

“Does Jesus’ Vine/Branches discourse in John 15 Mean You Can Lose Your Salvation?”

Does John 15:1-7 have anything to do with losing your salvation? I would like your input. Personally I believe it does not.

Thanks for your letter. John 15:1-7 definitely presents the interpreter with some difficulties. Nevertheless, I personally tend to agree with you and do not think that this passage teaches that a genuine believer (and this, of course, is important) can lose his/her salvation. Since my own studies are informed by the expertise of others, and since I share the viewpoint presented in the NET BIBLE, I have pasted their comments on this passage below:

The Greek verb *airō* (airo) can mean lift up as well as take away, and it is sometimes argued that here it is a reference to the gardener lifting up (i.e., propping up) a weak branch so that it bears fruit again. In Johannine usage the word occurs in the sense of lift up in 8:59 and 5:8-12, but in the sense of remove it is found in 11:39, 11:48, 16:22, and 17:15. In context (theological presuppositions aside for the moment) the meaning remove does seem more natural and less forced (particularly in light of v. 6, where worthless branches are described as being thrown out an image that seems incompatible with restoration). One option, therefore, would be to understand the branches which are taken away (v. 2) and thrown out (v. 6) as believers who forfeit their salvation because of unfruitfulness. However, many see this interpretation as encountering problems with the Johannine teaching on the security of the believer, especially John 10:28-29. This leaves two basic ways of understanding Jesus statements about removal of branches in 15:2 and 15:6:

(1) These statements may refer to an unfaithful (disobedient) Christian, who is judged at the judgment seat of Christ through fire (cf. 1 Cor 3:11-15). In this case the removal of 15:2 may refer (in an extreme case) to the physical death of a disobedient Christian.

(2) These statements may refer to someone who was never a genuine believer in the first place (e.g., Judas and the Jews who withdrew after Jesus difficult teaching in 6:66), in which case 15:6 refers to eternal judgment. In either instance it is clear that 15:6 refers to the fires of judgment (cf. OT imagery in Ps. 80:16 and Ezek 15:1-8). But view (1) requires us to understand this in terms of the judgment of believers at the judgment seat of Christ. This concept does not appear in the Fourth Gospel because from the perspective of the author the believer does not come under judgment; note especially 3:18, 5:24, 5:29. The first reference is especially important because it occurs in the context of 3:16-21, the section which is key to the framework of the entire Fourth Gospel and which is repeatedly alluded to throughout. A similar image to this one is used by John the Baptist in Matt 3:10, And the ax is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Since this is addressed to the Pharisees and Sadducees who were coming to John for baptism, it almost certainly represents a call to initial repentance. More importantly, however, the imagery of being cast into the fire constitutes a reference to eternal judgment, a use of imagery which is much nearer to the Johannine imagery in 15:6 than the Pauline concept of the judgment seat of Christ (a judgment for believers) mentioned above. The use of the Greek verb *meno* (meno) in 15:6 also supports view (2). When used of the relationship between Jesus and the disciple and/or Jesus and the Father, it emphasizes the permanence of the relationship (John 6:56, 8:31, 8:35, 14:10). The prototypical branch who has not remained is Judas, who

departed in 13:30. He did not bear fruit, and is now in the realm of darkness, a mere tool of Satan. His eternal destiny, being cast into the fire of eternal judgment, is still to come. It seems most likely, therefore, that the branches who do not bear fruit and are taken away and burned are false believers, those who profess to belong to Jesus but who in reality do not belong to him. In the Gospel of John, the primary example of this category is Judas. In 1 John 2:18-19 the antichrists fall into the same category; they too may be thought of as branches that did not bear fruit. They departed from the ranks of the Christians because they never did really belong, and their departure shows that they did not belong.”

The NET Bible is a really great site. If you're interested in exploring the topic of salvation, they have a number of articles at www.bible.org/topic.asp?topic_id=13. Articles specifically on the topic of “Assurance” can be found at www.bible.org/topic.asp?topic_id=31.

Hope these resources prove helpful.

The Lord bless you,

Michael Gleghorn

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