

## Lesson 14 WITHERED BRANCHES

*If a Man Abide Not in Me, He is Cast Forth as a Branch, and is Withered; and They Gather Them, and Cast Them into the Fire, and They are Burned - John 15:6*

### I. The Reality of Withered Branches

- a. The lessons these words teach are very simple and very solemn. A man can come to such a connection with Christ, that **he considers** himself to be in Him, and yet he can be cast forth.
- b. From the text it is certain that there is **such a thing** as not abiding in Christ, which leads to withering up and being burned.
- c. These withered branches are persons in whom the initial union with Christ appears to have taken place, and in whom yet it is seen that his "**so-called faith**" was not a faith leading to salvation. James 2:19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. KJV
- d. What a **solemn** call to examine one's self and to look within and to see whether we are indeed abiding and bearing fruit!

### II. The Nature of Withered Branches

- a. First we must see that this idea of persons thinking they are in Christ but being **wrong** is clearly taught in a number of places in the New Testament.
  1. The parable of the seed sown on **rocky** ground. Matt 13:5-6 Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: <sup>6</sup> And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. KJV
  2. The parable of the **tares** among the wheat Matt 13:25 But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. KJV
  3. The false **professors** rejected by Christ Matt 7:22-23 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?... *I never knew you depart from me KJV*
  4. Certain **members** of the seven Churches addressed by the Spirit. Rev 2:2 and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: KJV
- b. We have to wonder what may be the cause of this "not abiding." At the root of the problem there is but **one** explanation for the existence of withered branches. Luke 20:18 Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. KJV
- c. Lack of saving faith may explain the problem from God's point of view, but from the natural man's viewpoint there are a **variety** ways that the minds of men deceive them into thinking that they are in Christ.
- d. With some it is that they never understood how the Christian calling leads to holy obedience and to loving service to Christ. Many of these believe that salvation is merely a **free ticket** out of Hell.
- e. These are content with the **thought** that they had believed, and were safe from Hell; there was neither motive nor power to abide in Christ-they never bothered to discover their need of it.
- f. With others it was that the cares of the world, or its prosperity, choked the Word: they had never **forsaken** all to follow Christ.
- g. These fail to comprehend the utter totality of personal surrender and **dependence** upon God required by a living relationship with Christ.
- h. With still others it was that their religion and their faith was after the **wisdom** of men, and not in the power of God. These have created their idea of god in their own image and according to their own thoughts.
- i. They may have trusted in the doctrine of grace, or in their own sincerity, or in the soundness of their own logic, reason and understanding; but they had never come to seek an entire abiding in Christ as their **only safety**.
- j. No wonder that, when they encountered the hot winds of temptation, worldly distraction, persecution or difficult doctrine, they withered away: they were **not truly** rooted in Christ. John 6:67 Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? KJV
- k. From the Biblical record one must conclude that there are any number of persons in the Church throughout its history and today as well who were or are convinced that they were authentically in Christ; but who were **deceived**.

### III. The Perseverance of the Believer

- a. Many have taken this solemn warning as **proof** that a believer, once converted, may lose his salvation.
- b. While there are many who reject the idea of eternal security of the believer, the verses that they will point to refer either to those who were not **authentically** saved by Christ or to the Bema-seat rewards of the believer.
- c. In order to avoid their error, we need to have a rock solid understanding of what the Bible teaches about the doctrine of the **perseverance** of the believer.

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- d. One aspect of perseverance denotes the **duty** of Christians to continue steadfastly in obedience and fidelity to Christ. One does this not in order to inherit eternal life but to demonstrate love and gratitude to Christ. 1 Cor 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. KJV
- e. The Arminian view understands this faithfulness as a **condition** to inherit eternal life, but the Reformed view holds that the NT teachings testify to the safety and security of the believer as a result of his faith in Christ alone. Rom 8:28-39; Eph 1:1-14; 2:8-10; etc.
- f. The Christian's fidelity and obedience will be rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ. His salvation is not affected by lack of human faithfulness, but His **rewards** are.
- g. The Reformed view teaches that ultimate perseverance is a result of unconditional **election**.
- h. The **Westminster** Confession says, "This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will but upon the immutability of the decree of election flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father. . . ."
- i. In other words, those who are real Christians **cannot** fall away or be eternally lost. Their position in Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit assures their eternal salvation.
- j. When men begin to interject human faithfulness and human works into the question of their eternal salvation, they take it off the rock of Christ's **finished work** and place it upon a flimsy basis.
- k. If getting to heaven depended upon human merit or faithfulness in any degree, no human being would ever get there nor would any claim **personal merit** sufficient for entrance into the presence of God.
- l. Christ will abundantly reward faithfulness in His redeemed children, but He can never accept their faithfulness as **merit** for salvation.
- m. Failure to **distinguish** between salvation and rewards has confused this subject in theological thinking and this is, accordingly, a much disputed doctrine.
- n. In the final analysis the answer to the insecurity or security of the believer rests on the question of **who does the work** of salvation. Monergism says the work is done exclusively by God alone.
- o. **If** salvation is the work of God and does not rest on any merit in the believer and is not sustained by any effort of the believer, the believer is eternally secure. This is what the Bible teaches. John 1:13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. KJV

### IV. The Danger We Face

- a. Though there may be withering branches all around us in the church we ought not to be deceived into thinking that fruitless lives are acceptable with Christ and are the **norm** for the Christian life.
- b. We must turn away from the temptation to measure ourselves by our **peers**, instead, let us open our eyes in self examination to see if there is evidence of withering within.
- c. The only **acceptable** model for what the Christian life ought to look like is that of Christ. We the branches must live in and through our heavenly Vine.
- d. Salvation is not crying, salvation is not a sorrow for sin, salvation is not a sorrow for getting caught, salvation is not a turning from sin alone. Salvation is by faith receiving Christ **as He is**; the God-Man.
- e. Salvation is a spiritual realization imparted by the Holy Spirit that we need salvation and that only Christ is **uniquely** qualified to satisfy that need.
- f. This is a transaction between the sinner and the Savior. Examine your heart, as I have examined mine, and **BE SURE YOU ARE IN CHRIST**
- g. Our task is to do our own self-examination and to respond in dependence upon Him for the work that only He can perform. We must realize that we have no safety but that of **true abiding** in Christ.

### V. Application

- a. Let the very thought of a withered branch fill me with holy fear and watchfulness. Let each of us turn within. Ask: Is MY life fresh, and green, and vigorous, bringing forth its fruit in its season?