

## John 13-17

### Themes

#### A. Holy Spirit

1. Jesus' baptism by John is the first mention of the Holy Spirit in the gospel of John (1:29-34). The major difference between John's account and the other synoptic accounts is that he recorded the reaction of John the Baptist. He said, "I saw the Spirit descending like a dove from heaven, and it remained on him" (1:32). The actual act of baptizing is not mentioned, which shows that the main focus is on the Spirit's descent. John the Baptist was able to recognize Jesus as the Lamb of God, Messiah, through the testimony of the Holy Spirit (1:34). Two times the Spirit is mentioned as "remaining" on Jesus. This demonstrates that Jesus' relationship with the Spirit is one of permanence. Thus, Jesus is able to dispense the Spirit to others (1:33; 15:26; 16:7; 20:22).
2. The second reference to the Holy Spirit is when Jesus is talking with Nicodemus and says, "Unless a person is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (3:5). The thrust of this passage is on the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believers. In the following verse Jesus makes the analogy of what is born of the flesh and what is born of the Spirit (v. 6), meaning like begets like. Regeneration does not come through physical means; it can only come through the work of the Holy Spirit. Many Old Testament passages relate water to the spirit, such as Ezekiel 36:25-27, where "water" indicates cleansing from impurity and "spirit" refers to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who will enable people to follow God and obey Him.
3. In John 3:34-35 the author tells us that Jesus comes from the Father and Jesus gives the Spirit "without limit" because he has been given the authority to do so. This passage is connected to the next one—Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well—by verses 4:1-2 with the mentioning of Jesus' baptizing ministry. In 4:10 Jesus offers the woman "living water," a reference to the Holy Spirit as mentioned above. The ministry of the Holy Spirit here is to bring eternal life without exception to all who would seek it. This Spirit will be given by Jesus and "will become in him a fountain of water springing up to eternal life" (4:14). This will allow believers to worship anywhere in the Spirit (4:23).
4. In John 6:63 Jesus declares that the words he speaks are a product of the life-giving Spirit, and, properly understood and accepted, they produce eternal life in the hearer.
5. The connection between "water" and "Spirit" is made clear in John 7:38-39 where Jesus offers drink that will supply a well of living water. The author then adds that Jesus was referring to the Spirit when he said this. It is also mentioned that the Spirit would not be given until Jesus was glorified.
6. In the farewell discourse, Jesus promises that in response to the disciples' love for him, he would ask the Father to give them the Holy Spirit (14:16). The Holy Spirit is portrayed in a similar role to that of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is portrayed as a witness to Jesus, a helper to the disciples who will indwell them and will not come until Jesus departs (14:26; 15:26; 16:8-15).

7. The final mentions of the Holy Spirit are while Jesus is on the cross and when he appears to the disciples after his resurrection. For the author, the water that flowed out of Jesus' side in John 19:34 was a symbolic reference to the Holy Spirit (1 John 5:6-8) who could now be given because Jesus was now glorified (7:39). The second mention is in John 20:22 where Jesus is speaking to his disciples and breathes upon them to receive the Holy Spirit, which is a foreshadowing of the Spirit's coming at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-3).

## **B. Light and Darkness**

1. Throughout John is the image of light (representing God and holy perfection) and darkness (representing man in his sinfulness and rebellion). The first mention is in John 1:5, "The light shines on in the darkness, but the darkness has not mastered it," referring to the world's not recognizing God when He comes into the world through the person of Jesus Christ. This is an echo of Genesis 1:2-3 and its cosmic struggle—as John 1:3 declares the role of the preexistent Son in creation. This is, however, more than a cosmic struggle because John 1:5 foreshadows the rejection theme made explicit in 10-11.
2. For Jesus there are only two categories of people, which can be seen in the contrast between Jesus (as light) and the evildoers and opponents (as darkness), which is amplified in John 3:19-21. This passage portrays Jesus as the coming light that brings judgment. This judgment is based on a person's response to the light—either coming to it in acceptance or staying in the darkness in rebellion. Jesus makes it clear in John 8: 12 and 9:5 that he is the light of the world and that entrance into God's light hinges on how one responds to Jesus. This theme is repeated again in John 12:35-36 and 12:46.
3. This theme is illustrated throughout the gospel in Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees and the Sadducees, who represent the darkness, and in his teaching to the disciples, who represent those who have received the light and fled the darkness. It can also be seen with Judas, who is portrayed as a disciple and follower of Jesus but walks away the light and into the darkness and is swallowed up by it (13:30).

## **C. Belief and Unbelief**

1. For John one's knowledge of God begins with an act of personal faith in Jesus Christ (1:12) and accepting who Jesus is (20:31). Belief can only come in its fullest *after* the death and resurrection of Jesus (8:28). Belief involves seeing God and the world differently (9:1-41)—with spiritual eyes rather than depending on one's physical eyes. This level of belief comes only through the enablement of God in opening man's eyes to His light (6:65). The purpose of the gospel is so that one may believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and so receive eternal life (20:31). This is demonstrated in that the verb *pisteuo* ("believe") is used nearly 100 times in the gospel of John (4:41-42; 5:24; 6:28; 7:37-38; 14:1, 11; 20:24-29).
2. The gospel of John makes reference to both genuine belief in Jesus, which produces eternal life, and inadequate belief in Jesus, which does not result in life. The latter category includes those who say or act as if they are in the light, but in reality they are shown to have been in the darkness the entire time. John 2:23 is an example of this

- inadequate belief wherein the people “believe” in Jesus’ miracles but not in the way that he requires. This is made clear by the fact that he would not entrust himself to them (2:24). There is a word play between “believed” (v. 23) and “entrust” (v. 24), for they are the same word *pisteuo*.
3. Again in John 6:60-66 John shows that there were some who called themselves Jesus’ disciples (v. 60) but in the end decide to abandon him (v. 66). Jesus shows that he knew beforehand that many of them did not believe (v. 64) as well as Judas who would walk away later.
  4. Another example is in John 8:31-59 where Jesus tells his disciples that if they are really true, then they will practice his teachings; then they would “know the truth” and it would “set them free.” Verse 30 states that this group comprised Jews who had already “put their faith in him.” The problem comes when Jesus says that they are slaves to sin (v. 34), they have no room for his word (v. 37), they are descendants not of Abraham (v. 39) but of the devil (v. 44), they are liars (v. 55), and that they prove all this by trying to stone Jesus (v. 59). Whatever about Jesus they had put their faith in was deemed as inadequate by Jesus because they did not put into practice his teachings (8:31; 14:23-24).
  5. In John 3:12 Jesus shows the difference between belief and unbelief as the one who understands heavenly things versus the one who does not. Jesus says that the religious leaders have already rejected him (3:11) because they do not understand the earthly things of which Jesus speaks let alone the heavenly things. The contrast is made clear in 3:36 by what results from belief versus unbelief.
  6. All this is brought to a conclusion in John’s summary of Jesus’ ministry in 12:37-42. John states here that though many followed Jesus, they chose to reject him, which is attributed to spiritual blindness (vv.39-40). In contrast to this, there were those who truly believed (v. 42), the reason being that those who believe are freed from the darkness (v. 46). Those who reject Jesus will face the final judgment (v. 48).

## I. The Last Supper (13:1-30)

### A. Washing the Disciples' Feet (13:1-17)

In verse 13:1 “he now showed them the full extent of his love” (NIV) is a Hebrew idiom that is literally “he loved them to the end” (NET, NASB). This carries the idea of “he now loved them completely,” or “he now loved them to the uttermost.” This has an important lexical link to John 19:30 where Jesus is on the cross and says, “It is completed!” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” This link and the statement “Jesus knew that his time had come to depart from this world” (13:1) show that the full extent of his love for the disciples is demonstrated in his sacrificial death for them on the cross. The foot washing that follows is a prophetic act of his coming death.

1. What is the reason Judas is mentioned in verse 2?

In verses 4-5 Jesus' removal of his outer clothing and wrapping the towel about himself are the dress and the actions of a slave who would have been required to do the foot washing.

2. What prompts Jesus to wash the feet of the disciples in verse 5?

In verse 8 Jesus says, “you have no share with me,” which comes from the Greek word *mero* meaning “heritage” or “inheritance.” This word was used in the LXX to describe the heritage of national Israel. Each tribe had its “share” (*mero*) in the Promised Land, except Levi (Num 28:20; Deut 12:12, 14:27).

3. What point is Jesus trying to make with the foot washing in verses 6-11? What is the meaning of the dialogue between Jesus and Peter?

4. What is Jesus calling his disciples to in verses 12-17, in light of the context?

“The foot-washing is an act of humble service for others, symbolic of the humiliating service Jesus will render in laying down his life for others—which is why the foot-washing is necessary if the disciples are to have a share in him (13:8). Naturally, though, the disciples would not have understood the full significance of this until after his death. This throws new light, too, on 13:14-15—the example Jesus has given is not just one of humble

service, but of humble service to the point of death. This is expected of his followers as well: compare, for example, the parallel statements in 1 John 3:16, 4:11.” (W. Hall Harris, *The Gospel of John: Introduction and Commentary*, p. 183.)

“There is a form of religious piety that utters a hearty ‘Amen!’ to the most stringent demands of discipleship, but which rarely does anything about them.” (Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 469.)

## **B. The Announcement of Jesus' Betrayal (13:18-30)**

In verse 18 the phrase “The one who eats my bread has turned against me” is a quotation from Psalm 41:9. The second part is an idiom that literally says, “has lifted up his heel against me.” The idea is the betrayal of a close associate.

1. To whom is Jesus referring in verses 18-20 and why does he mention him?
2. What do you notice about Jesus in verse 21, especially in light of the previous comment?

In verse 23 “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” the “beloved disciple,” is mentioned for the first time. This individual is also mentioned in 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, and 21:20. Given the fact that Mark 14:17 seems to indicate it was only the twelve who were with Jesus at this time, and with the omission of all references to John, son of Zebedee, from the Gospel of John, it seems likely that the references to the beloved disciple should be understood as references to John the author.

People taking part in such a meal reclined on the left side, and the left arm was used to support the body, leaving the right arm free for use in eating. The disciple on Jesus' right would have his head in front of Jesus and is described as “lying in his bosom.” The position of highest honor would have been to the left of the host according to Roman custom. It is possible that Judas was seated to Jesus' left in the position of honor. Matt 26:25 suggest that Jesus could speak to him without being overheard by the rest of the group. Judas was also in a position where Jesus can hand him food (13:26). Jesus may have given Judas the position of honor as a last appeal to him, which would heighten the irony of Judas' betrayal.

3. What is the significance of the final comment in verse 30, “Now it was night”?

“As the Light of the world was about to depart and return to the Father, the darkness had come at last (cf. Luke 22:53). Again the contrast in imagery is clear. For John, Jesus is the Light of the world, and those who believe in Him come to the light and walk in the light. At the opposite extreme is Judas Iscariot, who rejected Jesus, cast in his lot with the powers of darkness, departed into the darkness, and was swallowed up by it.” (W. Hall Harris. “A Theology of John's Writings.” In *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 204)

## II. The Upper Room Discourse (13:31-16:33)

### A. The Prediction of Peter's Denial (13:31-38)

1. How is Jesus glorified in verses 31-32?
2. How is the commandment that Jesus gives them in verses 34-35 a "new command" (Lev. 19:18)?
3. Where is Jesus going that they cannot follow but will follow later as described in verses 36-38?

### B. Jesus' Parting Words to His Disciples (14:1-14)

In verse 2 "many dwelling places" (NET, NASB), "many rooms" (NIV), "many mansions" (KJV) comes from the Greek word *monai*. Many have associated it with the Aramaic word *anwa*, which can refer to a stopping place or resting place for a traveler on a journey. This was later translated by the Tyndale as "mansion," although it simply meant "a dwelling place," with no connotation of size or glamour. However, it is more likely that the word *monai* is related to its cognate verb *meno*, which is frequently used in the Gospel of John to refer to the permanent relationship between Jesus and the Father or Jesus and the believer. Thus, the idea of a permanent dwelling place, rather than a temporary stopping place, would be in view. This is the way that Luther understood it.

1. What are the dwelling places in the Father's house in verses 2-4 (John 2:16-22; 8:35)?

This fits with what John says in other places (John 15:4, 6, 7, 9, 10; 1 John 2:5-6, 10, 24, 27-28; 3:6, 9, 15, 24; 4:13, 15-16; 5:20) and with Pauline theology of the believer's adoption as sons and heirs in Christ (Rom. 8:14, 17, 23; 9:4, 26; 2 Cor. 6:18; Gal. 3:26, 29; 4:5-6; Eph. 1:5; 3:6; 1 Thess. 5:5; Titus 3:7; see also Heb. 2:10; 6:17; 11:9; 12:5, 7; 1 Peter 3:7) and being "in Christ" (Rom. 8:1; 12:5; 1 Cor. 1:5, 30; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; Eph. 1:4, 7, 11, 13; 2:5-6, 10, 13, 21-22; 3:12; 4:21; Phil. 1:1; 3:9; Col. 1:2; 2:7, 11; 1 Thess. 2:14; 5:18; 2 Thess. 1:12; see also Heb. 3:14; 1 Peter 3:16; 5:10, 14). Also the Holy Spirit is in us (Acts 1:5, 8; 2:4, 17-18, 33; 4:8, 31; Rom. 8:15, 26-27; 1 Cor. 2:12-14; 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor. 1:22;

3:18; 5:5; Gal 3:5; 4:6; Eph. 2:18, 22; 4:3-4; 5:18; 6:18; 1 Thess. 4:8; see also John 7:38-39). Likewise Paul says that through Christ we are now members of God's household (Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; see also 1 John 4:16).

2. How can Jesus make the claim that he does in verse 6?

In verse 7 it is difficult to know whether it should be translated, "If you had really known me, you would know my Father" (NIV, NASB, KJV) or "If you have known me, you will know my Father" (NET). The external textual evidence seems to favor the latter.

3. What way should this verse be translated based on the contextual evidence?

4. What is the significance of verses 8-11?

"We should not overlook the faith involved both in the utterance and in the acceptance of those words, spoken as they were on the eve of the crucifixion. 'I am the Way,' said one who would shortly hang impotent on a cross. 'I am the Truth,' when the lies of evil people were about to enjoy a spectacular triumph. 'I am the Life,' when within a matter of hours his corpse would be placed in a tomb." (Leon Morris. *The Gospel According to John*, p. 570.)

5. What does it mean for the disciples to perform "greater deeds" than Jesus in verse 12?

6. What do verses 13-14 mean (see also 15:7, 16; 16:23, 24, 26)?

"Johannine theology has introduced into prayer in Jesus' name an emphasis that goes beyond the use of a formula. A Christian prays in Jesus' name in the sense that he is in union with Jesus. Thus, the theme of asking "in my name" in xiv 13-14 continues and develops the indwelling motif of 10-11: because the Christian is in union with Jesus and Jesus is in union with the Father, there can be no doubt that the Christian's requests will be granted." (R. E. Brown. *The Gospel According to John*, p. 636.)

### C. Teaching on the Holy Spirit (14:15-31)

“This verse [15] provides the transition between the promises of answered prayer which Jesus makes to his disciples in verses 13-14 and the promise of the Holy Spirit which is introduced in verse 16. Obedience is the proof of genuine love.” (W. Hall Harris. *The Gospel of John: Introduction and Commentary*, p. 197.)

In verse 16 the word “advocate” (NET), “counselor” (NIV), “helper” (NASB) comes from the Greek word *parakleto*. The word has the idea of a person called to someone’s aid in court, a helper, intercessor, or character witness. The word “defender” comes close; however, it means more than just this. Jesus’ statements about teaching and remembering carry the idea of a “helper.” See 1 John 2:1, “one who will intercede for us.”

1. What does Jesus mean when he says “another advocate” or “paraclete” in verse 16?
2. What is the role of the coming advocate in verses 15-17 and 26?
3. How does one demonstrate love to Jesus and the Father in verses 15-24?

In verse 28 we see that “during his mission on earth he is less than the One who sent him, but his departure now signifies that the work the Father has given him is completed (cf. 19:30). Now Jesus will be glorified with that glory that he had with the Father before the world was (cf. 17:5). This should be a cause of rejoicing to the disciples because when Jesus is glorified he will glorify his disciples as well (17:22).” (W. Hall Harris. *The Gospel of John: Introduction and Commentary*, p. 200.)

#### D. The Vine and the Branches (15:1-17)

There are numerous Old Testament passages that refer to Israel as a vine: Ps. 80:8-16, Isa. 5:1-7, Jer. 2:21, Ezek. 15:1-8, 17:5-10, 19:10-14, and Hos. 10:1. The vine became symbolic of Israel and even appeared on some coins issued by the Maccabees. Jesus also used this imagery to refer to Israel (Matt. 20:1-16; 21:23-41; Mark 12:1-9; Luke 13:6-9; 20:9-16).

These Old Testament passages portray Israel as faithless to Yahweh and as the object of severe punishment. Ezek 15:1-8 talks about the worthlessness of the wood from a vine because of the disobedience of Judah. A branch cut from a vine is worthless except to be burned as fuel. This fits more with the statements about the disciples than with Jesus' description of himself as the vine. Ezek 17:5-10 contains vine imagery, which refers to a king of the house of David, Zedekiah. Zedekiah broke his covenant with God when he allied himself with Egypt, ultimately leading to his downfall (17:20-21). Ezek 17:22-24 then describes the planting of a cedar sprig, which grows into a lofty tree, an allusion to the coming Messiah. It is significant that the Messiah is not described in Ezekiel 17 as a vine, but as a cedar tree. The vine imagery here applies to Zedekiah's disobedience.

1. What is the significance of Jesus' statement in verse 1 (in light of the above)?

In verse 2 "cuts off" (NIV), "takes away" (NET, NASB, KJV) comes from the Greek word *airo* and can mean "lift up" or "take away." John 8:59 and 5:8-12 is where *airo* is used in the sense of "lift up," and John 11:39, 11:48, 16:22, and 17:15 is where it is used in the sense of "remove."

2. What seems to be the best translation given the context (15:1-8)?

See the "Who are the Branches in John 15:2 and 15:6?" excursus on page 15.

In verse 2 "prunes" comes from the Greek word *kathairei*, which means "cleanses." It is not a normal word for pruning but was chosen because Jesus is referring to people rather than vines. This is a word play with *katharoi* (clean) in verse 3. The idea here is the cleansing of sin and is the same word that is used at the washing of the disciples' feet when Jesus says, "You are *clean* already" (13:10). This refers to the disciples being cleansed of sin; Judas was excluded (13:11).

3. What is Jesus' point in verses 4-5?

“One’s initial impression is to interpret the imagery in terms of good deeds or character qualities, relating it to passages elsewhere in the NT like Matt 3:8 and 7:20, Rom 6:22, Gal 5:22, etc. This is not necessarily inaccurate, but we must remember that for John, to have life at all is to bear fruit, while one who does not bear fruit shows that he does not have the life (once again, conduct is the clue to paternity, as in 8:41; compare also 1 John 4:20—“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen”).” (W. Hall Harris. *The Gospel of John: Introduction and Commentary*, p. 210.)

4. What is the result of not remaining in Jesus in verse 6?

“Grapevines, in contrast to other types of wood, do not have many uses. Their total value is that they can produce fruit, namely grapes. Vines do not yield timber from which people can make other things (Ezek. 15). Similarly the only reason believers exist is to bear spiritual fruit.” (Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on John*, p. 222.)

5. How is 15:7 different from 14:13-14?

In verse 8 the second verb in *genesthe pherete* should not be understood as a future indicative “[and show that] you will become,” communicating a resultative sequence between the two. Rather it should be understood as coordinate in meaning. Thus the two actions are one and the same; bearing fruit and being Jesus’ disciple are a single action. The first is the outward proof of the second. In bearing fruit they prove themselves to be genuine disciples (15:5).

6. What does it mean to remain in Jesus and what is the comparison in verses 9-10?

7. What is the result of obeying Jesus in what he has commanded in verses 9-10?

8. How does one obey Jesus and what does it look like?

Verse 14 really explains 15:10 in a different way. Notice that this is the only time that the believer is called a friend of God—if they are remaining in him by obeying him.

9. Why does Jesus say they are no longer slaves but friends in verse 15?

In verse 16 “Jesus stressed that the initiative in the relationship between Him and His disciples lay with Himself, not them (cf. 1:39, 42-43; 6:70; 10:27). He probably did this because of their tendency to think too highly of themselves... He had chosen them to be His friends, but He had also appointed them to a specific task. They had a job to do as His servants, a mission to fulfill. Part of His purpose for them was that they bear fruit and that their fruit would have lasting effects.” (Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on John*, p. 230.)

#### **E. The World’s Hatred (5:18-16:4a)**

1. What can the believer expect in verses 18-21 and why?

2. Why is the world guilty now and what is the reason for this action in verses 22-25?

3. Does Jesus provide any encouragement in verses 18-21? In what way?

“Jesus said in 14:16 that the Father would send the Paraclete in answer to Jesus’ prayer, and in 14:26 Jesus said that the Father would send the Paraclete in Jesus’ name. Now in 15:26 Jesus says that he himself will send the Paraclete from the Father. What are we to make of these seeming discrepancies in the accounts? They are probably merely indicative of the intimate union between the Father and the Son—the two are so closely identified in their activities in sending the Paraclete that this degree of interchange is possible.” (W. Hall Harris. *The Gospel of John: Introduction and Commentary*, p. 214.)

4. Why does Jesus tell the disciples about their coming persecution in verses 16:1-4a?

### **F. Jesus' Final Words for His Departure (16:4b-33)**

In verse 5 the idea is not that no one has asked him where he is going—Peter and Thomas have asked him (13:36 and 14:5)—rather that they have not persisted in trying to understand. If they truly understood, they would be filled with joy that the Father was going to be glorified through Jesus' obedience (13:31-32). Instead they are sad (16:6).

1. Why must Jesus depart from them in verse 7?

In verse 8 “convict” (NIV, NASB) and “proven wrong” (NET) come from the Greek word *elegcho* and can mean (1) “to convict or convince someone of something,” (2) “to bring to light or expose something,” (3) and “to correct or punish someone.” The third option does not apply here since Jesus is not talking about judgment.

2. In what way and how will the world be proven wrong by the Spirit in verses 8-11?

3. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in verses 12-16?

4. To what does Jesus compare their sadness in verses 17-24 and what will be the end result?

5. What is the irony in verses 16:25-33?

“Had the disciples really possessed the understanding they claim, they would have reacted very differently when the crisis came.” (Leon Morris. *The Gospel According to John*, p. 631.)

### **G. Jesus' High Priestly Prayer (17:1-26)**

1. What are the three sections of Jesus' prayer in chapter 17?

Jesus had said earlier that his "hour" had come, (12:23 and 13:1). The best understanding of the "hour" is the period of time starting at the end of Jesus' public ministry and extending through the death, resurrection, and exaltation to the Father's side. The "hour" begins with Judas' arrival in the garden, which leads to Jesus' death. Jesus' "hour" brings glory to the Father and to himself (13:31-32).

2. What is Jesus' attitude in verses 1-5?
3. What is eternal life according to verses 1-5?
4. How is it that the disciples belong to Jesus and not the world in verses 6-8?
5. How has Jesus been glorified by the disciples in verse 10?
6. What does it mean in verse 11 for the disciples to become one as the Father and Son are one?
7. What is the disciples' relationship to the world in verses 14-19?
8. What is Jesus' desire for the believers in verses 20-23 and for what purpose?
9. What is Jesus' desire for the world in verses 24-26?

## Who Are the Branches in John 15:2 and 15:6?

The question in John 15:2 and 6 is over who Jesus is referring to concerning the branches that do not bear fruit. Do the branches represent believers who are still carnal? Or are they unbelievers with merely a passing interest in Christ? The answer to this question will affect the way one views genuine salvation and true commitment to Christ.

One option for understanding this passage is that the fruitless branches that are taken away (v. 2) and thrown out (v. 6) are believers who lose their salvation because of unfruitfulness. However, this interpretation encounters problems with the Johannine teaching on the security of the believer (10:28-29).

This leaves two basic ways of understanding Jesus' statements in 15:2 and 15:6:

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

### View #1: Was an Unfaithful, Disobedient Believer

When the phrase "in me" is used in John's Gospel (6:56; 10:38; 14:10, 11, 20, 30; 15:2, 4, 5-7; 16:33; 17:21, 23), it refers to fellowship with Christ. It is inconsistent then to say that the phrase in 15:2 refers to a person who merely professes to be saved but is not. A person "in me" is always a true Christian.

There is a distinction made between the one who "believes" and one who "remains." The one who believes has made the initial act of faith in Jesus. In contrast, one who *remains* must already be in fellowship with Jesus and cannot then refer to the beginning of one's faith in Jesus (since they are already there and now must remain). If believing and remaining were to be equated, then believing would also equal obeying commandments (John 15: 9-10), which does not fit scriptures. Dillow ("Abiding Is Remaining in Fellowship: Another Look at John 15:1-6.") argues that John 6:56 cannot refer to initial belief because this would lead one to a works salvation understanding of faith.

The Greek word for branches in verse 2 is *klema* and means "tendrils" that come off the branches (not the actual branches). Grapevines have branches that bear fruit, but they also have branches that do not always bear fruit but are growing stronger so that they can bear fruit in the future. There can be genuine life without fruit in a vine, and there can be in a Christian as well (Constable, *Notes on John*).

For this view, the Greek word *airo* is understood to mean "lift up." Those who take this view believe that in the spring vinedressers both lifted up unfruitful branches and pruned fruitful

branches. Jesus gave this teaching in the spring when farmers did what He described (See Constable and Derickson).

The process of lifting up (v. 2) happened in the spring whereas throwing branches into the fire (v. 6) happened in the fall, so these cannot be the same incident. The branches that are thrown into the fire are seen as the parts of the believer's life that did not have a healthy connection to Jesus, thus they are removed to help strengthen the believer.

The fire either refers to the loss of reward for the believer at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:15) or the image is incidental, used only to point out the uselessness of the believer who does not obey and not in reference to Christ's judgment.

Jesus is speaking to the disciples, of whom he has made clear that they are already believers, so Jesus' mention of the branches being removed cannot, in this view, refer to unbelievers since that is not who He is addressing.

### **View #2: Was Never a Genuine Believer**

For this view, the word *airo* is understood to mean "take away." This actually fits the general usage of the word in Johannine literature and the context of the passage. It seems to make sense to see the branches on the ground in verse 6 as the ones that were removed in verse 2. (If the branches in verse 2 were merely lifted up, then where did the branches in verse 6 come from?)

Concerning the branches that were lifted up, Joseph C. Dillow ("Abiding Is Remaining in Fellowship: Another Look at John 15:1-6 in *Bibliotheca Sacra*) argues that, in fact, that the vines that were lifted up were ones that were already producing fruit, and they are lifted to help them grow more. There is also evidence that the farmers of this time lowered to the ground those branches that were already bearing fruit to cause them to ripen more quickly because they are close the warmth of the ground.

It is clear that 15:6 refers to the fires of judgment (Ps. 80:16; Ezek. 15:1-8). But view #1 requires one to understand this in terms of the judgment of believers at the judgment seat of Christ. However, this concept does not appear anywhere in the gospel of John. In John's perspective, the believer does not come under judgment: 3:18, 5:24, 29. The first reference (3:18) is important because it occurs in the context of 3:16-21, which is key to the framework of the entire Gospel and is repeatedly alluded to. It is not likely that the branches that are lying on the ground and thrown into the fire belong to some other tree or vine; this would hardly make the point.

This is similar to the image used by John the Baptist in Matt 3:10: "...and the axe 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." This is a call to initial repentance or face eternal judgment, since this is being addressed to the Pharisees and Sadducees who are seen as unbelievers in all four gospels. This view of fire as eternal judgment fits better with the Old Testament imagery and the gospels than it does with the

Pauline concept of the judgment seat of Christ (a judgment for believers), especially when it is in a totally different context.

The use of “remain” (*meno*) in 15:6 is used of the relationship between Jesus and the disciples and/or Jesus and the Father; it emphasizes the permanence of the relationship (6:56, 8:31, 8:35, 14:10), not discipleship after initial faith. The branch who has not remained is Judas, who departed in 13:30. He did not bear fruit or remain in Jesus and is now in the darkness; he was a tool of Satan. His eternal judgment in the fire is yet to come. It is clear from the context that not just the believing disciples are in view here; it is also the unbelieving disciple (Judas) who was a part of Jesus but did not remain. Throughout the Gospel, there is a contrast between Peter and Judas (remaining vs. not remaining). Peter represents the one who sins but is cleansed through repentance and so bears fruit because he remained in Christ. Judas represents the one who sins but does not repent, showing he did not remain in Christ and thus dies in judgment.

Likewise in verse 6 Jesus is talking about the one who does *not remain* in him. The implication is that at one time they *were* in him in some way but are no longer. It is clear that they are not a part of him, which implies unbelief.

In verse 8 Jesus says, “...that you bear much fruit and show that you are my disciples.” This implies that fruit is evidence of discipleship and lack of fruit is evidence of a lack of discipleship.

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