

“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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“Can a Christian Lose His

Salvation?"

I have been debating a Christian online about whether salvation is permanent, which I believe it is. I have seen many scriptures that show this is the case but the person I am debating has brought up two verses I have never looked at before and I don't know how to respond. The verses are 2 Peter 2:20-21:

"For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them."

I looked in a couple of commentaries as well as in *When Critics Ask* (by Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe) and they either said nothing about it or they didn't address the issue at hand. I have just within the last month or two started getting your newsletter and reading your articles/e-mail responses and I have been very impressed. So I was hoping that you could shed some light on this issue.

You have brought up a great question! The security of every believer is a critical issue in the Christian life. John 10:28-30 assures us that if we are given eternal life by God through Jesus Christ, no one can snatch us from the Father's hand. Romans 8:28-39 also guarantees that nothing in all of reality can separate us from the love of God in Christ.

With that said, there is the issue of the "apparent" problem passages. Of them, 2 Peter 2:20-21 seems a real nasty one. But upon reading the entire epistle from Peter, one can see that the people in question are false teachers. Peter's perspective, as that of Jude in Jude 19, is that these false

teachers were not truly Christian. As Jude puts it, they are “wordly-minded, devoid of the Spirit.” Most likely these teachers publicly professed Christ as their Lord, but their subsequent rejection verified their unchanged spiritual condition.

The Bible as a whole teaches that believers are securely held in God’s hand. But let us be careful not to judge others because of what we see or don’t see. Challenge one another in perseverance to bear fruit, but leave the final judgment to the word of God that is “able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

Thanks so much for your insightful question. God gives understanding to those who seek it as if searching for buried treasure and precious silver. [Proverbs 2:3-5]

Kris Samons
Probe Ministries

“Help! My Doubts Scare Me!”

Dear Sue Bohlin,

Hello. My name is _____. I e-mailed Ray earlier too. Anyways, I was reading an e-mail discussion you had with somebody, who didn’t believe in God. You said something in it about how it’s not an intellect issue, but a heart issue. This is hard for me to accept. I’m ashamed admitting this, but oh gosh its hard for me to admit. Maybe I won’t. I could say that I don’t believe in God, but that just sounds way too harsh. Have you heard of anybody who was a Christian, but then they began to have doubts and became agnostic? That’s how I feel. I asked Jesus into my heart when I was younger (I’m 18 now), but

for a long time I've just been so skeptical. I guess I'm not a Christian, because a Christian knows that he or she is one, and I don't. I don't know how to express what I've been going through lately. Everyday I think about my doubt and it depresses me. I'm not sure if I'll ever get rid of it and that scares me. I desire to believe in God so much, but it's hard. I have so many questions. I wonder why God doesn't show himself to me so I know for sure that He is there. I don't know. Maybe He has but it's just not enough. Maybe I don't have enough faith.

Another thing that really doesn't help me is some of the stuff that I have read on the internet. Different books that I've read about have caused me to have even more doubt. Have you heard of *The Bible Unearthed...*, or *The Jesus Puzzle...*? I haven't read any of them, but read reviews. Anyways, the second one I think denies that Jesus was a historical person. That really bothers me. Earlier today I was reading something on the web where this person was being critical of Lee Strobel (who wrote *The Case for Christ*). I really like that book (not done with it yet), but after what I read on the internet about it, I wonder if it really shows that Jesus was a historical person. I don't know. Maybe I just let other people's conflicting views on Christianity get to me too much, but after reading these things, I start to wonder if maybe they are correct on what they are arguing.

Anyways, to me, my problem doesn't seem to be a heart issue because I really would like to believe in God. I desire to believe in Him and live for Him, but it's hard. Is there something that I lack? Do I just not have enough faith? I don't know, maybe I don't. Well I think I've made this long enough. If there's any advice you could give me I would appreciate it. Maybe you could pray for me. Thanks a lot.

I know you don't know me, but I REALLY wish I could reach through this computer screen and put my arms around you and give you a big hug and tell you IT'S GOING TO BE OK!!!!!! It is

so OK to have doubts, to wonder about where you stand spiritually, because, at 18, you are at the point you need to be—deciding for yourself what you should keep and what you should jettison of what you have been taught. You are an adult now but you probably don't feel that you have enough information to make an informed, committed adult choice about something as important as eternal destiny and one's relationship with God!

Good news—lots of other people are also in your shoes. But they don't ask for help, and bless you, you did, and there IS help for you!! There are good answers, and you'll be stronger and more confident for having voiced your doubts and questions, once you're on the other side of this spiritual crisis. It's OK, _____. . . .God is walking through it with you.

I guess I'm not a Christian, because a Christian knows that he or she is one, and I don't.

Well, no, actually that's not true. Many Christians have assurance that we are Christians, and many Christians fervently *hope* they are but they're not sure. That's an important issue all by itself: can we *know* we're saved and going to heaven? Can we lose our salvation? Our founder and first president, Jimmy Williams, addressed this issue in one of [his e-mails](#).

I don't know how to express what I've been going through lately. Everyday I think about my doubt and it depresses me. I'm not sure if I'll ever get rid of it and that scares me.

I wish you could see God's heart as He watches you wrestle with your doubts and fears. He loves you so much (man, I feel like Monica on *Touched by an Angel* here!) and is very tender toward you as you experience these strong and scary emotions. I understand your fear that you'll never get rid of the doubt. But doubt is like darkness—you don't overcome it by pushing it

away, you make it go away by bringing in light. As you seek light and truth and to know what is really true and real, God will show you the light. I am so grateful that you came to us at Probe instead of some New Age "all religions are the same" website!

I desire to believe in God so much, but it's hard. I have so many questions. I wonder why God doesn't show himself to me so I know for sure that He is there. I don't know. Maybe He has but it's just not enough. Maybe I don't have enough faith.

What's important isn't the amount or strength of our faith, but the *object* of our faith. God is strong enough to handle your doubts and to show you, in ways so intimate you will know it's HIM, that He is real and He loves you very much.

Another thing that really doesn't help me is some of the stuff that i have read on the internet. Different books that I've read about have caused me to have even more doubt. Have you heard of The Bible Unearthed..., or The Jesus Puzzle...? I haven't read any of them, but read reviews. Anyways, the second one I think denies that Jesus was a historical person. That really bothers me.

With good reason. Some of the best Christian apologetics books started out with the author's intention to disprove Christianity, and the facts overwhelmed the skeptics into belief. The entire world was affected by the life of Jesus Christ, in one way or another, but He didn't exist? Now THAT takes a lot of faith!

Earlier today I was reading something on the web where this person was being critical of Lee Strobel (who wrote The Case for Christ). I really like that book (not done with it yet), but after what I read on the internet about it, I wonder if it really shows that Jesus was a historical person.

Did you know Lee Strobel started out as an atheist? I'm glad

you're reading it; it was a wise choice. So is his second book, *The Case for Faith*. I found this statement from him in an interview online: "I have found that the testimony of history points compellingly toward Jesus Christ having returned from the dead in the ultimate authentication of His claim to be God. To me faith in Jesus is not blind or irrational. I have so much independent evidence that the New Testament writings are reliable that I would be swimming upstream against the evidence if I were to follow the teachings of the Koran or the Book of Mormon. The more I subject the New Testament to analysis, the more I pepper it with questions, the more I walk away utterly convinced of its trustworthiness."

I don't know. Maybe I just let other people's conflicting views on Christianity get to me too much, but after reading these things, I start to wonder if maybe they are correct on what they are arguing.

Just about every truth, especially those of eternal importance, will be countered with something counterfeit, because we're in a very real battle for our minds and souls. It's unfortunate that the counter-arguments can *appear* so compelling, but the issue is ultimate truth. Right now, you're on the right track in seeking truth and desiring to sort through the clamoring voices that attack it.

Anyways, to me, my problem doesn't seem to be a heart issue because I really would like to believe in God. I desire to believe in Him and live for Him, but its hard. Is there something that I lack? Do I just not have enough faith? I don't know, maybe I don't.

It's been said that the Christian life isn't hard, it's IMPOSSIBLE. You can't live for God in your own strength—not for any length of time, anyway, without burning out and getting majorly discouraged. The secret is to allow Jesus to live His life through you by yielding to Him. That, by the

way, is one of the things that sets Christianity apart from every other religion: God inside us, offering to live His life through us, without any loss of our own individuality. But right now, the big issue is what to do with your head/heart conflict. Fortunately, there is a PERFECT book that I believe will make all the difference in the world to you.

It's called [Making Your Faith Your Own: A Guidebook for Believers With Questions](#) by Teresa Vining. I was privileged to read Teresa's manuscript and LOVED her book. One of its strengths is that she was in the exact place you are now, and she takes you through the questions AND the answers, and suggests you keep a journal as you work through the book so you can decide what you believe and commit to, and what you're not willing to. It is a terrific book on apologetics, and she is very respectful of the person with questions and doubts. I think you will love this book too.

Well I think I've made this long enough. If there's any advice you could give me I would appreciate it. Maybe you could pray for me.

I'd like to pray for you right now!

Father, I lift up _____ to You and I thank You for her intellect and her honesty in facing her doubts and questions. Thank You that You are not in the least bit troubled by them because You know You are real and true and able to take her through this time to a point where she will know beyond a shadow of a doubt that YOU ARE. I ask You to send her little intimate glimpses of You and open her eyes so she'll know it's You saying "Hi." I ask that You give her a peace when she's pursuing truth and give her an uncomfortable restlessness when she's moving toward the darkness and deception that would seek to draw her away from You. Lord, I thank You for Your hand on _____'s life and on her heart and on her mind, and by faith I thank You for taking her to the place where she will joyfully serve You with all three. Lord, make her feel loved

and protected and cherished by You.

In Jesus' name,
Amen.

Hope this helps, dear one!

Sue

“How Can I Know I’m Going to Heaven?”

Some people know they’re going to heaven, and I would like to be sure too. Can you help me?

Thank you for your e-mail requesting information about an assurance of your salvation. I will try to lay out some things which I hope will help. God wants us to have an assurance of our salvation, and until we do, we live life in uncertainty.

1. First of all, I would point out that the very fact you are concerned about this is an indication that you are in the Family of God. Non-Christians don’t spend any time thinking about this or being anxious about their spiritual condition. That you are concerned, in my judgment is a “sign of life.”

2. Secondly, we have the clear teaching of Jesus in John 3 in his dialogue with Nicodemus, that salvation comes about by a new, or spiritual birth. The analogy is very clear: Jesus compares physical birth with spiritual birth. And with both, there must be a beginning, a birth before there can be life and growth. In a number of passages we read of this new birth which brings about a transformation when we find ourselves IN CHRIST: “Therefore, if any man is IN Christ, he is a new

creature; old things pass away and behold, all things become new." (II Cor. 5:17).

Now Jesus did not say that we must be born again and again and again. We are born into God's family once by faith, claiming Christ as our Saviour and Substitute, and we begin to trust in Him, and Him alone, to make us presentable to God the Father when we die. And Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:8-9 that this is a result of God's grace to us, and it is totally apart from any good works that we could do to merit or attain heaven apart from Him and what He did on our behalf.

3. One of the things Paul warns the Galatians about is that they had originally understood salvation was by faith, but they started adding various works to make sure that they were saved. Paul asks, "You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you. . . Having begun in the Spirit (by unmerited grace through faith), are you now being perfected by the flesh (works)?" (Gal. 3:1-5)

This is exactly the question you are asking, _____. Do we begin in faith + no works, but then have to keep on working in order to stay saved?

4. There is a place for good works in the Christian life, but it is very important where we position these good works. If we put them before we exercise faith in Christ, then we are working our way to heaven just like every other religion teaches. Good works become the means of achieving salvation. And if we could get to heaven by our good works, then God made a terrible mistake! He let His only Son come and die for our sins. By choosing our good works as the means of our salvation we negate, nullify what Christ accomplished on the Cross.

5. Where do good works have significance? After our new, or spiritual birth. Good works are a sign of Christ's life within us. We do not perform them in order to remain in God's family. We do them out of grateful hearts because we find ourselves

“accepted in the Beloved.” (Ephesians 1:6).

If we take the Galatians approach, knowing that we were “saved by grace,” but then turn right around and do our good works to stay saved, then we are right back on the old treadmill. Furthermore, the driving force/motivation to do good works with this approach is FEAR. We keep trying because we are afraid we will lose our relationship with God. We could never say with the Apostle Paul that “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.” How could he say that? He wasn’t perfect! He could say it because “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.” (II Tim. 1:12)

If we take Paul’s approach, we are motivated, not out of Fear, but out of LOVE. We want to serve God and glorify Him in our lives. But there’s a problem.

6. Sin is the problem. Christians still sin after their conversion. You know, God could have dealt another way with sinning Christians. When a person first heard and understood the Gospel, and then became a believer, God could have zapped him/her dead right on the spot! That would have taken care of sin in a believer’s life!

But God chose not to do that. He chose rather to leave us here, imperfect though we are, to be His ambassadors. And He made provision for cleansing the believer by means of acknowledging our sin to Him in confession and claiming the forgiveness over it which Christ provided through the Cross.

Let me have you just focus on I John 2:1-3. There John says, “My little children, I am writing these things to you – (he’s just talked about confessing our sins [I John 1:9] with the promise that God is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness)– ” that you SIN NOT.” (This is the ideal) “But if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He

Himself is the propitiation (satisfaction) for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world."

God does not want us to sin. But if we do, here is the provision for God's forgiveness. We have an Advocate, a defense attorney who pleads our case and we are cleansed. Now I want you to just think about this for a moment. Does one sin, like being angry at your spouse, cause a loss of salvation? How about 10 times a week? Or 100 times a month? How much gossip? Or coveting what others possess? Do you see where I'm going with this? People who talk about being good enough or having (in their own estimation) done enough to retain their salvation in good standing really don't have a very accurate picture of how pervasive our problem is.

7. If one sin isn't enough for us to lose our standing in Christ, then how many and what kind of sins would be enough to push us over the edge and out of the Family of God? No one has answered that question to me satisfactorily. We would never know the answer to that question. Martin Luther addressed this problem five hundred years ago. He, as a monk, had lived with this uncertainty about his soul until he came to understand that the "just shall live by faith." The issue was not sins, it was a lack of righteousness. Being born into God's Family means God has declared us righteousness through our identity with and trust in Christ.

I am not saying that good works are not important. They are. And people who know they have been dealt with in grace and are forgiven have a strong motivation not to sin. I think it's kind of like the difference between a cat and a pig. A cat might fall into a mud puddle, but it immediately gets out and starts cleaning itself. That's its nature. But a pig can lie all day in the mud and it loves it because that's its nature. Another sign of "life" in a believer is that when we sin we feel bad. It hurts us. We tend to be more sensitive to it. And sometimes when we decide to stay in the mud, God has another provision for us. We find it in Hebrews 12: "Whom the Lord

loves, He chastens" (vs. 5-14). Our sin becomes a "family" matter when we have been born into the God's family. Paul tells us in I Cor. 11 that "if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged." If we fail to get ourselves back in line and out of the mud, choosing to ignore the "warning lights," our Father, though longsuffering, may have to take us to the "divine woodshed" and discipline us. But it is the discipline of a Father, not the punishment of a Judge. That is what Paul meant when he said to the Corinthians, "For that reason (disobedience) some of you are weak and sickly. . .and some of you sleep (have died under discipline.)"

8. And that brings us to another problem connected to all of this, and that is the fact that we disappoint God, our family, and the body of Christ, and we see them disappointing us. We rarely wonder how we could act in an un-Christian way, but we sure do wonder about others! And then we begin to wonder if we are really "in the Family," and we wonder the same about others.

Our problem here is that we, as the Bible says, "(man) looks on the outward appearance, while God looks upon the heart." Paul says in Romans 8:16,17 "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." This means that You can know about you, and I can know about me, but we can't ultimately know by someone's outward behaviour whether they are God's children or not. We have probably made misjudgments on both sides. There are some who appear godly, upstanding, etc., who have been playing a clever charade. There are others whom we might assume not to be Christians that may well be. We can wonder. We can speculate. And if we see little or no evidence of the fruits of the spirit, we can wonder. But we cannot, should not judge. Because we just don't know.

But here is what we DO know. "The one who believes in the Son of God has the witness in Himself. The one who has not believed God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed

in the witness that God has borne concerning His Son. He who has the Son has the life. He who does not have the Son does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know (not think, hope, feel) that you have (present tense, not future, present! We possess it now!) eternal life.” (I John 5:10-13)

_____, I hope some of this will help answer your question. Someone has defined “faith” like this: “Faith is when you stop saying please to God, and you start saying, Thank You.” If we have asked Christ to be our Savior, and we have opened the door to our heart and our life to Him and we are trusting only in Him for our salvation, then we need to be saying “thank You” to Him, and then living our lives in a way which demonstrates a genuine gratitude to the One who has forgiven us. and prepared a way of access into God’s presence.

May God Bless you,

Jimmy Williams

Founder, Probe Ministries