In the Metaphor of the Vine, Jesus tells us that if we “obey My commandments,” then we are abiding in Him. (John 15:10.) Jesus then says this abiding is crucial to salvation. First, Jesus says only by abiding in Him (obeying) can we produce fruit. (John 15:4.) Second, Jesus then says the “branch in me” that does not “keep bearing fruit” (present participle active in Greek) is “taken away.” (John 15:1-2.) This cannot possibly a good outcome on salvation. For Jesus then says the branch that does “not keep abiding in me” (defined as ‘obeying’ in verse 10) (present participle active again) is as a branch that is “cut off from the vine, withered, thrown outside and is burned.” (John 15:1-6.) Yet, verse ten says such abiding is by “obeying My commands.”

Hence, it is easy to deduce the point. Jesus teaches if a “branch in me” fails thereafter to “obey my commandments,” you are not “abiding in Jesus,” and you cannot bear fruit which is essential to not being “taken away.” Once you are taken away, it is too late. The one in Jesus who failed to keep on abiding in Jesus — which Jesus defines as “obeying my commandments” — will find himself/herself “cut off from the vine, thrown outside, withered (dead) to be burned” in hell. It is rather obvious.

What of the faith alone gospel? Here Jesus explicitly says it does not save. Instead, Jesus directly makes salvation contingent, in part, on works of obedience. Only by keeping Jesus’ commands in you and obeying them will you produce the “fruit” (works) necessary for branches “in me” (Christ) to be spared being “taken away,” “cut off,” thrown ‘outside,” becoming thereby “withered” (dead) and then be “burned” at
the final harvest. In fact, one of those “commands” you need to keep in your mind is **this passage**, which when properly understood should spur the prayer to have such fruit!

### Branches In Me: Two Possible Fates

In John 15:1-6, Jesus says He is the Vine and the apostles are the branches. Jesus does not say the apostles’ *works* are branches. Instead, Jesus says an apostle — body, mind and soul — is a branch.

Jesus then says a branch “**in me**” that fails to produce fruit will be “taken away.” (Verse 2.)¹ This fruitless branch failed to “keep on abiding in me” (Verse 5). Such a branch, if it does not “keep on abiding in me,” is cast “outside,” and as a result becomes dried up (lost all life/is dead), to be cast into the fire to be burned. Thus, the fruitless branch in Christ — due to its not abiding in Jesus (*obeying him, see verse 10*) — lacks fruit, is taken away, thrown outside, dies and is burned.

The American Standard Version of John 15:1-6,10 reads:

(1) I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. (2) Every branch **in me** that beareth not fruit, he taketh it away [harpazo]: and every branch that beareth fruit, he cleanseth it, that it may bear more fruit. (3) Already ye are clean because of the word which I have spoken unto you. (4) Abide in me, and I in you. As

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1. The Greek for “taken away” is *harpazo*. Dillow argues it should mean here *lifted up* to follow vinedresser practice. This appears plausible at first until one does a word study on *harpazo* in Jesus’ usage. In John 10:27-28, Jesus says by *listening* and *following*, you will not be “harpazo-[ed]” from His hand. Clearly, *harpazo* has an end-of-salvation meaning. This also fits better the Metaphor of the Vine where Jesus next says the fruitless branch is thrown outside the vineyard.

2. Judas had just left the room. The other eleven alone are present.
the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; so neither can ye, except ye abide in me. (5) I am the vine, ye are the branches: *He that abideth in me*, and I in him, the same *beareth much fruit*: for apart from me ye can do nothing. (6) *If a man abide not in me*, he is *cast forth [outside] as a branch*, and is withered; and they gather them, and cast them into the *fire*, and they are *burned*....(10) If ye *keep my commandments*, ye shall *abide in my love*; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

Consequently, Jesus teaches those who “keep on abiding” in Him are alone able to produce fruit. (John 15:5.) Jesus then repeats twice that if you fail to “keep on abiding in Jesus,” you cannot “bear fruit.” (John 15:4, 6.) The Greek word for *abide* in all three verses is *meno*. It means to *stay* or *continue in one place*. Here it is three times used in the present participle active — a continuous tense. (On how to translate, see page 510 et seq.) Thus, Jesus means unless you “keep on staying in me,” you cannot “bear fruit.” (John 15:4, 6.) By contrast, if you “keep on staying in me,” you will bear much fruit. (John 15:5.)

The one who “does not keep abiding in me” is “cast outside” to be “burned.”³ (John 15:6.) Why did this happen? Because by failing to “abide in” Jesus, you could produce no “fruit” (John 15:4,6), and the one who “bears not fruit is taken away.” (John 15:2.)

What kind of burning happens to the fruitless branch that was taken away and thrown outside in John 15:6?

Verse six is clearly a reference to the time of burning of the branches. In vinedresser practice, this occurs at the final harvest time. Burning of vine branches is not done during the growing season.⁴

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3. This is *ballo*, to cast out, with *exo*, outside.
John Wesley, the famous evangelist, saw clearly Jesus’ meaning:

They are burned. It is not possible for words more strongly to declare, that **even those who are now branches in the true vine may yet so fall as to perish everlastingly**.\(^5\)

Jesus is clearly saying that you will be judged for failing to have fruit. The root cause of your failure is failing to “abide in” Jesus. Since abiding is crucial to having the fruit without which you will be sent to hell, it is imperative to discover Jesus’ definition on what it means to “abide in” Jesus. Our Lord defines it in the same speech.

**What Does It Mean To Abide In Jesus?**

What is the answer to the now perilous question of what it means to “keep on abiding” in Jesus? To repeat, this is crucial to understand. Jesus clearly says if you fail to do this (verse six), you will not have fruit, and you will thus become lost. You will be taken away and thrown outside into the fire to be burned.

Jesus tells you what it means just four verses later:

*If ye keep (tereo) my commandments (entolas, plural), ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.* (John 15:10 ASV)

So if you keep Jesus’ entolas, which means directions, you “abide in” His love. The verb translated as keep is the aorist active subjunctive. It is the verb tereo. It means to hold fast, observe or obey. As an aorist, it means kept,


observed, or obeyed. If you should have kept, observed or obeyed Jesus’ directions, you “shall” abide in His love. **You are abiding in Jesus.** If you should have failed to keep His commandments, you **no longer are abiding in Jesus’ love.** You are no longer abiding in Jesus (verse six). You are disobeying Jesus.

Actually, what Jesus is saying is obvious. **Obey His commands, and thus you will have the fruit that obedience provides.** Consequently, abiding in Jesus would have to mean obeying Jesus, just as He says. It actually produces the fruit of obedience. Absent such obedience, you are not abiding in Jesus. As a result, you lack the fruit essential not to be taken away and thrown outside and be burned in the fire.

This dovetails with John 8:51 which uses similar vocabulary. Jesus says there:

I tell you the truth, anyone who **obeys** (tereo) My teaching (**logos**) will [or should] never [ever] die! (John 8:51 NLT.)

Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man **keep my word,** he shall [or should] never see death. (John 8:51 ASV.)

This is simply repeated in John 15:1-6, 10. In John 8:51, Jesus says if you obey His teaching, you should never ever die. Why would that be? Because by obedience to Jesus’ teaching you will have the fruit Jesus requires in the Metaphor of the Vine. Absent such fruit of obedience, you will be taken away, be thrown outside, and be burned.

This is re-emphasized one more time in John’s Gospel. In John 3:36, it says in correct translation:

He that **keeps on obeying unto the Son** hath eternal life; but he that **keeps on disobeying the Son shall not see life,** but the wrath of God abideth on him. (John 3:36.)

The first part is typically translated as “believes,” but the Greek really says that when you “keep on obeying,” you are enjoying eternal life. This is then contrasted with what
happens when you “keep on disobeying the Son.” The second part says God’s “wrath keeps abiding on” such a disobedient person.

Thus, John 3:36 is re-emphasizing John 15:1-10 and John 8:51. As long as you are obeying Jesus, you should never ever die. (John 3:36a; John 8:51.) However, when you are not obeying Jesus’ *entolas*, and instead you are being disobedient to His *entolas*, you have the wrath of God abiding on you. You lack the fruit that is essential to not being taken away, thrown outside and then be burned. (John 3:36b; John 15:1,6.)

**Is ‘Abiding in Me’ Distinct From ‘Abiding in My Love’?**

Can it be argued that “abiding in me” in John 15:5-6 does not mean “abiding in my love” in John 15:10? Is this “abiding in my love” in John 15:10 (which Jesus defines as *obeying His commandments*) something disconnected with what Jesus just said was “abiding in me” that you absolutely had to have in order to avoid the final fiery judgment in John 15:6? No. They are identical for a few strong reasons.

First, let’s go back to verse five.

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for apart from me ye can do nothing. (John 15:5 ASV.)

Here, ‘bearing fruit’ is anyway likely the result of “obeying my commandments” in John 15:10. The concept of fruit is typically equated by Jesus with good works and obedience. (Matt. 7:16-20; 13:22; 21:43.) Thus, if Jesus later explains the way to abide in “His love” is to obey His commandments (John 15:10), this naturally explains why there is a causal nexus with such abiding and “bearing fruit” in John 15:5. Obedience has fruit — *works of righteousness*.

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6. See “The Use of Pisteuo By The Greatest Prophet (John the Baptist) In John 3:36 As Obeys” on page 448.
A second proof that “abide in me” (15:5-6) is to be equated with “abide in my love by obeying my commandments” (15:10) comes from other elements within the Metaphor of the Vine itself.

In verse four, Jesus says “Abide in me, and I in you.” Doesn’t this verse demonstrate a synergy between Jesus “abiding in you” and our “abiding in” Jesus? Yes. Jesus explains what it means for Him to abide in us in verse seven.

If ye abide in me, and my words (rhemata, declarations, sayings)⁷ abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

(John 15:7)(ASV).

Thus, what Jesus means by “abide in me and I in you” (John 15:4) is that if you abide in Jesus, then Jesus’ words (rhema) are abiding in you. (John 15:7.) Thereupon, Jesus is abiding in you when His words are actively abiding in you.

Obviously, these rhema are the words that are the springboard for obedience to Jesus’ directions. They are His commandments (entolas) in 15:10. The meaning of rhema that fits best here and elsewhere is words of command or commands, not simply words. (See, Luke 5:4-5; John 6:63;6:68; cf. NAS New Testament Lexicon (rhema means inter alia “words of command”).) Hence, John 15:7’s mention of rhema — commands — abiding in you directly ties back into verse ten where abiding in Jesus’ entolas (directions) means we abide in His love (i.e., abide in Him.)

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⁷ In John 17:8, Jesus said to the Father that He has “given them the words (rhemata) which thou gavest me.” Robertson says rhemata has a slightly different connotation than the singular logos. Robertson says the “plural rhemata refers to every single word of God (John 3:34) and of Christ (John 5:47; 6:63, 68) while the singular logos (John 17:6, 14) refers to God’s message in its entirety.” (Jeffrey Khoo, “Evangelicals and Catholics Together in John 17:21?,” The Burning Bush 2/1 (January 1996) at 9, 13, citing Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1933) at 5:276.)
Consequently, it is easy to deduce that abiding in Jesus’ love (John 15:10) must be the same as “abiding in” Jesus (John 15:5-6) because His abiding in us (John 15:4) is defined as His commands abiding in us. (John 15:7.) In other words, if what is important about His abiding in us is His words/commands (John 15:7), then it makes perfect sense that what is important about us “abiding in” Jesus is our obedience to those very same words (entolas, rhemata) in us. (John 15:10.) Hence, it follows that ‘abiding in Jesus’ in verses five and six must mean “abiding in His love” in verse ten.

To repeat, the latter Jesus defined as “obeying [His] commandments.” (John 15:10.)

This brings us all the way back to the answer to the crucial question about salvation in John 15:1-6. Jesus has equated the crucial “abiding in me” in verse six with “abiding in My love” which in turn is defined as “obeying my commandments.” (John 15:10.)

Finally, it is spiritually preposterous to suggest one can be abiding in Jesus who is not also abiding in Jesus’ love. The two descriptions cannot possibly be distinct. For Jesus says “abiding in His love” is by “obeying my commandments.” (Jn 15:10.) “You are my friends if you do whatever I command you.” (Jn 15:14.) It follows that a Christian who disobeys Jesus’ commands is no longer abiding in Jesus’ love. It then could never make any sense to say a disobedient Christian is “abiding in” Jesus in the sense required in John 15:6. Thus, Jesus clearly means that a failing to abide in Him is a failure to obey Him, and its consequence is you lack the crucial fruit that will spare you from damnation.

8. This is once again corroborated by reading the epistle of Apostle John who is writing these inspired words from Jesus: “See that what you have heard from the beginning stays in you. If it does, you will also stay in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he promised us—even eternal life.” (1 Jn. 2:24,25 NIV, with meno corrected to mean stay, identified in bold). Thus, what you “heard” means the “entolas” (commandments) of Jesus.
This is underscored by John 3:36 which says if one “keeps on disobeying the son, the wrath of God keeps abiding on him.” (John 3:36.) It is thus nonsense to say one can “abide in” Jesus and thereby be able to produce the fruit necessary in John 15:1-6 yet be a disobedient Christian who lacks Jesus’ love for you.

Consequently, we know Jesus’ lesson on “abiding in my love” in John 15:10 is indistinguishable from “abiding in me” in John 15:6. Hence, obedience to Jesus’ commandments (John 15:10) is what it means to “abide in me” in John 15:5-6. It follows that **absent obedience you lack the crucial-saving fruit** of John 15:6. You are “cut off” and “burned.”

Accordingly, for multiple good reasons, Jesus abides in you when His commandments abide in you. Also, you abide in Jesus when you obey Him. Then only by obeying Jesus will you produce the fruit unto salvation required in John 15:1-6 and enjoy the love of Jesus. (John 15:10,14.)

**The Metaphor’s Meaning About Connection**

This conclusion then makes sense of the entire metaphor. Jesus means by connection to Him that apart from knowing Jesus’ words (commands, rhema & entolas), and keeping them in your memory, you cannot produce good fruit. Without this connection, you cannot obey Jesus. Thus, when Jesus in John 15:5 says it is not possible for you to bear fruit if you are not abiding in Jesus, the reason is plain. Without Jesus’ commands in you, **you are merely following your own sense of conscience of what is right and wrong.** You will ultimately be disobedient. Like the Pharisees who cherry-picked what to follow from the Law (Matt. 23:23), you will have a shallow set of commands to follow unless all of Jesus’ commands are part of your tool set of life.

Thus, in John 15:6, your failure to abide in Jesus (**i.e.**, obeying the words of Jesus) is guaranteed if you do not have Jesus’ words in you. John 15:4 and 15:7 say Jesus is in you when Jesus’ sayings and commands are in your memory (and you loyally follow them). Apart from having Jesus’ com-
mands in you (John 15:4,7) and you obeying them (John 15:10) and thus you abiding in Jesus (John 15:5-6), you can not produce any good fruit. (John 15:4-6.) And absent such good fruit, you are taken away, cast outside to be burned. (John 15:2,6.)

Implications On The Cheap Grace Gospel

Obviously, the Metaphor of the Vine is all about having more than just faith. If Jesus’ words are in you and He abides in you, but you do not abide in Jesus by obeying those very same words, then such disobedience will cause the wrath of God to remain on you. (John 3:36.) If you fail to obey Jesus’ commands, then you do not abide in Jesus/in the love of Jesus, and you will lack the fruit without which you will be marked as a branch to be thrown outside to be burned. (John 15:1,2,6,10.) Faith without fruit cannot save. Never could and never will. Jesus is merely repeating Deuteronomy 6:25. The Cheap Grace Gospel is clearly falsified by Jesus’ Metaphor of the Vine.

What About Jesus’ Promise Not To Cast Out In John 6:37?

Yet, some think this view is at odds with Jesus promising to never cast out someone in Jesus. Their argument is based on the common English translation of John 6:37. Based on this, they refuse to acknowledge the literal meaning of John 15:1-10.

However, a correct translation of John 6:37 fits perfectly into John 15:6.

John 6:37 actually says he who “keep on coming” to me “I will in no wise cast out.”⁹ This implies whoever stops coming to Jesus will be cast out. Proponents of faith alone, predestination, etc., admit the continuous aspect of the verb

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⁹ The Greek word for cast out is ekballo, which combines exo with ballo. The Greek word for coming is erchomai in the present tense, which means “is coming.”
tense for *come* in this verse.\(^\text{10}\) This is precisely what John 15:6 says. If you do not keep on staying in Jesus, then you bear no fruit, are cut off, become dead and are thrown in the fire.

This is clear in context of John chapter six. Jesus defines this *coming* in verse 40 of chapter six by a synonymous activity to *coming*. It is the activity of *looking*. “For my Father’s will is that everyone who *keeps looking* [present participle active] to the Son and *pisteuo eis* Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” (On the meaning of *pisteuo eis*, see page 428 *et seq.*

Thus, Jesus teaches that all those who *keep on coming* to Jesus and *keep on looking* to Jesus have the same benefit as those who in John 15:1-6 *keep on abiding* in Jesus and are consequently fruitful.

John 6:37 is merely restating the positive part of John 15:1-6. However, John 6:37 and John 6:40 both are *consistent with the negative warning of John 15:6* that those who stop coming to Jesus and stop looking to Jesus are those who do not keep on abiding in Him, are unfruitful and are cut off from the vine. They are as dead branches which, in the final harvest, are removed and burned.

Hence, there is nothing inconsistent between John 15:1-6 and John 6:37. Jesus will not cast outside anyone who keeps coming to Him, who keeps listening to Him and who

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\(^{10}\) Dr. James White admits: “Throughout this passage an important truth is presented that again might be missed by many English translations. When Jesus describes the one who comes to him and who believes in him [3:16, 5:24, 6:35, 37, 40, 47, etc.], he uses the present tense to describe *this coming*, believing, or, in other passages, hearing or seeing. The present tense refers to a *continuous, on-going action*. The Greek contrasts this kind of action against the aorist tense, which is a point action, a single action in time that is not on-going.... The wonderful promises that are provided by Christ are not for those who do not truly and continuously believe. The faith that saves is a living faith, a faith that *always looks* to Christ as Lord and Savior.” (White, *Drawn by the Father*: A Summary of John 6:35-45 (Reformation Press: 1999) at 10-11.)
keeps abiding in Him. He will cast outside only the ones who do not keep on listening to Him, who do not keep on coming to Him and who do not keep staying in Him. For these are the ones who are disobeying the son upon whom the wrath of God continues to abide. (John 3:36.)

**Distortions To Retain The Cheap Grace Gospel**

One can be certain what Jesus truly means in John 15:1-6,10 by studying how weak are the competing solutions to make Jesus sound like the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace.

Therefore, we can deduce the strength of the above conclusions by examining the unsuccessful struggle that Cheap Grace Gospel adherents endure to explain away the Metaphor of the Vine. By way of synopsis, these points are:

- One view holds that a branch is not an apostle. Instead, we are told that the branch is an apostle’s works. The fire that burns is supposedly in heaven (not hell), and it burns away wooden works, and thus does not imply the fiery judgment of hell. (Dillow, *Reign of the Servant Kings*.)

- Another view simply asserts the fire is not a threat of hell. Jesus is not threatening to throw any apostle outside where the sinners go en route to hell in Revelation 22:15. This is accomplished principally by deleting the word outside in the translation. The word for outside only appears in the original Greek, the Latin Vulgate, and the Spanish Reina Valera. Its omission in standard English translation helps sustain the nonsensical assertion that the fire and burning which Jesus mentions is not hell.

- Another view holds that a branch was never a true believer because the fate in hell proves they were never a believer. If a believer suffered in hell for lacking fruitfulness, this would contradict faith alone doctrine. This means Jesus contradicts Paul. Certainly that cannot be a ‘biblical’ outcome. However, then dogma from someone other than Jesus becomes the test of how to read Jesus even when the dogma is at odds with Jesus. This view ignores Jesus said the eleven believing apostles (Judas had...
left beforehand) are branches and are ‘clean right now.’ Jesus’ message is clearly directed at believers, not unbelievers. Jesus’ warning is to a branch “in me” that does not produce fruit because it does not continue to abide “in me.” Jesus’ warning of burning unfruitful believers at the final harvest is clear.

The Significance Of the Word *Outside* Missing In Most Translations

Before we discuss the argument some make that the burning in John 15:6 is not hell, we need to know that something is missing in the standard English translations. This omission began at least with the KJV. This omission continues today up through our NIV. Almost every translation in English omits that Jesus says the fruitless branch is cast outside despite the Greek word for outside being present in every Greek text. Vincent’s Word Studies says the Greek word here means “outside.” Vincent goes on to explain the fruitless branch is thrown “outside” the vineyard.

What would have been the consequence had outside been properly translated? Everyone would have seen the link to the “unbelievers, fearful (cowards), and liars” who in Revelation 22:15 are “outside” waiting to be thrown in the lake of fire in Revelation 21:8. There you have the identical steps as in John 15:6: the cowards and unbelievers et al. are “outside” to be “burned” in the fire of hell. Thus, correctly translating “outside” in John 15:6 would let all Christians easily and readily know Jesus is warning the apostles of being sent “outside.” This is the place en route to hell’s fire if they do not produce fruit because they failed to abide in Jesus. This failure to abide in Jesus is then equated by our Lord with a failure to “obey [His] commandments.” (John 15:10.)

However, as we all know, such an implication would destroy the Cheap Grace Gospel held by the many of those engaged in translation. It would also upset the doctrine of almost every other ‘evangelical’ group engaged in translation.
of our English Bible. So rather than translate it correctly, it is obscured by other less readily recognized words such as *forth, away, without,* etc.

Here is a sampling of the major translations where *outside* is not correctly reflected in the rendering.

If a man abide not in me, he is cast *forth* as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. (John 15:6 KJV, ASV, Webster, GB.)

If any one may not remain in me, he was cast *forth* *without* as the branch, and was withered, and they gather them, and cast to fire, and they are burned. (John 15:6 YLT.)

Anyone who does not remain in Me is thrown *away* like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. (John 15:6 NLT.)

Only a few translations render it correctly as *outside.* The Spanish Reina Valera uses “fuera” which means *outside.* The Latin Vulgate uses “foras” which likewise means *outside.* The Good News Bible is adequate, saying “out.”

It is hard to explain the behavior of the KJV unless one admits bias is involved. For the KJV renders the same expression in Matthew 21:39 when Jesus is talking of evil servants who kill the son whom the master then fires, having them “thrown *out* of the vineyard.” Why not translate similarly the similar expression in John 15:6?

Moreover, there is absolutely no doubt that the word at issue should be translated as *outside* in John 15:6. If we look at the same word’s usage throughout the New Testament, this is overwhelmingly obvious.

The same Greek word is used to describe Peter sitting “outside” while Jesus is inside being questioned by the high priest. Matt. 26:69 (NLT, GNB, Vulgate, RV)(“outside”). Cf. KJV, ASV, YLT, GB (“without”).
When Jesus was told that his mother and brothers were “outside” wanting to see him in Matthew 12:46, it was the same Greek word used in John 15:6. (NLT, WEB, RV, Vulgate) (“outside”); (KJV, ASV, YLT (“without”).)

The same Greek word is used by Jesus when He says in Matthew 5:13 that the salt that loses its savor is good for nothing but to be cast “outside.” (RV, Vulgate. Cf. KJV, ASV, NLT, GB, GNB (“out”); YLT (“without”).)

Likewise, in John 6:37, Jesus promises that anyone who keeps coming [present participle active] to Him He will in no wise “cast out” or “outside,” using this very same Greek word as in John 15:6.

Thus, why do you think this word for outside is not translated in John 15:6 by most English translations? What could be so bad about us knowing a branch in “me” who does not produce fruit and is thrown “outside” is in fact cast outside to be burned?

Because, as noted earlier, if outside were used, then everyone could have seen the link to the “unbelievers, fearful, and liars” who in Revelation 22:15 are “outside” waiting to be thrown in the lake of fire in Revelation 21:8.

(22:15) Outside the city are the dogs—the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idol worshipers, and all who love to live a lie.

(21:8) But cowards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, those who practice witchcraft, idol worshipers, and all liars—

their fate is in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death. (NLT)

Thus, when we examine the argument in the next section that says John 15:1-6 does not undermine cheap grace because the burning supposedly is not in hell, this argument is made only palatable due to the standard translations. They all obscure that the word outside is present in John 15:6. Such
obfuscation by means of translation permits such arguments that the burning is not in *hell* to appear plausible. However, in the original text, it is not even remotely possible.

Nevertheless, even as commonly translated by omitting *outside*, it is self-evident the fires of hell are the threat. Jesus says the branch that does not bear fruit and is taken away (verse two) — the one who does not continue to abide in Him (and hence cannot be fruitful) (verse five) — is ultimately withered, and is to be thrown away (outside) to be burned. It is dead and subject to fire. Laney sees the implication clearly. The final disposition is a “prelude to judgment, not of blessed fellowship with Christ in heaven.”

Smith agrees. “In the context, verse 6 describes the taking away in no uncertain terms as a taking away to judgment.”

**The Fiery Smelt Solution: The Burning Is Supposedly Not Hell**

Joseph Dillow contends that we must see John 15:6 in light of Paul’s words about a smelt. Paul speaks of our works being burned in a heavenly smelt so God can discern the good works from the bad. (1 Cor. 3:15.) Yet, we will pass through this smelt as if “by fire.” Thus Dillow says if we use Paul’s picture of a smelt to interpret Jesus’ remarks, Paul implies that Jesus means we remain saved after this burning process. Consequently, when Jesus says the branch is thrown outside to be burned, while Jesus literally says *you are the branch*, Dillow says Jesus surely must mean your *works* are the branch. These weak and strong works are supposedly then burned off to reveal the valid works. Something other than *you* is allegedly consumed by fire. Otherwise, Dillow realizes

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the Modern Cheap Grace Gospel’s entire edifice of doctrine would be falsified by Jesus. Dillow believes we surely cannot permit that to happen.

**Flaws In Dillow’s Spin That Fire Is Smelt In Heaven**

Unfortunately for this hypothesis, branches in the Metaphor that are burned are “you.” Jesus says this is the apostles who are “clean right now.” Yet, if they do not continue to bear fruit by staying in Jesus, Jesus warns they will be taken away, cast outside, and be entirely consumed by fire. *Apostles are people, not works.*

Moreover, it is impossible to believe the branches in the Metaphor of the Vine are equivalent to what Paul is discussing. No branch thrown in the fire will survive. If a branch could represent either good or bad works, as this cheap grace hypothesis assumes, there is still no branch that can survive a fire. Burning a branch made of *wood* will never reveal some left over good works. *It will all be ash.*

Thus, the picture Jesus used of branches being burned is a mismatch to what Paul envisions is thrown in the heavenly smelt. The Cheap Grace Gospel adherents are putting a square peg in a round whole. Paul imagines works of precious metal versus wood going into a smelt. Only the metal works survive. The wooden ones are burned off. Paul’s picture mismatches the context of Jesus’ metaphor which envisions *each and every fruitless branch made of wood is thrown outside and burned*. Thus, Paul’s heavenly smelt does not assist us in interpreting Jesus’ words.

Also, this argument has one other gaping problem. Jesus’ Metaphor of the Vine makes it clear the fruitful branch will be spared *any* burning. But Paul is saying that all Christians are to have their works passed through this heavenly smelt. Jesus and Paul cannot be talking of the same thing. If they were the same, then Jesus would be implying the fruitful branch never sees the smelt of heaven, which leaves only one ridiculous implication. It would mean the fruitful branch is
going to hell. This is nonsense. The one spared the fire in John 15:1-6 cannot be lost. Hence, the one whose works are smelted in heaven and are saved must include the fruitful branch in John 15:1-6 who is spared the fire experience which Jesus threatens. Hence, the smelt in heaven cannot contain the fire which Jesus promises to spare the fruitful branch from suffering in John 15:1-6. Thus, it is wholly improper to use Paul’s smelt idea to interpret John 15:1-6.

Further Spin That Fire Is Rarely A Symbol Of Hell

Many cheap grace adherents know this smelt notion does not work. Yet, they are undaunted. Dillow goes on to amazingly suggest the word fire rarely means God’s judgment. Joseph Dillow in Reign of the Servant Kings at first concedes that fire is used in Scripture as a symbol of God’s judgment, e.g., Isaiah 26:11. However, then he shockingly says: “Only rarely and exceptionally is it associated with the fires of hell.” (Reign, supra, at 412).

For this amazing statement, Dillow completely ignores Jesus frequent references to hell as a “fiery furnace” or “flames” or “fire.” (E.g., Matt. 5:22;13:42,50; Mk 9:43.)

In fact, the “fire” in view in John 15:6 is clear by continuing on in Jesus’ same speech. The Metaphor of the Vine (John 15:1-6) leads directly into John 16:1-2. There Jesus explains the prior warnings were so the apostles will not be “ensnared” (Greek skandalizo). This tells us the kind of “fire” in view in John 15:6. For Jesus in Matthew 13:41-42 similarly says that when He returns with the angels all those who are “ensnared” (Greek skandalizo) will be sent to the “fiery furnace.” Clearly, in Matthew this means hell.

Thus, the warning of the Metaphor of the Vine was given to discourage the apostles from being “ensnared” (skandalizo-ed) (John 16:1-2). They thereby avoid being thrown into the fire in John 15:6. Hence, it is clear this fire is the “fiery furnace” of hell. This is because Jesus uses the same Greek word elsewhere — “ensnared” (skandalizo-ed)
— and says this group goes into this “fiery furnace” in Matthew 13:41-42 on Judgment Day. It is thus utter nonsense to argue that John 15:6 is talking about a fire other than the fires of hell.

Spin That Branch Thrown In The Fire Never Believed

Others realize both the smelt theory and fire-not-hell theory do not wash. Therefore, another proposal to save cheap grace from John 15:6 is to say the branch thrown in the fire never was a believer.

However, in John 15:1-6, Jesus tells eleven apostles that they are branches. They are all “clean” right now. (Judas had just left.) Jesus is thus talking to eleven believers who are branches. However, Jesus warns them that a branch “in me” will be cut off if it lacks fruit on the branch. (Verse two.) Jesus says if you fail to abide in Him (i.e., are disobedient to His word in you), you will become like a branch that is withered (fruitless) and thrown in the fire. This means Jesus threatened a believing apostle with damnation for failure to continue to abide in Jesus, i.e., obey His commandments. Hence, Jesus refutes the Cheap Grace Gospel that says there is nothing you need to continue to do to remain saved after you have initial faith in Jesus.

Undaunted by Jesus’ clarity, some commentators like John MacArthur adopt the idea that the Metaphor of the Vine solely threatens unbelievers. He does so because he admits the fire described in John 15:6 is hell. MacArthur says “the imagery of burning suggests that these fruitless branches are doomed to hell.” (MacArthur, The Gospel of Jesus (Zondervan: 1994) at 171.)

However, if the branch is a Christian who goes to hell for “failing to abide in Jesus” (i.e., have His word in you bear fruit), then the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace is wrong. How then can salvation be by faith alone without works?

To solve John 15:1-6 so the Cheap Grace Gospel is upheld, John MacArthur in his Study Bible (1997) in direct contradiction to Jesus makes an ad hoc assertion that the
branches that do not produce fruit were never true believers. “The branches that do not bear fruit are those who profess to believe but their lack of fruit indicates genuine salvation has never taken place and they have no life from the vine.” (Id. at 1615.)

However, Jesus said a believing apostle who was clean right now is a branch subject to this threat. Jesus talks about a “branch in me” that does not “bear fruit” being “cut off.” As the New Living Translation words it, Jesus says: “He cuts off every branch of Mine that doesn’t produce fruit....” (John 15:2 NLT.)

Laney points out, this phrase “in me” refers to saved persons elsewhere in the Gospel of John.13 Dillow too concurs that it would be “inconsistent to say the phrase in 15:2 ['branch in me’] refers to a person who merely professes to be saved but is not.”14

Furthermore, it only gets worse for MacArthur’s view as one reads the passage. Jesus says again the failure of a “branch to keep staying in me” (continuous tense of meno) will end up making it a useless branch, to be thrown outside and burned. (John 15:6.)

Jesus meant this as a warning to apostles to bear fruit, and to do this they had to continue to abide “in me.” Jesus defines this as “obeying my commandments” so that we “abide in my love.” (John 15:10.)

The implication of Jesus’ Metaphor is clear. The Apostles knew that their failure to abide in Jesus would lead to the failure of fruitfulness and the consequence of the fire for useless branches. This message unquestionably was the same as Jesus gave elsewhere: be fruitful or perish. “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is thrown in the fire.” (Matt.7:19.)

Baptist Professor Gary Derickson Concurs MacArthur Errs

That a believer is being warned is confirmed by the careful analysis of Gary W. Derickson, a Baptist college professor, in “Viticulture and John 15:1-6,” in Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society (Spring 2005). He is blunt that it is incorrect to ignore that the risk in verse six (being burned outside the vineyard) belongs to a believer:

[Jesus] was clearly addressing His believing disciples. He linked answered prayer to abiding (v 7) and His Father’s glory to their fruit bearing (v 8). Both abiding and fruit bearing, developed and defined in vv 4 and 5, are related directly and conditionally to the men standing in Jesus’ presence. Both vv 6 and 7 begin with third-class conditional clauses, indicating that it was possible for the disciples, undeniably identified by “you” in v 7, to fail to abide. If they could fail to abide in v 7, they could also be described by and subject to the warning in v 6. When the fruitfulness that results from abiding demonstrates their relationship to Christ as His disciples (v 8) and is seen in light of the promises of vv 5 and 7, their usefulness as His disciples must be in view in the warning in vs 6. Id., at 41-42.

Derickson then deals with the clear implication of what it means that one who was a branch in Him is then detached.

How can one be a branch attached to Christ and then become detached without ever having been regenerate or without losing salvation?

Yes, indeed. As Derickson says, Jesus just warned that a branch “in me” can become detached by failing to abide in Jesus. This is totally anathema to the faith alone gospel.
Derickson then says if you want to hold to the faith alone gospel and see this as a “commentary [by Jesus] on justification,” then one solution is to say Jesus was talking of branches that never abided in Him. This is MacArthur’s argument. However, not only does this contradict Jesus’ words, but also, as Derickson points out, it makes no sense within the passage.

The problem with this is that it would mean, strangely, that Jesus issued a warning to unbelievers in the middle of encouraging His disciples, individuals who believed in Him but who needed to be strengthened to keep trusting Him in view of what they would experience over the next three days. If uselessness was not Jesus’ point, then the only interpretation for anyone holding eternal security would be spiritual decline and discipline by death for persistently disobedient believers.

Derickson tells the holders of the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace how implausible is such a solution. You have to ignore the fact that the ones warned were those presently abiding in Jesus. You have to assume those warned about failing to abide were nonbelievers. Also, Jesus would have oddly inserted this message during a discourse clearly talking to believing apostles in positive terms about abiding in Him. Also, the context of uselessness points to believers, not unbelievers. Yet, if MacArthur’s solution is abandoned, there are no more solutions left. The alternatives do not wash, such as a “branch in me” is a Christian who is merely disciplined, not damned. (We discussed earlier about how this solution can not work.)

15.“The Fiery Smelt Solution: The Burning Is Supposedly Not Hell” on page 358 et seq.
Derickson Is Compelled To Deny The Fire Is Hell But Admits It Is A Final Harvest Analogy

Derickson is a believer in faith alone. He is caught in a dilemma by his carefully studied admissions above. In Derickson’s case, due to the admission that a believer is in view, he opts to save cheap grace by saying the fire is supposedly not hell. We already previously disproved that option.

Yet, what is fascinating to watch in Derickson’s argument below is how desperate it has become. He makes this claim about a fire not in hell while ignoring evidence Derickson himself provides on how viticulture illuminates the passage. Listen to a man caught in a contradiction.

That v 6 looks at the **fall, postharvest pruning** is seen in the practice of burning all the wood not attached to the vine....Jesus’ message to His disciples...[i]f they chose not to “abide,” they would not bear fruit and would therefore not be used by God. *(Id., at 42-43.)*

Derickson, however, argues this is not judgment:

In a vineyard anything not attached to the vine is useless and discarded. A **part of the discarding process at the end of the productive season is the burning of dry materials.** The burning **need not describe judgment;** it is simply **one step in the process** being described. It is what happens to pruned materials. Their uselessness, not their destruction, is being emphasized. *(Id., at 41.)*

Despite his efforts to minimize the viticulture picture, Derickson just admitted this burning is an **end of harvest** process of burning off deadwood. Derickson can try to claim this is ‘only the pruned branches’ and disclaim this implies ‘judgment.’ But the viticulture picture Derickson himself provides is an **end of harvest** burning process. Thus, Jesus was looking at the **final harvest.** When it is finished, all the useless
branches which are left over are then burned. Those who did not produce fruit are dead branches which are burned. Whether Derickson admits it or not, the picture that viticulture paints here is that Jesus must be speaking of the final judgment. There is a fire for the useless branches at harvest time. It is simple. It is not difficult to discern.

Again, the futility of the various foxholes that Cheap Grace Gospel proponents utilize to escape Jesus’ meaning is one of the best proofs that faith alone is wrong doctrine. This goes for those who like MacArthur claim that the branches “in me” were never believers. It goes just as well for those like Derickson who recognize the silliness of MacArthur’s view. He too advances an absurd solution that the burning at the end of harvest of useless branches implies only a disciplinary step on Christian believers. Rather, being burned in a final harvest means precisely that — the judgment of hell.

**Conclusion**

Jesus’ lesson in the Metaphor of the Vine is the same as John 3:36 — you can believe, begin having life for the age, but if you disobey Him, then you “shall not see life.” However, if you let Jesus’ commands abide in you, then Jesus will live in you and empower you to have the fruit necessary to avoid the final judgment. But if you disobey those words, and thus you do not abide in Him, you can produce nothing. You will be a branch with no fruit. The Vinedresser removes all branches with no fruit in the final harvest and burns them. Damnation is your lot.

Of course this Metaphor refutes the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace. But who is your Lord? Jesus or the modern fabulist of cheap grace? Choose the Lord! He is your “sole teacher.” (Matt.23:8,10.) None can speak in His presence with their words of consolation for mere belief. Jesus says *continue to abide* (obey) *and bear fruit.* Fail to do so and be burned. It is that simple.