

# Does John 15 Contradict Once Saved Always Saved?

Salvation and Service

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## John 15:6

<sup>6</sup>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.

Proponents of conditional security (the false soteriological belief that teaches believers can lose their salvation) assert John 15 (specifically verse 6) is a passage that contradicts the Biblical teaching of eternal security (believers are saved eternally and cannot lose their salvation). They argue this passage contradicts Once Saved Always Saved. This article will examine this claim in detail.

In this article, you will learn what it means to abide in Christ and to bear fruit. Believers (compared to branches) cannot bring forth good fruit unless they abide in Jesus Christ (presented as the true vine in v 1 of John 15). This parable (Parable of the True Vine) describes the significance of Christians being connected to the vine to bear spiritual fruit (we will discuss what fruit is in the context of believers thoroughly in this article). Before we comprehensively examine John 15 and explain the true meaning of the passage, let's start with some basics. This will help us to set the foundation before countering this common objection to the eternal security of the believer.

## Salvation

The Bible is clear about salvation. Salvation comes through faith alone in Jesus Christ (**John 3:16, Romans 4:5, Ephesians 2:8-9**). There are over 100 verses in the Bible teaching the sole condition for salvation is faith in Jesus Christ. Faith alone is sufficient for salvation. This is

because Jesus did all the work. The question (and subsequent answer) regarding what a person must do to be saved is found in the book of Acts—specifically in **Acts 16:30-31**:

30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? 31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

The unregenerate (those not born again) are told to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved. In **John 19:30**, Jesus said "it is finished". Therefore, the only acceptable response from us is to believe in Jesus Christ for everlasting life. What does it mean to believe for eternal life? Scripture interprets scripture. To believe is to trust:

#### **Ephesians 1:13-14**

13 In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, 14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

### **Saved by Faith or Faithfulness?**

Notice in Ephesians 1:13 how the words believe, and trust are used interchangeably. Those that have believed in Jesus Christ have trusted Him. Again, to believe is to trust. Once a person believes on the Lord Jesus Christ and is passed from death unto life (**John 5:24**), they are saved eternally. John 5:24 says there is no condemnation (future tense) for the regenerate. **John 3:18** plainly states that those who are condemned are those who “hath not believed”. This means there is no condemnation to those who have believed. Eternal life is life that never ends. If this life could be lost, it would not be eternal life. This would be temporary life.

Guardians of conditional security argue that we’re not really saved until death (final justification). They are in major error. The Bible says we are presently sons of God—and we have been passed from death unto life. John 5:24 does not say “passing”. It says “passed”. This means believers are in the life now. If those that claim faith really means ongoing obedience and faithfulness were right, the language in John 5:24 should say “passing”. Unfortunately for advocates of conditional security, the passage does not read the way they would need it to read if

their soteriological system were true. To reiterate, Jesus states that those who have believed have no condemnation (John 5:24), will never die (**John 11:25-26**), never thirst (**John 4:14, John 6:35**), and never hunger (John 6:35). He also assures believers that no man can pluck them out of His hand, or His Father's hand (**John 10:28-29**). This is double eternal security. The Bible is clear that nothing can separate us (believers) from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus (**Romans 8:38-39**). After a person is born again (passed from death unto life spiritually), they are commanded to bring forth good fruit. The next section will explore the meaning of good fruit in the life of a believer.

## **What is Biblical Fruit?**

Fruit is the product of something. For example, God commanded Adam, Eve (at creation), and Noah's family (after the Flood) to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. This command meant to reproduce physically (akin to believers reproducing spiritually) and have children to fill the earth (analogous to expanding God's Kingdom through evangelizing):

### **Genesis 1:28**

28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

### **Genesis 9:19**

And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. The reader will notice that according to the text, being fruitful is to replenish the earth.

This has everything to do with reproduction. The product or fruit of a human is another human. In the book of Genesis, God states plainly that plants and animals will reproduce after their kind. Humans produce humans, dogs produce dogs, and apple trees produce apples. Again, fruit is the product of something. Humans are born into this world as creatures of God. Our physical birth is our first birth (born of the water). Humans reproduce physically. We are told to be born again (born of the spirit or born from above). When we are regenerated (by faith in Jesus Christ), we

are instructed to bring forth good fruit. In other words, believers are commanded to reproduce spiritually by preaching the Gospel to the lost and providing them with the necessary information to get saved as they trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ:

**Proverbs 11:30**

30 The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.

Believers are righteous through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are justified because of His imputed righteousness (**Romans 4:5**). According to Proverbs 11:30, the product of a believer is more believers. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God unto salvation:

**Romans 1:16**

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Those in an unregenerate state need to be saved by faith and faith alone in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. We as believers are commanded to preach the Word of God to the world:

**Romans 10:17**

17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

It is important for people to properly understand what is meant (Biblically) by Christian fruit. I have pointed out that fruit is the product of something. The product of the believer should be more Christians (converts). The fruit of our labor is more Christians. We should be striving to win the lost and working hard to pull them out of the fire:

**Jude 23**

23 And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

God justifies. He sanctifies. And He glorifies. We read about this in **Romans 8:29-30**. For a person to believe the Gospel, they must first hear the Gospel. We, as soldiers of Jesus Christ, are to go out into the world making believers and disciples of all nations (**Matthew 28:19-20**). Paul encourages those that are regenerated to walk in the spirit. When we as believers walk in the

spirit (**Galatians 5:16, Galatians 5:25**), we will manifest the fruits of the spirit (**Galatians 5:22-23**). The product of the spirit is love, joy, peace, etc. By walking in the spirit, abiding in Christ, and putting in the necessary work to reach the lost with the Gospel, the justified will be fruitful. Believers will excel in their spiritual education as their condition conforms more and more to their position in Christ. As believers, we will fully conform to our position at glorification (the redemption of our bodies).

## **What is the True Meaning of John 15?**

Now that we understand what a person must do to be saved—and what a person who has been saved needs to do in their Christian experience, let's examine the passage that is so frequently misused to contradict the clear teachings of scripture. A significant rule of Bible hermeneutics (interpreting scripture) is to avoid contradicting clear teachings with passages that are more difficult to understand. Salvation is simple. How to get saved and enter the family of God is explained plainly. Therefore, we must ensure that we do not undermine the clear teachings of salvation with the meat of the Word. This is why it's so important to interpret the Bible knowing first that salvation is by faith alone in Jesus Christ and that eternal life cannot be lost.

Bearing fruit as a believer is conditioned upon abiding in Jesus Christ (**John 15:5**). To be able to abide, a person first must get saved. You can't abide in Christ if you aren't spiritually born again. This is why those in John 15 are saved. They are called "clean" (**John 13:10, John 15:3**) and are commanded to abide (something only believers can do). As Christians, we can do nothing for God without God working in our lives.

John 15 is about being in service to God. To reiterate, Jesus is speaking to the saved in this passage because the unsaved don't have a new man to walk according to. Since the term abide is a fellowship term (to remain in close communion with God), it is of utmost importance to first understand that the audience in John 15 are believers. To have the power to abide, and to serve God in your Christian Walk, you first need to be saved (we discussed how to be saved earlier in this article). There is nothing a believer can do to please God, and to expand His Kingdom, in the flesh. Believers have both the flesh and the spirit.

## **The Old Man vs. The New Man**

Genuine Christians are given a new nature to walk according to. Unbelievers only have the flesh. They have not been given a new nature to live in. That is why unbelievers are positionally in the flesh—while believers are positionally in the spirit. Unbelievers can't walk in the spirit—since they have not been born again. Believers have been born again. Therefore, we can choose the spirit over the flesh. We, as believers, need to put on the new man, walk in the spirit, and abide in Christ. When we abide in Christ, we please God. The reason why we still sin after being saved is because we still have this unregenerate flesh. God did not do away with our old man. We will struggle with our old man until we die physically. When we die physically, our old man dies for good and our new man, the regenerated spirit, goes to the third heaven to be with God. We will receive new bodies at the first resurrection. This is what we are predestined for—to be conformed to the image of His Son. Since there is no reforming the old man, it is of utmost importance that we choose the new man to walk in. By walking in the spirit, we can do good. We can be productive Christians if we make sure to abide in Jesus Christ.

## **Harsh Language to Believers**

John 15 is not about salvation. It's about being able to produce for God. God wants us to produce good fruit. Jesus wants us to follow Him in our Christian experience in order that He can make us fishers of men (**Matthew 4:19**). If every Christian were shining in their Christian experience, and excelling in their discipleship, that would mean all believers are fishers of men—which would suggest that the entire planet should be evangelized. We should be living in a golden age of Christianity. This is obviously not the case. Our doctrine needs to fit reality. This indicates unfruitful believers do not lose their salvation. Nor does John 15 prove that unfruitful believers were never really saved (spurious Christians). Believers who aren't producing good fruit because they aren't abiding in Christ can be benched and therefore not used by God. Not being used by God could result in being "burned". Figuratively, this means Christians can experience destructive consequences based on their poor choice to not walk in the spirit and abide in Christ.

John 15:6 isn't the only passage where Jesus uses harsh language towards believers to provoke them to be productive and pleasing to the Lord. Now that we've been baptized in the body of

Christ, God wants us to be valuable assets to this body. In **Matthew 5:13**, Jesus says to believers who lose their savor (since believers are the salt of the earth) that they're "good for nothing", to be "cast out", and will be "trodden under foot of men":

<sup>13</sup> Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth **good for nothing**, but to **cast out**, and to be **trodden under foot of men**.

Jesus is perfectly capable of using intense language towards believers that serve as a purpose to motivate towards good works and good fruit. For John 15:6 to be describing hell or eternal condemnation, there should be qualifiers such as "everlasting" and "eternal" to make this call. Unfortunately for conditionalists, these words aren't present. The context does not dictate a loss of salvation. The lake of fire is not in view in this passage.

## **Does Fire Always Refer to Hell?**

Clearly, John 15:6 is describing temporal judgment. It is a fact that genuine believers can experience divine chastisement. This punishment results in temporal consequences—and even a loss of reward at the judgment seat of Christ (which all believers will be present at). It is not even contested that the word fire can be used in the Bible to refer to temporal judgment for disobedient Christians. **Psalm 104:4** refers to angels as flaming fire. This description of angels is clearly not referring to hell. **Hebrews 12:29** calls God a consuming fire. Does this mean God is a consuming hell? Of course not. There are numerous instances of the word fire being used in scripture that does not refer to hell or the lake of fire. Fire is also used in **1 Corinthians 3:10-15** to refer to the burning of useless works at the judgment seat of Christ.

Believers can't do anything unless they are abiding in Him. This is why Paul pushes his fellow believers to not only live in the spirit (position) but to also walk in the spirit (experience). When we walk in the spirit, we will produce good fruit. How do we walk in the spirit? We follow His commandments. When we follow His commandments, we are a friend of God, and we are His active disciples. To restate, believers are not positionally in the flesh. We are positionally in the spirit. But when it comes to our experience, we can either be in the spirit, or in the flesh. We must choose moment by moment to either be in the spirit or the flesh. When we are in the flesh,

we cannot please God. We please God by choosing the spirit, following His commandments, and abiding in Him. Without Him, we can do nothing. The good in us as believers is the God in us.

## **Producing Much Fruit**

Believers that abide in Christ will produce much fruit (expand God's Kingdom by helping to make converts). Believers who choose to walk in the spirit, and refuse to excel in their spiritual education, will be fruitless. John 15 has everything to do with fruitful versus unfruitful Christians. Fruitless Christians will face consequences. They will face the penalty of their carnality. These consequences do not encompass the lake of fire. Eternal condemnation is not a concern for a fruitless believer. This is an impossible consequence for a saved Christian. This is because Christians have been passed from death unto life. This life is now (spiritually). They are currently the sons of God. The outcome of being unfruitful are temporal consequences—and a loss of rewards at the judgment seat of Christ.

## **Soulwinning**

Soulwinning is continuing in the love of God. If you're a believer today, you never would have gotten saved, if somebody did not continue in the love of God by bringing you the saving Gospel message of Jesus Christ. Isn't that amazing? Isn't that incredible inspiration for you to go out to witness and evangelize the lost? It isn't worth it to walk in the flesh and fail to produce good fruit. There will be eternal consequences because you will miss out on the opportunity to reap life everlasting, which is eternal rewards (including winning souls/producing fruit). God has chosen us for service that we should be active disciples by following Him and bringing forth fruit (reproducing spiritually). When a believer leads somebody to the Lord, this is fruit that extends into eternity. Thieves cannot break into your house and rob you of these rewards. No—these rewards have eternal value. We, as believers, have the opportunity on this earth, to reap life everlasting by walking in the spirit, putting on the new man, abiding in Christ, and winning the lost to the Lord Jesus Christ.



## **Eternal Security Has Been Established**

Salvation cannot be lost. John 15 does not contradict this reality. If salvation could be reversed, everything that comes with salvation will also be reversed. This includes regeneration, justification, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, our predestination to glorification, our baptism into the body of Christ, our sins having been passed away and forgiven—and so much more.

The Bible is clear: eternal life cannot be lost. But what can be negatively affected is our communion, friendship, and fellowship with Jesus Christ. Trusting Jesus Christ as Savior is what got you saved. Following His commandments is what makes us a friend of God. How do we live in the spirit (our **position**)? We believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. How do we walk in the spirit (our **experience**)? We follow His commandments. Following His commandments and walking in the spirit is how we have communion with the Lord. Believers need to follow His commandments, and as a result, expand God's Kingdom. Increasing God's Kingdom has eternal benefit. John 15 is a great motivator for following the Commandments of Christ, walking in the spirit, abiding in Jesus Christ, and winning souls to the Lord.

## **Conclusion**

Jesus is not taking the eternal life of the believer in John 15. Fruitless believers are benched for temporal chastisement. Genuine Christians who crash and burn in their experience will be “burned”. They will reap the negative consequences of their choices. The branch (believer) is taken away for discipline in order that he can start abiding again and become a productive or useful Christian. Temporal discipline is in view. The goal of these temporal consequences is to get the believer to start bearing fruit again. God wants all branches to be productive. A good product requires good workers. The issue in John 15 is not eternal condemnation. It deals with the temporal vantage point. John 15 is describing the experience of believers in this life.

It is important that we have the mind of Christ. We have been given the power to overcome sin. We should do our best to see and do things God's way. Our desire should be to please the Lord. This is what we were created for—to please God. If we allow the spirit to guide us in our lives, and live the way God wants us to live, we will be pleasing to God and have lives comprising an

abundance of joy. But if I choose to live contrary to God's way, I will reap the negative consequences of my fleshly choices. These consequences will not be good for me, nor will they be good for those around me. Having a Godly testimony is important as we seek to glorify God by our works. Walking in the flesh, and failing to abide in Christ, will only hurt our testimony, and therefore hurt the cause of Christ. This is why we could be benched as believers in order that God can feed spiritual nutrients to those believers seeking to walk in the spirit and abide in Him. A believer who crashes and burns in this life due to his carnal choices will fail in his spiritual education and will not be called a friend of God. He will still be a child of God. Nothing can change this. But he will endure the consequences of his refusal to abide in close fellowship with the Savior.