

Session 5 The Tragedy and Loss of Being Unfruitful (Jn. 15:2, 6)

Session 5 has kind of a weighty title: “The Tragedy and the Great Loss of Being an Unfruitful Believer.” This is a very unpopular subject, but as Paul the apostle said in Acts 20:27, “I did not draw back from declaring the whole counsel of God to you.” We want to be a people, and you want to be disciples, who do not draw back from sharing the whole counsel of God. Meaning, everyone likes the encouraging promises, but there is discipline, there are warnings, there are judgments and all kinds of different activities in the kingdom of God. Paul said, “I will not draw back from sharing the whole counsel of God.”

John 15:2, 6 is a really stern warning to believers. It is tragic because the warning of verses 2 and 6, and I have kind of skipped over it until now because I wanted to put them both together and look at them phrase by phrase. It is tragic that many believers minimize this warning. It will be a tremendous spiritual loss when they stand before the Lord on the last day. It is my heart that on my watch nobody that I am touching is going to be unaware of these subjects, by the grace of God. You will want to say the same thing as the Lord establishes you, whether you are ministering to five or ten or fifteen or twenty or on social media or whatever it is. You want to be committed to teaching the whole counsel of God.

I. FRUITFUL AND UNFRUITFUL BELIEVERS

- A. In John 15:2, 6, Jesus contrasted fruitful and unfruitful believers—the distinction is in bearing fruit by abiding in Him until the end. Those who abide in Him can bear fruit that remains unto true greatness. He identified 3 types of believers in 15:2—those who bear no fruit, some fruit, and much fruit (15:8).

²Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit...⁶If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they...throw them into the fire, and they are burned. (Jn. 15:2, 6)

Look at paragraph A: In John 15:2, 6, Jesus is contrasting fruitful and unfruitful believers, though—and this is a controversial subject because—a number of camps in the body of Christ want to define this as believers versus unbelievers. However, I am convinced that He is talking about fruitful believers and then believers who are no longer fruitful and the tragic situation for those believers. It is a different story if we are thinking of believers versus contrasting ourselves with unbelievers who do not get it anyway.

Jesus is talking to His disciples and the distinction that He is making between the two is in bearing fruit by continuing to abide in Him—and here is the key—until the end. Jesus said—and we will look up the passages in a little while—Jesus said, “Until the end, you must endure until the end of your life or until the Lord returns. You cannot go hard for ten or twenty years, and then the last ten years decide it is not worth it. Jesus is really serious about this. It is a subject that we do not hear much about, but the Lord emphasized it, and the apostles emphasized it over and over.

Now the good news is—and what we have shared in the last number of sessions—the glorious news is that we can bear fruit that remains and that is our true greatness before God. God can look at our lives and call our life choices great, and everyone has that within their reach by the grace of God.

In verse 2, Jesus identifies three types of believers: the believers that bear no fruit—and I believe that they may have borne fruit at one time but they are no longer bearing fruit—and believers that bear some, and believers that bear much. I know what camp you want to be in. You want to be in the camp that bears much fruit that remains. That is what we have looked at in Sessions 3 and 4.

Let's read verse 2 and verse 6, and I am going to highlight a couple of phrases as we do it. "Every branch in Me"—that is the key phrase right there—These are branches that have a vital connection to Him. They are born-again people. However, these branches do not bear fruit, and I would add my own words in here, "They are no longer bearing fruit," because I believe that everybody that says "Yes" to the Lord has some fruit initially, but they do not continue and go on bearing fruit. "He"—that being the Father in verse 1—"is the vinedresser. He takes those branches away from the vineyard." He takes them out; that is judgment. That is a bad thing. The Father removes them from the vineyard.

"And every branch that bears fruit He prunes,"—this is the Father—"so that they bear more fruit," and then on verse 8, it says, "much fruit" and "fruit that remains."

Now in verse 6, He is going to elaborate on verse 2, because if all you have is verse 2 you do not have the whole story. After verses 4 and 5, He talked about abiding and bearing fruit and all of the glorious things. He said, as it were, "Let's go back to what I said in verse 2," so in verse 6 He elaborates more. "If anyone does not abide in Me," and He is talking about branches that are connected to Him, "He is cast out as a branch." Again, this is judgment. "He is withered; they gather them," and we find out later that it is the angels who are gathering them. "They throw them into the fire, and they are burned."

*I mean, we read this and say, "Oh my goodness! No wonder we do not want to talk about this." But actually we **do** want to talk about this because of what it says. We do not want to be uninformed about how serious the Lord is about this subject.*

- B. Jesus warned of the tragic consequences and loss in being unfruitful (15:2, 6). This is an unpopular subject—but we must speak "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). The branch that is burned in 15:6 is the branch that was taken away in 15:2. 15:6 interprets and expounds on 15:2. Many minimize the terrifying reality that Jesus set forth in these two negative statements (15:2, 6).

Look at paragraph B: Jesus warned of tragic consequences—tragic consequences and loss—in being an unfruitful branch. The branch that is burned here in verse 6—at the very end it says "and they are burned"—they are the same branches that were taken away in verse 2, that the Father took away. The Father is the actor; He is the one initiating this action.

Many people, many believers, minimize the terrifying reality of this warning. Jesus said it straight forwardly, and Paul the apostle said it, and so did Peter and the other apostles. Verses 2 and 6 are the two very negative statements, truths, that Jesus made in the Upper Room Discourse. I mean, He told Peter that he would deny Him but that he would recover, but here He is telling the disciples, "You cannot bear fruit and be in a place where you are no longer bearing fruit without your being taken away out of the vineyard by the Father, and you can be gathered and thrown into the fire and burned." That is talking about people that are believers who lose their salvation. I understand the arguments of losing salvation or not having salvation. I understand them very well.

As a personal note, my first six or seven years in the Lord, I was very energetic about a number of subjects, and one of them was "once saved always saved." I mean, I argued with everybody, I read tons of books, and I know the arguments very, very well. Over time I said, "Wait a second, I am wrong on that." I was also very energetic on the Pre-Tribulation Rapture and then I thought, "Well, maybe I missed that, too!" Okay, full disclosure: I was really against speaking in tongues as well! Anyway, I was sincere though, but the good part is that I know the arguments really well on both sides because I read the scholars and I presented them, debated them at the college campus, and then changed my position over time.

The reason I say that is to save you the trouble of telling me those other verses because I really have understood them, and for about thirty years I have determined that I would not argue those three subjects with anybody. I will simply declare them, and when someone says “No!” I say, “Okay, let’s just love Jesus That is up to you. I am clear before the Lord!” I just want to say it: I will not debate those three things with anybody. You know, I have talked with pastors who have said, “How can you prove tongues are from God?” I say “There are guys that want to tell you that, but I don’t want to. Let’s love Jesus, and be friends together!” And it is the same thing about the Pre-Tribulation Rapture and the same thing about “once saved, always saved.”

While I am not the most informed, but certainly I am quite informed about those three subjects because I taught them strongly for a number of years on one side, debated a lot of folks, and then I shifted my position, which was a little difficult to do, but I did it, and I am glad I did it because I think the position that I am holding right now is more biblical. Again, I am only saying this so you do not have to come and give me the arguments. I will say, “Yup, I really, really do! I love you though, so let’s just love Jesus!” Now, some people are called to debate those subjects I am just not. I am just called to declare them and move on and stay focused on the Lord.

- C. **In Me** (15:2): Jesus spoke of believers as being “in Me,” and Paul spoke of them as “in Christ.” The phrase “in Me” is used 16 times in John’s gospel (6:56; 10:38; 14:10 [2x], 11, 20, 30; 15:2, 4 [2x], 5-7; 16:33; 17:21, 23). This phrase always refers to believers. This is supported by the analogy itself—branches that share the life of Jesus, “the vine” (15:1). It is not consistent to say that those “in Me” refer to believers throughout John’s gospel except in 15:2 where it refers to an unsaved person.

Look at paragraph C: Jesus said “Every branch in Me.” That is the key phrase. Well, that is one of the many key phrases. Jesus spoke of branches as being in Him, “in Me.” Paul spoke in a parallel way of people being in Christ. It is a parallel statement. The phrase, “in Me”—a branch in Me or somebody is in Me—is used sixteen times in the gospel of John. It always refers to believers.

However, the argument for some is “except for this one situation. This is clearly an unbeliever,” they would say. Their reason is because if this is a believer, then the believer is losing their salvation, and this is such a horrible thought to a whole systematic theological system that they decide, “Well, sixteen times the phrase “in Me” is a believer, but this one time it is not.”

I just say, “No, I think we need to stay consistent on how John presents this concept in the gospel of John.”

- D. **That does not bear fruit** (15:2): There are two main views to the branches that bear no fruit. Either Christians who fell away from their faith and lost their salvation or unbelievers who only appeared outwardly to be Christians—being involved in church and ministry activities, etc. This speaks of those who were not “currently” bearing fruit. He did not say that they “never” bore fruit.

Look at paragraph D: “They bear no fruit.” This believer does not bear fruit. Again, I am believing that it does not say that they have never borne fruit, but I believe that it is a present tense situation. I think that they bore fruit for a season. However, now they are in that period of time when they are not. I have seen a lot of believers go ten and twenty years where they were fiery for the Lord, and then for ten and twenty years after they are not! And I am thinking, “This is serious!” I mean, I have seen really fiery people for the Lord for ten or fifteen years and then something offends them, something disappoints them, and then they just begin to “wither” is the phrase Jesus uses, just little by little, and a few years later they hardly have a witness for the Lord. I think, “This is incredible! They were full-on intercessors for revival and the power of God, and now they are not sure the Bible is the word of God!” And I say, “Really?”

So I think this idea that Jesus says that they are not bearing fruit, meaning in that current state of a five, ten or fifteen-year pattern—I would not know the amount of time—However, there are two main views to this, obviously I have already said it, that the Christian who falls away from the faith and they actually lose their salvation as horrifying of a statement that is, but if it is true, we really want to know it is true. One of the prayers that I have said over the years is, “Lord, shock me now. Do not shock me then! If there is something going on, tell me now! Do not tell me then, when I cannot change it.”

The other view is that this non-fruit bearing branch is an unbeliever who outwardly appeared to be a believer. Meaning, he was involved with Christian activities. There are a lot of folks like that. They are all involved in church activities, the social events, and ministry, but they are not even born again. There are a lot of people who are pastors and preach in pulpits every Sunday morning, but they are not even born again. So I do believe in that category, but I don’t think that is what He is talking about right here. I think He is talking about something really specific here.

- E. ***If anyone does not abide in Me*** (15:6): Some believers start their relationship with Jesus with genuine zeal but later drift into a fleshy lifestyle of “non-abiding” in their walk with Jesus.

Look at paragraph E: “If anyone does not abide.” If these branches do not abide, and the idea is if they do not continue “to abide in Me.” That does not mean they cannot have a bad month or even a bad season. I don’t want to encourage people to have bad months and bad seasons, but I do not want you to give up the hope that the Lord is with you because it has really been a horrible season. I think this is an entrenched season of not bearing fruit that is going on and on and on and is a long-term situation.

Some believers start their relationship with Jesus with genuine zeal. And they later drift into this lifestyle of not abiding in the Lord. Like, I’ve mentioned having been a pastor for forty-five years. Many people I have seen who have been ten years in the Lord—strong, prayer meetings, witnessing, praying for the sick, prophesying—and then the next ten or twenty years they do not even know if they believe the Bible anymore. I have seen that so many times. I mean, it was shocking the first ten or twenty times I saw it and thought, “This cannot be!” but about the one thousandth time I saw it—and I hope that is an exaggerated number, but I have seen it many, many times—I thought “This is real! This is real! Those guys were really on fire twenty years ago, really on fire. I remember, I was with them in fellowship!”

- F. Some teach that all believers will *always* persevere to the end; if they fall away they were not saved.

1. Jesus taught that some people receive God’s word with joy, endure and believe for a while (Lk. 8:13), and later the word is choked in them, and they become unfruitful (Mt. 13:22).

³...“Behold, a sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside...

⁵Some fell on stony places...they immediately sprang up...⁶because they had no root they withered away...²⁰[they] immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while...²²He who received seed among the thorns...hears the word, and the cares of this world...choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.” (Mt. 13:3-22)

¹³The ones on the rock are those who...receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.” (Lk. 8:13)

Look at paragraph F: Some conclude—and this is what I always taught too and did so for six or seven years—that if you are a true believer you will persevere until the end. And if you do not persevere to the end, that is proof you were never really a true believer. You were always an unbeliever though you were deeply involved in

the things of God and you loved Jesus or you thought you did, and you were tricked the whole time! That is the position of the folks who believe “once saved always saved.” These people have to be not-genuine believers because if they were, they would persevere until the end, is the idea.

Jesus taught something different than that. In Matthew 13, He talked about people—and you can read it a little bit on your own—He talked about people who received the word of God with joy. They actually received it. They endured for a season. They believed for a while. Those are the terms that Jesus uses in Matthew 13 and in Luke 8, “They endured, they believed, and they received the word of God with joy, and then later they were unfruitful.” I think that is the group He is talking about here in John 15.

2. Some unbelievers do engage with Christian communities and later renounce the Lord.

¹⁹...they were not of us; if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. (1 Jn. 2:19)

I John 2:19 is the verse I always use, and I used it for years, and I believe it. I mean it is true. When someone said, “Well, that guy fell away!” I would say “No, he never was saved,” I always use 1 John 2:19. Everybody does in that camp of theology, “but they were not really of us for if they had really been of us they would have continued but since they went out and left the faith, they have openly manifested that they are really not of us from the beginning.” I think there are really people like that. I think that there really are unbelievers entrenched in Christian communities, and some years later they end up renouncing the Lord, but they never were believers. I do believe that category still exists. I am guessing as you never really know what is in a person’s heart, but I have seen people and thought, “Okay, but that is not synonymous with the genuine believer who years later drifted away from the Lord.”

Again, I used this verse for years to argue with the ones who held to once saved always saved because I made everybody who fell away as one who never was really ever genuinely in the faith at one time, but again, I want to say that category really does exist, and I still maintain that.

- G. ***He takes away*** (15:2): Jesus warned of the tragedy of believers who became unfruitful. The Father takes away or removes branches in judgment in order to burn them (15:6). I believe that “He takes away” means that the believer loses his salvation; some see it as a reference to losing one’s reward or possibly their life. John the Baptist spoke of God cutting down unfruitful trees (Mt. 3:10).

¹⁰“...every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (Mt. 3:10)

“He takes it away.” Now the “He” in verse 2 is the Father, the Vinedresser. It is the Father from verse 1. Jesus is still talking about the Father. Jesus is warning of the tragedy of a believer who became unfruitful. Again, in the parable we just looked at in Matthew 13 and Luke 8, “They received the word with joy. They endured for a season. They believed for a while and then the word of God was choked in their life and then they became unfruitful later.” Later you can read those passages a little more carefully. I just wanted to put them on the notes so you can look at them in your own time.

Okay, I believe when it says, “He takes away,” I believe He is talking about in judgment. He is removing them out of the vineyard. So when they stand before Him, they are not in the kingdom is what He is really talking about. John the Baptist when he was talking to Israel spoke of the Lord cutting down unfruitful trees. He said “Every tree that does not bear good fruit.” This is talking about the Father will cut that tree down and throw it into the fire.

Again, no one likes that, so you are not going to get any big popularity ratings on social media if you publish this sermon. If you want to do it the chicken way, you can just say, “Mike Bickle says,” and then you can still get it in there. Actually I always tell people, “Don’t ever say, “Mike Bickle says,” if you do not see it with your own eyes in your Bible.” However, on this one you can slip it out there until you get your courage bolstered up. I am just really saying that kind of tongue in cheek actually.

1. The Greek phrase, “takes away,” is *airō*—it can mean “to cut off” (negative) or “to lift up” (positive)—to lift from the ground so the branch might gain exposure to the sun to be fruitful.
2. A.W. Pink promoted that view because he did not believe that a true believer could fall away from the faith. But there is no evidence that sagging branches of grapevines were regularly lifted up from the ground. Thus, Jesus clarified in 15:6 that the branches in 15:2 were burned.

H. Jesus repeatedly emphasized the need to “endure until the end” in our faithfulness to Him.

¹³***But he who endures to the end shall be saved. (Mt. 24:13)***

²²***You will be hated by all...but he who endures to the end will be saved. (Mt. 10:22)***

²⁶***He who overcomes and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give... (Rev. 2:26)***

¹⁸***When the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, he shall die...***

¹⁹***But when the wicked turns from his wickedness...he shall live... (Ezek. 33:18-19)***

Look at paragraph H: Jesus repeatedly emphasized the need to endure—meaning to stay faithful until the end—in our faithfulness to Him. I have a bunch of verses right here, so I do not have to read them all, and there are more besides these. They overcome if they stay faithful to the end.

Walking with the Lord hard for ten or fifteen years and then getting bitter, disappointed, just getting tired of the routine of life and saying, “Well, you know, I do not want to mess with this anymore!”—that is a serious, serious thing to do, and again I have seen hundreds. I said thousands, but probably not a thousand, but hundreds of people have done that over my forty-five years of pastoring. It is devastating to watch, but it is a reality.

Maybe there are people in this room who will be in that state of mind someday down the road, and that is why I want to be a faithful witness to you now. I want you to think, “This makes me unsettled!” Good! I want you unsettled!

This is unsettling for me. It is unsettling for me because I do not want to be one of these guys, and I do not want to talk about it! However, if Jesus says it, then I want to say it. I want to say what He says. I want to stand for what He stands for because He is the definition of love, and if He says it, it is an embodiment and expression of love. I have so much confidence in His leadership, and if He says it, then it is good and it is right. So I am going with Him, even if I cannot connect all of the dots on how “good that good” is. I just say “If it is You, it is good. If it is You, then it is right. If I have trouble with it, I am the guy who messed up, not You, Jesus.” Let’s just go with that.

Today, the reason that is so important is because—this might be new to some of you who are younger—over the last ten years, there is this explosion of popular opinion in the Church against the Word of God. I remember forty or fifty years ago when I started preaching the word of God, literally in 1972, you rarely heard that. In the last ten years through social media, there are so many believers who are emboldened by misinformed, deceived other believers. They are emboldened with false confidence and with humanistic arguments that make sense to them but are not true to the Word. And they think that if they have a hundred people agreeing with them, then they are good.

And I am saying to them, “Do you understand? Go look at the sky. You only see about one percent of the stars that exist. That is who you are going to stand before! He is really smart!” And I do not care what our human logic says, the Word of God is what we believe and what is true, and we can anchor our confidence in it even when it is not popular in our twenty-first century culture, but we are anchored in the truth of the word of God. I know that the vast majority of you believe that, but be strengthened in that and do not waiver in that because it is going to get more hostile. There will be more hostility against people who stand for the truth and negative facets of the truth related to God’s judgments. It is the subject most hated in the human race: the judgment of God.

There is no subject in human history hated more than God’s judgments. However, God’s judgments are an expression of His kindness and His love. And, they really make sense, if you understand what He understands. However, in this culture it is a stigma. The Church does not like it; the unbelievers do not like it. It is embarrassing to a lot of believers, but just settle it. We are going to go with what Jesus says, and we are going all the way, and we are going with confidence.

So I want to strengthen those of you who are kind of thinking, “Well, I think you are probably right.” No, I am right on this, so just anchor it in and go with it. And, do not listen to the chatter in the culture of the humanistic thinking of people who have a god in their own image and they think it’s okay. We are made in His image; we cannot make God in our image and make it work! It does not work that way. It is only by revelation of the Word of God that we have it.

- I. **He is cast out as a branch** (15:6): The unfruitful believer is described as cut off from the vine and “cast out” of the vineyard (kingdom of God). Christianity is a relationship based on voluntary love, so a believer can exercise their free will to reject Him and the relationship. The responsibility and fault lies in the withering branch that eventually dies, and not in the Vine that gave it life.

“If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered...they are burned.”
(Jn. 15:6)

Let’s look at paragraph I: “He is cast out as a branch.” So in verse 2, he is taken away; in verse 6, it is the same thing but in stronger language. “He is cast out;” that is in verse 6. Let’s read verse 6 again because I do not think it is a verse that people are overly familiar with so that is why I have put it in the notes a couple of times here. “If anyone does not abide in Me,” He is talking about branches that are in Him from verse 2—“if those branches do not continue to abide in Me” is what He is saying—“that branch is cast out as a branch and that branch is withered and that branch will be burned by the mandate of the Lord.” It is the Father overseeing the whole process, but angels are involved, and obviously Jesus is involved, etc.

So this is the unfruitful believer, and he is described as “cut off” from the vine. He is cast out of the vineyard, and that analogy means the kingdom of God. Christianity is a relationship that is based on voluntary love. God does not give us a pill so we say “I love You. I love You.” It is not robotic, He is not making us love Him. He is setting the situation, revealing His heart, and saying, as it were, “I will not make you love Me. I will show you My power and My wisdom and, if you see it, you will love Me because it will awaken love in your heart.” The relationship is not robotic love. It is not automated as if He puts something in us to say, “I love You. I love You. I love You.”

We have a free will because love is not love if it is not given voluntarily. So, we can reject Him. The responsibility and the failure is on the withering branch, not on the life that is in the vine. The life in the vine, that is Jesus obviously in this analogy. His life is sufficient but the branch, the believer, can say “I do not want to anymore.”

1. No one can snatch a believer out of God's hand, but a believer can walk away from Him.

²⁹“...and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand.” (Jn. 10:29)

One of the verses I love so much, which I quoted so often back then, and I still quote it because I love it—John 10:29—Jesus said, “...and no one is able to snatch you out of My hand.” There is no devil in hell, there is no unbeliever, nobody can take you out of His hand, but you can look at Him and say, “I do not want You anymore.” Nobody can do it to you, but you can do it yourself. So you do have a free will, and He will not violate your free will. The Great Wedding at the end of the age is not a shotgun wedding. You have a choice to be there. You have a choice to be there.

2. Paul warned believers not to be haughty lest they also become like a branch that is cut off.

¹⁸...do not boast against the branches [Israel]...²⁰Because of unbelief they were broken off
...Do not be haughty, but fear. ²¹For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not
spare you either...²²consider the goodness and severity of God... toward you, goodness,
if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off... (Rom. 11:18-22)

In paragraph 2, Paul uses some of the same language as John 15 about the vine, its withering, and being cut off when he is talking in Romans 11. I will just let you read that on your own, but I wanted you to know that Paul actually uses this language himself in Romans 11 when he talks about branches, which is the nation of Israel, being broken off because of their unbelief. Then he tells the Gentile believers in Rome, “If you are haughty, you can be broken off too!” I mean it is pretty strong language, and it really parallels John 15:6, the passage we are looking at here. Paul the apostle obviously supports what Jesus taught, obviously!

- J. **He is withered** (15:6): There is a “slow” spiritual process that Jesus referred to as “withering.” It begins when one's heart becomes like a dried-up branch without a sense of spiritual vitality. The signs of this process includes a lack of hunger (Mt. 5:6) to engage with Jesus in prayer and the Word, or to fellowship with godly believers and serve others in ministry. This withering process is often the result of our life choices and the use of our time—by not prioritizing time to cultivate an abiding relationship with Jesus. This can happen to those teaching the Bible or singing on a worship team. It is common for one who is critically ill in the ICU to have no physical hunger. Spiritually sick believers have little hunger for God. It is not normal for a believer to have no hunger for God.

Look at paragraph J: “This branch,” in verse 6 he says, “he is withered” and that is kind of an ominous term, “a branch that is withered.” Again, as a pastor for many years I have watched branches wither, true branches that are in Him, verse 2, who bore fruit for a season. That Matthew 13, “They received the word with joy. They endured for a while.” Luke 18, “They believed for a while, and they withered.” And they no longer bore fruit.

There is a spiritual process. Jesus used the term, “they withered,” and again that is an ominous concept, but it is a real one. It begins when one's heart becomes like a dried up, withered branch, spiritually speaking. They have lost their sense of spiritual vitality. They say, “Well, you know, those first few months, those first few years,” and for some people it is the first few decades. Everyone is different. They had a sense of freshness and vitality, but it is gone. They do not hunger for the Word like they used to. They might say, “I never did hunger that much, but I did a little bit,” and they hungered a little bit to be in the Lord's presence and to talk to Him. They hungered a little bit for fellowship with godly believers, but that hunger kind of withered and passed away. And that withering process takes time to happen. For one person it happens quickly over months, and for other people it happens over years. I have watched believers spiritually wither over years, and the signs are clear. It

is that they do not have spiritual hunger like they used to, and though they would admit that their hunger was not that great when they had it, still it did exist.

One of the signs of sickness in the ICU unit in a hospital—the emergency ward, so to speak—is no hunger. If there is no hunger, that is a primary sign that there is a serious sickness there. When there is no hunger at all, no desire for food.

When we do not hunger for the things of God, and we do not hunger to be in fellowship with godly believers, when we do not hunger to be close to the Lord, we should not say, “Well, you know, I am the worst thing in the world!” but we are alerted! We say, “Wow! This withering is really taking place!”

Other people say, “I have never hungered,” and I want to say this kindly to them: “Maybe you are not born again yet!” And they respond with, “Well, I have been to Bible school for two years!” Well, there have been guys in ministry for fifty years who are not born again yet! If you have never hungered for these things, do not cave in with despair and say, “I’m lost!” Say, “Maybe I am really not born again! Maybe my mom raised me up in homeschooling and told me I was, so I just kind of thought I was! I prayed that one prayer in children’s church, and she patted me on the back and said to never doubt it again.”

Maybe you are not born again! Because if you are born again, there is at least a little bit of hunger. So if there is none, and it never was there, say, “Lord! I am desperate! I want to know You!”

Then the Lord will say, “There you go! Now we are talking for the first time in years! Now we are having the conversation we need to have!”

For others it is different. They have a little bit of hunger, but the hunger has withered. It can be restored! It absolutely can be restored, but it is not something that will be done for you. You have to be intentional. The Spirit would say, as it were, “I will help you but you have to engage with Me. I will not force you. Again, this is no shotgun wedding, and I am not going to force feed you. I am not going to make you talk to Me if you do not want to.”

And so, I like telling people, even though it shocks them a little bit when they say, “I don’t ever have anything! I feel so horrible,” I say “You are probably not born again.”

And they say, “What do you mean? I don’t even know what you are talking about! I have been on the worship team for eight years in the youth group!”

I say, “That does not mean you are born again!” That does not mean that you have a vital relationship with the Lord.

And, actually, that delivers them. They say, “I have never, ever thought about that, to be honest! I was always taught everything was okay because I grew up in a Christian home, in the youth group. And yes, we did some crazy things in our youth group that we do not want to talk about, but I just assumed I was born again because everyone said I was.”

And so this could be a phenomenal night for you, because the light might go on for a few of you, and you might say, “Well, this is the answer! Maybe this thing could get exciting and fascinating! I thought I had it.” Maybe you do not! Or you were initially born again, but you never fed yourself spiritually because of the choices you have made, the way you have used your time, and you started withering from day one!

It is not normal to have no hunger for God; as a believer that is not normal. We could find a hundred believers around us who say, “Oh! I understand, bro! Me too, me too!” and we are all humble about it.

I think, “That is still a sign of sickness! You are in a spiritual ICU unit. You should be alarmed if you do not have hunger!” Now, you do not have to be the most dedicated believer in your city or in your generation, but if there is not hunger, be alarmed by that. There is a withering that is happening or the life has not actually ever begun, one way or the other.

Now this withering process—I told you that this was not going to be a really popular message, but I believe that it is part of the full counsel of God, I love Jesus, so I love His leadership, and so I am in for whatever He is in for—this withering process is often a result of our life choices. There are many life choices a person in the Christian world—a true believer, or a not-yet-born-again believer but in the Christian community—are making life choices that are quenching the Spirit constantly in their life. And they never, ever awaken hunger in their life. The way they use their time, they do not prioritize time to abide in the Lord. You cannot develop a deep relationship with the Lord just on the run, just blowing Him kisses every few days like, “I love You, Jesus! Hey, I’ll get right back to Ya! Hey, I know, I know, I know. I will be back later!” You cannot do that for year after year after year and have a vibrant heart. Many believers are so on the run that though they are genuine, they are withering, and they do not have language for it.

However, Jesus is giving it to us right here in John 15:6: “You are withering! Pay attention! Alert! Red Alert! Make changes now! Make changes now!” That is the point. That is the message!

II. THEY THROW THEM INTO THE FIRE AND THEY ARE BURNED (JN. 15:6)

- A. Jesus warned that unfruitful branches will be burned by the fire of God’s judgment (15:6). Commentators interpret this passage in four different ways: First, the “burned” branches are Christians who lose their salvation. Second, these branches refer to those who professed to be a Christian but were never saved. Third, to believers who suffer loss of reward in the fire of the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:15). Fourth, to compromising believers in fiery trials.

6If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. (Jn 15:6)

Let’s look at verse 6 again! Again, I am putting it in here two or three times, and a couple of times I put it in abbreviated form just to make the points I wanted to emphasize. Now I am putting in the whole of verse 6. Verse 6 is really important, I mean it really is. I don’t look at this and think, “Augh!” I look at this and say, “Thank You! Thank You for letting me know. Thank You that this is how it works!” Jesus warned that unfruitful branches, or that branches which become unfruitful which is another way to say it, “will be burned by the fire of God’s judgment.” He says, “If anyone does not abide in Me,” and He is talking in verse 6 about the branch, of “every branch that is in Me” that is in verse 2. That is the branch He is talking about. Jesus said “He is cast out! He is rejected!”

1. On the last day, Jesus will command those not in relationship with Him to depart (Lk 13:27).
²⁷“He will say, ‘...I do not know you...depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.’ ²⁸There will be weeping...when you see...the prophets in the kingdom...and yourselves thrust out.” (Lk 13:27-28)

It says in Luke 13 that “some people will come into His presence on the last day, and He will say, ‘Depart from Me!’ and they will say, ‘No! I love You! I remember You!’ And He will say, ‘No! Depart from Me. We do not have a relationship!’ And they will gnash their teeth as they are being pulled away from His presence.”

So they are brought into His presence saying, “Wow! This is amazing!” and then He says, “No, no! We do not have a relationship!” It says in Luke 13 that He commands them to depart and that they were weeping and gnashing their teeth when taken out of His presence.

2. Jesus taught parables that highlighted people who were formerly God's servants yet ended up losing what was entrusted to them (Lk. 12:41-48; Mt. 25:14-30) emphasizing that what they had will be “taken from them” and they will be “cast out” into darkness (Mt. 25:29-30).

⁴³“Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes...⁴⁵But if that servant ...begins to beat the male and female servants, and to...be drunk, ⁴⁶the master of that servant will come...at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. ⁴⁷And that servant who knew his master’s will and did not...do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. ⁴⁸But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.” (Lk. 12:43-48)

¹⁴“For the kingdom of heaven is like a man...who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. ¹⁵And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one...¹⁹After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them... ²⁴Then he who had received the one talent came and said, ‘Lord, I knew you to be a hard man...²⁵I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground...²⁶But his lord answered and said to him, ‘You wicked and lazy servant...²⁸So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. ²⁹For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. ³⁰And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness.’ There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Mt. 25:14-30)

3. I highly recommend John Burke’s book, *Imagine Heaven* (see videos on YouTube)

I have mentioned this over the years, and you have to be a little careful with what I am going to say next, but I have always been interested in people who have had death experiences of all kinds. I have studied this for forty or fifty years, and when I get a testimony or a book of people who had death experiences, I read it. They were in the hospital and their spirit left their body, they stood before the Lord and they came back! And there are so many stories like that, and the book that I want to talk about that I got a hold of only recently—Patricia, you are the one who sent it to me—it is *Imagine Heaven*. How many of you know *Imagine Heaven*? It is incredible. She sent it to me about a year or so ago. And I have probably heard it five or six times already, I mean the whole thing!

It is written by a man who was an engineer. He heard of people that had had near death experiences where they died, but they were not totally dead yet. They looked like they were dead, and the doctors were not sure because there is that moment or those few moments where you are not dead, but they think you are or they say you are clinically dead, and all kinds of dynamic things happen.

Anyway, this guy John Burke collected stories. I listen to it audibly. I have actually been hearing it at night when I just listen to it in my ear. And I love it, but I never look at the hard copy to see what his name is. I have listened to it over and over again. So, he was an engineer. He heard of this, and after thirty-five years of being an engineer, then he decided to go and investigate this himself. He investigated one thousand different reports

from all over the world, every different kind of situation and was so captured by the authenticity of the things that happened all over the world that were similar.

*Anyway, you can read it yourself, and I think it will be an incredible blessing to you. **Imagine Heaven** is the name of it. Again, I like the audio book, though I typically only like reading books, but this is the one book I listen to. However, my point is that there are many experiences. and I have read stories like these for many years besides these of people who thought they were believers and then descended into a dark place, and they were horrified when they were standing in the presence of Satan, darkness, and demons, and they could not get out!*

When they cried out to Jesus, they got a chance! I do not want to go into that theology of “Well, they are dead but not quite dead!” That is not my point. My point is I really believe that when they are cast out, it is incredibly serious. It is incredibly serious! I have had two or three friends whom I have known for many years who had death encounters and descended down to hell and to darkness, and they said it is the most horrifying reality that you cannot fathom it. They came back out of that experience and have been radical believers. I know two or three of them. They have said, “I will never forget that!”

Do not let anybody tell you that this is not real is the point I am trying to say. What Jesus says here is real. You do not need that book to know it is real, but that book will bolster your heart and kind of stretch your holy imagination a bit.

Jesus talked about, “That one is cast out as a branch” and there are four different interpretations of this passage. There are four views of scholars, and people from different places in history, and I just love to see what God has shown other men and women through history about different passages. I want to learn from them, I want to learn from the anointing of the Lord on them, you know from a thousand years ago from all different branches of the kingdom of God. I can learn from all kinds of groups. I don’t believe everything I hear from them, but I do learn a lot from them. So there are four different interpretations of this passage. I believe the ones that are cast out as branches are Christians who have lost their salvation. You can read the other interpretations of that.

- B. Note that Jesus shifted from the singular “if anyone...he is cast out” to the plural, “they are burned.” The singular is used to emphasize the responsibility of each individual so they would sincerely ask, “Lord, am I becoming a dry branch?” The plural highlights that “many” will face this judgment.
- C. **They gather them:** Earlier, Jesus said that angels will gather the “dead branches” and cast them into the fire (Mt. 13:41-42). At the end of the age, His angels will gather any who practice lawlessness to cast them into hell. It is indescribably tragic for a former branch (believer; 15:2) to end up in hell!

⁴¹The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, ⁴²and will cast them into the furnace of fire...

*⁴⁹So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, ⁵⁰and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”
(Mt. 13:41-50)*

Paragraph C: Jesus is still talking in verse 6. He said, “They are cast out as a branch. They have withered and are gathered. It says, “they gather them;” we find out the “they” are angels. The angels gather these cast-out branches because, earlier in Matthew 13, Jesus had already identified the angels are the ones that gather and cast out the dead branches and they throw them into hell actually and into burning fire.

We are in John 15; let's go back to Matthew 13. This is some time, some months back. Jesus taught it, and they had already heard this teaching, so He knew they already knew this. "The Son of Man will send out His angels and they will gather out of His kingdom all of the things that offend. They will gather those who practice lawlessness" whether they have a Christian history or not. "They practice lawlessness" meaning not that if you have any area of your life that is not totally perfect so you are in trouble.

No, this is a careless person who says, "I do not care! I am going to do what I want to do when I want to do it! I do not care what Jesus says about this type of lawlessness." It is not a sincere believer struggling with an area trying to get free. That is not what we are talking about because you could have incredible confidence of His heart towards you when we are warring against issues that are stealing our heart and weighing us down, but we are not agreeing with them. We are fighting them. The Lord says "I am with you on that! I am with you!"

So those who practice lawlessness are those who do not care about His leadership, whether they have a Christian heritage/history, or not. That is not the issue. The issue is that they have settled into a life of lawlessness and disobedience to the Lord. Verse 42, "The angels will cast them into a furnace of fire!" Verse 49, "And so it will be at the end of the age, the angels will come forth, and they will separate the people who have chosen disobedience to the Lord, which is wicked!" Again, whether they have a history or Christian heritage or not is not the issue. They have chosen a life of disobedience. "The angels," verse 50, "will cast them into a furnace of fire and there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

Again, these near-death encounters that I have studied over the last forty or fifty years, or not studied but read with real intrigue. I do not believe all of them, but some of them I will say, "Wow! This is really remarkable!" The people who have seen hell and then have come back to tell and then became radically committed to Jesus when they were not beforehand is a pretty convincing story when you hear their testimonies.

It is indescribably tragic for a former branch, somebody that was a branch in Jesus, to now be in hell. I cannot think of anything more horrible, I mean, being in hell is incredibly horrible, but to know the Lord and end up that way later is indescribable. I do not have words for all of this, so there you have it.

D. Those who reject Jesus and His leadership will endure the fires of hell for all eternity (Mt. 25:46).

⁴⁶***"These will go away into everlasting punishment..." (Mt. 25:46)***

⁴³***"If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, than go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched..." (Mk. 9:43)***

⁹...***"If anyone worships the beast [the Antichrist]...¹⁰He shall be tormented with fire...***

¹¹***The smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night..." (Rev. 14:9-11)***

¹⁰***...the lake of fire...and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever... (Rev. 20:10)***

Look at paragraph D: I want to be clear that the Bible teaches very clearly that hell is eternal, though this truth has not been popular for the last ten years in the body of Christ, but do not go by popularity, go by the word of God. Hell is eternal. I have a whole bunch of verses there so you can read them yourselves. I don't want to take time now to read them all. They are pretty straight forward. The basic logic is how could a God of love make an eternal hell? I'm not going to break that down right now, but I have some real clear reasons why that does not contradict God being a God of love. I don't want to go into that right now as that is not my point tonight. However, the logic of "If I was God, I would not do it, so therefore God must not do it." No, get rid of that! That is not the paradigm. You are not the paradigm. Your friends are not the standard.

You didn't make the stars! Go make a thousand stars, and then we will talk and compare it to the One who made billions and trillions of stars. We can at least have the conversation. Just make a couple thousand of them and I will talk to you. Obviously, that is ridiculous, but my point is the arrogance that humans have to think that they are smarter than God when all they have to do is go out and look up at the artistry and majesty of heaven! It is the artwork of heaven!" You will be saying, "You know what, maybe You know more than I know." Let's just start with that! Let's start there! Again, we are not going to create a god in our own image and hope he's true, because a god in our image would be a disaster at the end of the day. He would be like us! Oh my goodness!

- E. Practical ways to avoid falling away or deception include regular, prayerful Bible reading; setting our hearts to obey the Lord; staying in close relationship with others; regular involvement with a body of believers (Heb. 10:25) that has leaders who uphold biblical doctrines, values, and practices; and that we maintain a humble teachable spirit that receives instruction and correction from others.

What are practical ways to avoid falling away? Practical ways to avoid deception at the end of the age because there is going to be so much of it. By the way, I believe that there is going to be a spirit of revelation, a spirit of power far greater than the deception that is going to be released by the enemy. Jesus is a far greater leader than Satan is a deceiver. The power of truth, the power of the first commandment, and the beauty of the Bridegroom is far more compelling than the dark side, but we have to lean into it, and we have to interact with the Lord, even at the beginning stages. Like, "Lord, I don't get this very well. I don't really understand most of this, and I don't hunger that much, but I am concerned about it because I believe I need to touch You more!"

And the Lord would say, "I will take that, I will work with that!"

That is how I started. I said, "Lord, I don't get all of this stuff! It is all confusing!" I told the Lord for my first five or ten years, "If I were You, I would just make the Bible clear and really simple! 1 Corinthians 1- Seven steps of prayer; 1 Corinthians 2 – Seven steps of relationships; 1 Corinthians 3 – Seven steps of leadership; 1 Corinthians 4 – Seven steps of ministry. Just make it easy and we will all read it!" He did not listen to me. He smiled, but He did not do anything that I asked Him.

The way to keep from falling away or from falling into deception is actually simple. It is challenging to do, but it is not confusing. It is not confusing at all, and it is so simple anyone can do it. Open your Bible without understanding anything and just start talking to the Lord. When you read your Bible, pray-read the Bible. Read it and say, "Lord, thank You for loving me. Show me more. I do not even know what I mean but okay!" and the Lord would say, "Keep going, come on keep talking!" Set your heart to obey, "Lord, I am stuck in these three areas: I have some bitterness, I have some lust issues I am dealing with, and I have a little beginning of an addiction over here on something, whatever but, no longer; I am going for You!"

And the Lord would say, "Okay, I can work with that too. Set your heart to obey Me."

Stay in close relationship with other godly believers, meaning, the greatest thing that happened to me in my early spiritual life though I didn't do on purpose, but I look back and think, "God, You saved me!" I ended up in a youth group of people who were fiery for the Lord. They were not the most popular people in my school or in my area, but they wanted to go hard for God. We got together, and I thought years later when I look back, "Lord, without those conversations I would have never stayed steady!" Socializing with people you grew up with in your church youth group is not the same thing as fellowshiping with godly believers.

I know a lot of folks who say, "Hey! We grew up in the church group together, and we socialized!"

No, I am talking about godly conversations, I do not mean that everything is godly, every word, but you are challenging each other, you are moving forward in God. That is what I mean by fellowship, not just somebody who grew up in the church, but you hardly hear or see any evidence of it in their life. That does not count.

Stay in close relationship with others. Be regularly involved in a local body of believers, and pick a body of believers with leaders who uphold biblical values, doctrine, and practices. People who will stand for the Word, because many of you are here for a season, and then you will go back home. “Well, I go to the church that says ‘church’ on the building but they do not preach the gospel!” That is not the same thing. They have to be going hard after God. They get to be weak and broken people, but their heart is going for God. Find a church like that, and then whatever you do in all of this, maintain a teachable spirit so you are humble, able to receive correction from other people. If you do those simple things, one year will turn to five, five will turn to ten, ten will turn to twenty and you will have a heart with a vibrant spirit. It is not mysterious how to do this. It is actually so within reach to everyone.

III. THE END-TIME APOSTASY IS THE GREATEST TRAGEDY IN HISTORY

- A. The most tragic reality in human history is the end-time falling away from the faith (2 Thes. 2:3; 1 Tim. 4:1-2; 2 Tim. 3:1-7; 4:3-5; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; cf. also see Rom. 11:22; 1 Tim. 5:15; Heb. 3:12; 6:4-6; 10:26-31, 39; Jas. 5:19-20; 2 Pet. 2:20-22; 3:17).

Now I am going to leave more of this just to read on your own because it is pretty self-explanatory but I want you startled by this statement.

Look at paragraph A: The most tragic reality in human history—I am going to say this again. I have thought this through for years, meaning this is not a kind of impetuous, spontaneous statement. I have thought about this for years. The most tragic reality in the six thousand-ish years since Adam in the Garden of Eden—I do not know how long for sure—is the end-time falling away of the faith of believers. Hundreds of millions, I believe. I hope it is not that number, but I think it really will be that number. I think that there will be hundreds of millions more who do not and a billion new ones that will come in. However, I believe a large number of people with a confession of faith—some never were born again and just renounced the Lord. Others, that were genuinely born again and they fall away—it will be a massive sign of the times.

- B. Paul prophesied a falling away from the faith in the end times.

³Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day [Jesus’ second coming] will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin [the Antichrist] is revealed... (2 Thes. 2:3)

¹Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits...²having their own conscience seared...³forbidding to marry... (1 Tim. 4:1-3)

³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine...⁴they will turn their ears away from the truth and be turned aside to fables. (2 Tim. 4:3-4)

The Bible makes it very, very clear in 2 Thessalonians 2. Paul says verse 3, “Do not let anyone deceive you, the day of the Lord,” which is the Second Coming of Christ, “will not come until the falling away comes first.” There is a falling away at the end of the age that is so big, it is one of the signs of the times. As a matter of fact, the two major signs Paul gave are the global falling away and the Antichrist revealed on the global stage. I mean imagine how significant it will be for the Antichrist to be established on the global stage! That is a massive sign, and the falling away is that dramatic, that big is the point.

And I believe that it has already started, I have seen more people in the last five years who were on fire for the Lord twenty years ago that are just saying, “I am fed up.” They are bitter at other believers. They are bitter at the Lord. They are disappointed. They are tired. They just have other things that they want to do and that withering is a slow process.

Paul said, “Until the falling away comes first, you will not see the Second Coming,” meaning the falling away will be that observable on a global level. He says again in 1 Timothy 4:1, “The Holy Spirit expressly says.” I mean, that is an intense term. I mean, when the Holy Spirit says, “Thus says the Lord! The Holy Spirit is speaking,” Paul says that “The Holy Spirit really says this!”

Wow, when you said “expressly,” I thought, “Okay, this must be a big one!” The Holy Spirit is doubly emphasizing this: “In the later times people will depart from the faith. They will depart from the faith. They will have seared consciences.” That is in the generation and in the timeframe when marriage will be forbidden.

I remember fifteen years ago when we were talking about this in our leadership team meeting, and they asked, “Well, what do you mean?” It was 2005, I remember it vividly “What does it mean that in the end times that marriage would be forbidden?”

I said, “Well, it looks like marriage will be forbidden. I cannot picture it.” In 2005, I could not picture it. Today it is on the horizon. All around the earth this whole issue is being discussed, but anyway I do not want to get into all of that. However, my point is that Paul says explicitly the Spirit is prophesying that there will be a falling away in the end times.

C. It is impossible for one to return to the faith after their conscience has been seared (Heb. 6:4-6).

⁴For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. (Heb. 6:4-6)

Look at paragraph C: Hebrews 6 was one of my most difficult passages when I was really adamant about once saved always saved. I could never get around this verse. The writer of Hebrews says in chapter 6:4, “It is impossible for those”—he gives five characteristics—“they were once enlightened.” Okay, that sounds born again or close to it. “They tasted the heavenly gift,” that is Jesus. Hmm, tasted, that is getting close to born again. Okay! “They are partakers of the indwelling Holy Spirit” Augh, that really sounds born again! “They have tasted the good word of God,; they have had hunger for the word of God. They have tasted the power of God in their life and then they fell away.”

I had the hardest time with those five things and making that an unbeliever. I just said, “Hmmm, well, they were enlightened but never saved.”

And my friends would say “Really? They tasted the heavenly gift, Jesus and....”

“Well, they tasted, they did not really say yes. They were only thinking about it!”

Anyway, verse 6, “If they fall away, it is impossible to renew them because their conscience has been seared.” That is why.

And the reason I say that is because a lot of folks have said to me over the years, “I think I have committed the unpardonable sin!”

I asked, “Do you care about it?”

And they said “Yes! I am terrified!” Well, then you have not done it. Because if you have done it, you would not care about it, and if you are terrified about it, you are not even close to it. For these people, it is impossible to renew them through repentance because their heart is seared, their conscience, like Paul said in the passage we just read in Timothy.

- D. Those who fall away are those who continue in unrepentant sin after receive the truth (Heb. 10:26).

26If we sin willfully [persistently] after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27but a certain fearful expectation of judgment...29How much worse punishment...will he be...worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant...a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?...” (Heb. 10:26-29)

Okay, further in the book of Hebrews 10, verse 26, “If we sin willfully.” That does not mean that one afternoon or one weekend you went to some place and did something bad. “Oh, I knew I was going to do it!” It is talking more than stumbling on a weekend. It is talking about a persistent, “I am going to do what I want to do, and, Lord, You are not going to tell me!” These are people **after** they have received the knowledge of the truth!

Verse 29, the writer of Hebrews said, “How much worse a punishment? They have received the knowledge of the truth, and now they are trampling the Son of God under foot because they know Him. They are counting His blood, the blood of the covenant, the blood of Jesus, as a common thing that is not valuable. “They have insulted the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of grace,” meaning they are denying Him is what he is talking about. And so this is describing the same kind of person in chapter 6 as is being described in chapter 10.

- E. Peter warned of false teachers who once walked in the truth but fell away (2 Pet. 2:1-22). Their latter end is worse—there are different measures of intensity of condemnation and judgment in hell (Mt. 10:15; 11:22-24; Mk. 12:40; Lk. 12:47-48; 20:46-46; Jn. 15:22).

15They [false teachers] have forsaken the right way...19They themselves are slaves of corruption...20If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord... Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. 21For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment...” (2 Pet. 2:15-21)

Look at paragraph E: Peter talks about false teachers. He describes teachers who embraced the truth at one time in their life. These are Bible teachers, these are teachers in the Church, traveling around in the early Church. Peter says in 2 Peter 2:15, “They”—talking about these false teachers, again, they are Bible teachers, they have forsaken the right way—“They were in the right way for a period. “They are slaves of corruption. If after they escaped the pollution of the world through the knowledge of Jesus”—so they are born again—“and they are again entangled in them and they go back.” That does not mean they slipped into a former sin, but they went back into a former mindset of “Jesus, I do not care about You anymore. Your blood shed for me is a common thing. I am insulting the grace of God. I do not care anymore!”

Peter says, “They get entangled again.” It is that mindset, and it does not mean they got free and then a year later they got stuck again in one area. That is not what he is talking about, so do not let the enemy trick you on that one.

It is a mindset where they say, “I do not care about His leadership anymore.”

Peter says, “They get entangled, and they are overcome, and the later end for these teachers is worse than the beginning. It would have been better had they never knew the truth, if they had never known the way of

righteousness, than to know it and to turn from it” because there are different measures of the glory of God in the age to come in heaven. We have talked about that over the last couple of weeks where Paul said, “As one star differs from another star in glory, so also is the resurrection” of 1 Corinthians 15. So in hell, there are different measures of judgment and darkness. Hell has different levels—I do not know if levels is the right word but—different measures of intensity, and there are quite a few verses on this from Jesus and the apostles. Peter said, “They will be far worse off where they going than if they were just an ignorant unbeliever who rejected the Lord, than to have known the truth and then reject it with that knowledge that God had given them. They are far worse off than if they would have never known.”

F. A genuine brother can commit “sin that leads to death” (1 Jn. 5:16-17).

¹⁶If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask [pray], and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. ¹⁷... there is sin not leading to death. (1 Jn. 5:16-17)

G. It is wise to examine our heart and lifestyle so that we may not be self-deceived.

⁵Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified. (2 Cor. 13:5)

Paragraph G: Let’s end with this. Let’s have our worship team come on up.

It says here, Paul says, “Examine yourself to see if you are in the faith. Test yourself.” Then he asks the question “Do you know that Jesus is in you? Are you sure?”

Now the point is not to get everyone asking, “Oh my God! Oh my goodness! I do not know!” No, just be honest with the Lord. Ask, “Lord, do I have fruit? Am I growing a little bit in righteousness, purity, humility, gratitude? A little bit?” I wish I grew faster, but I am growing a little bit. Even if it is three steps forward, two steps back, three steps forward, two steps back, but you are still mostly moving forward. That sounds like a lot of “backwards.” My point is if that is your situation, you are on the right path.

*What I do not want you to do is have the enemy pound you with this because the people who get pounded with a verse like this are really sincere believers who do not have a foundation in the truth. So every question disrupts them, and they go to bed just drowning in condemnation. And the Lord would say, “Wait! You love Me! You **are** trying to do this! You are with Me, I love you!”*

It is the other people; those who do not listen to this are the ones I am concerned about. Some are so hypersensitive with so little a foundation in biblical truth that they just get spun around in condemnation, and that is one reason I do not like teaching these kinds of things. However, I do like teaching them because Jesus taught them, and Paul taught them, and who am I not to say what they said?

And so, examine yourself and ask, “Lord, am I seeking to abide more?” Not always but mostly. Okay, we are going in the right way. Keep going, that works! Keep going, keep going!” We are weak people, okay. Keep going. Test yourself. What is going on in your heart? “Oh, I have raging bad stuff going on in my heart!” Okay, okay, you are human, and you have raging bad stuff. What are you doing with it? “Oh, just thinking about it!” Okay, got that too, but are you trying to feed yourself? Make that effort. Be in more godly conversations. Get in places where there is more teaching. Get in places where you are fellowshiping more. I tell you it is not about how powerful you are; it is the power of the Life of the Vine. Jesus is the Vine. The life in you will start moving.

I am talking to those who are feeling like they are on the edge. Some folks have come to IHOPKC, to an internship or a class here as kind of their last chance, you know, “I am going to give God one more chance!” I

have watched that over the years and the Lord has really ambushed a number of people like that and really surprised them.

Other folks gave it a chance, but kind of with their arms crossed, and the Lord says, “No, uncross those arms. I am God. Okay? You are a little guy. I love you, and I can overcome anything you are going through. I can show you how glorious you are to Me and how much I love you.”

Amen! Let’s stand and just come before the Lord.

Lord, I love Your leadership. Lord, I want to know You more. I want to bow before the truth of who You are. I want to embolden a generation to believe in Your leadership. You are good. You are wise. You are loving in everything that You do.

Lord, we say yes to You. Lord, I want to be a branch that bears fruit. I want to be a vessel that helps withering branches to recover. Holy Spirit, I ask You that the enemy would not take advantage of a weak believer who is confused right now, who loves You right now, and who is seeking to love You. I take authority over the spirit of confusion and disruption of their mind in condemnation.

Lord, I ask You for the heart that is hardened, that You would pierce them tonight, You would convict, and the arrow would strike them. That they would see they are in great need and in great danger; even tonight they are in danger. Lord, help manage this in this glorious gathering before You, this beautiful group of people.

Okay, I want to invite folks to come up for prayer. You say, “My heart is just stirred.” You might be confused and condemned, or you are troubled, or you might be, “Oh, I better get real!” I don’t care which one you are. You are just saying, “My heart is stirred and I just need God to talk to me tonight,” according to the things I was sharing. Meaning, this is unsettling you. It is good to be unsettled because you can grab the truth and get solid.

I have seen believers unsettled, and others say, “Oh no, they are unsettled!”

I say, “No, let them be. It is like the cocoon and that butterfly that struggles to get out. Being a little unsettled is good as you can get through this.”

So if you would like prayer, any of you, come on up and stand on the line, regardless of where you are on the spectrum of that. Some of you are saying “I need to get right with God, I need to get serious, man!” Others of you are saying, “I am not sure whether I am born again yet! My Mom says I am, but I do not know if I really am!” That is a good thing to ask. That might be the breakthrough you are waiting for. Others of you are feeling condemned. You are as sincere as you can be, but the enemy pounds on you all of the time and tells you that you are going to hell. And that is a lie straight from hell!

Lord, I ask You by the power of God right now, release the Spirit of grace all over this room right now. You don’t have to come up to receive from the Lord right now. All over this room and over the web stream those who are listening, I ask for the Spirit of grace and power. We ask for the Spirit of grace and power all over this room!

We want to love You. We want a break through in our hearts tonight, Lord! We want to know You! We want a vibrant spirit, Lord! Come and help us, Lord! Lord, we love You, Jesus, above all else!

Beloved, just ask the Lord, “Lord, I need a breath through!” Whether it is tonight or next week, He will answer you if you are sincere! The fog will lift. He will break through, I promise you. Stay with it!