forth and that God burns them is to disregard important language, and to contradict the great truths which belong to salvation by grace alone. If it be asked how in practical experience men burn each other, it will be seen that this language is highly figurative, for men do not in any literal sense burn each other; but they do abhor and repel an inconsistent profession.”<sup>vii</sup>

The problems with this view are namely the mistranslation of the Greek text. Chafer relies heavily on the KJV translation for his interpretation. But the text does not say “men gather them” but rather “they gather them”. The designation of “they” is also a matter of controversy.<sup>viii</sup>

#### *Variation 2: Divine Discipline (Dean, Lightner, Wilkin, this author takes this view)*

The first non-fruiting branch is a young believer (abiding in Christ) who has not yet matured enough to produce fruit. The branch is the mature believer who has

fellowship with Christ and bears fruit. Only the third branch, the one who does not have fellowship, is removed.<sup>ix</sup>

*Unless anyone abide in me* is a fifth class conditional since *ean* appears with the subjunctive in the protasis and fulfilling the condition that a present indicative is in the apodosis. The connection between the protasis and the apodosis is a logical one making this a *present general condition* which indicates nothing as to the likelihood of its fulfillment. It should be understood as an “if...then” statement. “If the protasis, then the apodosis.”<sup>x</sup> The condition is “if” one not abide in Christ, “then” he is: 1) thrown out, 2) withers, 3) gathered, 4) thrown into the fire, and 5) burned. This is the third type of branch, the first two being explained in verse 2 as the new or immature believer who has not yet produced fruit and the mature fruitful believer. The new or immature believer is “lifted up” so that he is able to bear fruit. The fruitful branches are mature branches already producing fruit, they are pruned so they are able to bear much more fruit. The believer being discussed here is the mature believer who is not producing fruit because he is not abiding in Christ. This believer undergoes discipline. The discipline comes in degrees. Our Lord disciplines those believers who persist in willful disobedience (Heb. 12:3-11) with the intent to correct their behavior.<sup>xi</sup> Though a perfect continuum of discipline may be impossible to work out from this text it is safe to say that the degree of discipline increases the longer the believer fails to restore fellowship by confession (1 John 1:9). In other words degree of discipline is proportional to time out of fellowship. He is “thrown out” indicating that God is not with him in his course of rebellious action. God is no longer abiding in Him. Quite naturally, since without Him we can do nothing (v. 4) the believer “withers” spiritually. Since the spirit is connected to the physical body spiritual withering may result in physical and/or mental illness. These are disciplinary measures our Lord takes if a mature believer persists in willful disobedience. If he does not respond positively to the discipline he is “gathered”, “cast” into the “fire” and “burned”. This is severe chastisement that may result in severe physical sickness and even physical death (1 Cor. 11:30; James 5:19-20; 1 John 5:16-17). The word “burned” is interesting because the Greek language has two words for “burn”. One is *katakaio* and means “to burn and consume” but the word used here is *kaietai* and means “to burn without consuming.” It is the same word used in the Septuagint (LXX) version of Exodus 3:2 “The angel of the LORD appeared to him [Moses] in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed.” This is what raised Moses’ curiosity to go and see this burning bush more closely. What an odd site? This is the word Jesus chose to use of the mature believer under severe chastisement for not abiding. The believer is not consumed by God’s disciplinary wrath. So, while the non-abiding mature believer undergoes chastisement,

perhaps even physical death, he is not totally destroyed, his salvation is secure in the work of Jesus Christ, having been appropriated through faith, and if physical death occurs his spirit goes to be with the Lord.

It is from this wonderful phrase spoken by our Lord, “Without Me you can do nothing” that the great hymn is sung:

Without Him I can do nothing,  
Without Him I'd surely fail.  
Without Him I would be drifting  
Like a ship without a sail.<sup>xii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> John F. MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 171.

<sup>ii</sup> For example, see Robert Dean, Jr., *Abiding in Christ: Dispensational Spiritual Life* (Chafer Theological Seminary Journal Volume 7)

<sup>iii</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 393.

<sup>iv</sup> S. Lewis Johnson, *Course Lectures on the Upper Room Discourse* (Tyndale Theological Seminary, LS-304).

<sup>v</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989), 53.

<sup>vi</sup> Arnold F. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2001), 962.

<sup>vii</sup> L. S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 3: Soteriology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1993), 300.

<sup>viii</sup> “they” may refer to men or they may be angels which can be used as instruments to discipline believers. Then again, any strict identification may not be the intent of the parable anyway. The symbology of a parable can be pushed too far beyond the intent of the one giving the parable. Such is probably the case here since “they” are not interpreted for us whereas the cast of characters; the vine, vinedresser, and branches are all clearly defined in the text.

<sup>ix</sup> Robert Dean, Jr., *Abiding in Christ: Dispensational Spiritual Life* (Chafer Theological Seminary Journal Volume 7), 46.

<sup>x</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 696-97.

<sup>xi</sup> Bob Wilkin, *Believers Who Play With Fire Get Burned: John 15:6* (<http://www.faithalone.org/news/y1994/94may3.html>)

<sup>xii</sup> It is probable that the author of this hymn is expressing this song in a justification sense rather than a sanctification sense. He is expressing his thankfulness that God saved him, but of course, as we have seen the passage has nothing to do with our thankfulness for being in *union* with Him but rather our *communion* with Him. The hymn, while not originally intended to describe sanctification truths is accurate when applied to sanctification. While unbelievers certainly can do nothing, certainly fail, and are certainly drifting without Christ that is not what John 15:4 is talking about.

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