

ONCE SAVED, ALWAYS SAVED?

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On this matter, the religious community is divided. Some have attempted to codify the approach to this subject by speaking of "the perseverance of the saints." Of course, that expression is one invented by men, and therefore they have assigned their own meaning to it. Whatever resemblance it may have to the truth, it is not the truth itself, and therefore, we owe no allegiance to it. However, God has spoken too clearly on this the subject of being "saved" for such divisions and opinions to be justified. Further, God has made no provision for men to speculate or philosophize about His salvation, much less put forward their conclusions as though God Himself had said them. Let us be clear, then, the question posed in this devotion, as it is stated, cannot be found in Scripture. Therefore, there is no way to be certain that it reflects "the mind of the Lord," or states the case as it ought to be stated. To begin with, that is a very tenuous foundation on which to erect a theological postulate, much less set out to actually prove it.

SOME INITIAL AFFIRMATIONS

Initially, it is necessary to erect certain pillars of Divine utterance. These will have a bearing on our reasoning concerning this subject. They are matters that are not to be taken for granted. The subject of salvation is, by Divine intent, held within the circumference of these statements and their implications.

First, no one who IS believing is in jeopardy of being lost. Consistently, the Word of God affirms salvation for those who ARE believing. A believer, after all, is someone who IS believing – not someone who HAS believed, or presumes to classify himself as a believer. Jesus Himself said, "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life" (John 3:36, NKJV). Again He said with great firmness, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life" (John 6:47, NKJV). Again He said, "He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:26, NKJV). Paul affirmed, "And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:39). Peter announced, "he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame" (1 Pet 2:6, NKJV). Any view of salvation that allows for the presence of unbelief, or a lack of persuasion, or a failure to trust in the Lord, is nothing more than a delusion from the wicked one, for God has provided no such salvation.

Second, salvation is not an experience that is fully transacted in a moment of time. It is rather a process that commences with the conviction of the soul (John 16:8-11). Newness of life is birthed when one is baptized into Christ (John 6:3,5; Rom 6:3-4; Gal 3:27) – but that is by no means the end of the matter. Salvation includes being conformed to the image of God's Son (Rom 8:29), a process that is accomplished by increasing stages of change, from glory unto glory. This change is wrought by the Holy Spirit as the ones being saved are beholding the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus (2 Cor 3:18; 4:6). Furthermore, the process of salvation will not be complete until our bodies are also changed at the resurrection of the dead. That change is referred to as "the redemption of the body," for which the ones who are being saved are waiting (Rom 8:23; Eph 1:14). Any consideration of salvation that excludes the necessity of ongoing change in this life, and final conformity to the image of Christ is nothing more than an imagination.

FAITH IS NOT TAKEN FOR GRANTED

The Word of God does not take faith for granted. It challenges believers to "earnestly contend for the faith" (Jude 3), "fight the good fight of faith" (1 Tim 6:12), and continue in the faith (Acts 14:22). We are also admonished to "examine" ourselves to see if we ARE "in the faith" (2 Cor 13:5). The Spirit tells us of people who have "departed from the faith" (1 Tim 4:1), made "shipwreck of the faith" (1 Tim 1:19), and believed "for a while" (Luke 8:13). Faith, therefore, must be deliberately "kept" by the one being saved (2 Tim 4:7).

It is possible for the person who has escaped sin, if he does not continue to believe, that an "evil heart of unbelief" can enter into him, thus excluding him from the promise of eternal rest. Therefore those in Christ – and ONLY those in Christ – are solemnly warned, "Take heed, BRETHREN, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. (Heb 3:12). Faith will not simply remain in the heart while it is unattended. It must be kept alive by the Word of God, for it is the spiritual sustenance on which faith thrives. This is involved men living "by every word of God" (Lk 4:4).

Salvation is only as sure as our faith! Everything relating to salvation that we presently have is by faith – everything. Whether it is justification (Rom 5:1), access to the grace of God (Rom 5:2), or purity of heart (Acts 15:9), it is all by means of our faith. Our spiritual life is maintained by faith (Rom 1:17), we stand by faith (2 Cor 1:24), and walk by faith (2 Cor 5:7). Christ even dwells in our hearts "by faith" (Eph 3:17). It is not possible to maintain all of the benefits of faith while in a state of unbelief – a state concerning which believers are warned (Heb 3:12,19; 4:1,11).

On the subject of falling away, or being lost after once saved, it is not in order to cite promises that are made to those who ARE believing, as though they covered those who are NOT believing. God HAS spoken on the subject of falling away, and His words are quite clear (Heb 6:4-6; 10:26; 2 Pet 2:20-22).

Believers do not live in a moral vacuum. They are in a cursed world, hounded by a fierce adversary, and living in a frail house of clay. They are not in heaven yet, and to get there

will require effort on their part – effort that will be undergirded by the Lord Jesus. It is inconceivable that God Himself, the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and even the holy angels could involve themselves in your salvation, without you being involved yourself. Such a thought is an absurdity that is unworthy of any consideration.

God speaks of a fallen state that is worse than never having known the Lord at all (2 Peter 2:20-21). The Spirit also speaks of those who have had extensive involvement with heavenly things, yet through unbelief, have fallen into a condition from which they cannot be recovered or extricated (Hebrews 6:4-6). All of those benefits were held by faith, and are lost by unbelief, or a lack of faith.

If a person doubts this can happen, a sober reflection on several accounts of Scripture should serve to awaken them from their self-induced stupor. Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden of Eden by God Himself. They had no sin, and had some form of fellowship with the Lord. Yet, they were expelled from the very Garden in which God placed them (Gen 2:15; 3:24). Who is the person willing to affirm they were really never in the Garden at all? Also, Israel was given the land of Canaan. After ALL of them were delivered from Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, and were miraculously sustained, a considerable percentage of them never did get into the promised land (1 Cor 10:1-11). The others, together with the children who were born in the wilderness, did enter the land, possessing it for a while. Yet, they were also expelled from it because of their unbelief, as God had warned them (Lev 18:8; 20:22; Jer 9:19). Would anyone be foolhardy enough to affirm Israel never really were saved from Egypt or occupied Canaan? And what about Judas, chosen by Jesus Himself to be an Apostle. We are told he "fell by transgression," and was thus excluded from the Apostolic office (Acts 1:25-26). His place, according to prophecy, was taken by another (Acts 1:20). Will any one dare to affirm Judas was really never an Apostle.

Yet, some would have us believe those who fall away were never really saved. To those daring to take such a view, the Holy Spirit says, "You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked" (2 Peter 3:17). And again, "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). There are some who affirm this is not the same as being lost – but we refuse to believe them. To believe what they have said requires that salvation be fully realized by those who cease to believe, return to the world, and do not remain in fellowship with Christ – a fellowship into which they were called (1 Cor 1:9).

Can a person be lost once he is saved? As long as they are in the realm of hostility – "this present evil world" – they can again be ensnared by the devil. Ultimate safety will be experienced only when we are removed from this world. Until then, our ONLY safety is found in our faith and what we possess by it (1 John 5:4-5). Now, that is our sole means of connection with the eternal. That is why we must put on the whole armor of God (Eph 6:10-18).

If, in this world, you could not fall from the heavenly places, there would be no need for an Intercessor (Heb 7:25). The angels would not be required to minister to the saved (Heb 1:13-14). The Holy Spirit would not be required to indwell the believer (Rom 15:13). If one imagines that Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the angels engage in their indispensable ministries apart from the willing involvement of the individual, Satan has surely deceived them. No such thought is ever expressed in Scripture! The reasoning is flawed that assumes heaven is involved in our salvation, but we are not. It is OUR involvement that is the weak point, so to speak. At the point we "draw back," God ceases to be pleased with us, and that is a matter of revelation (Heb 10:38-39). It is then that we move outside of the circumference of Divine grace and protection.

While there is a danger of being lost once we are saved, it is certainly not necessary. God is "able to keep you from falling, and present you faultless before His throne with exceeding joy" (Jude 24-25). As you place your faith in Him, walking in the Spirit and living by faith, you WILL be kept safe. In fact, it is your faith that is "the victory that overcometh the world" (1 John 5:4-5). But do not assume that process is automatic. It does require all of your effort. It is YOU that must "fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life" (1 Tim 6:12). Rather than waste time speculating about the possibility of falling away, engage all of your powers to ensure you do not! Your effort will be supported by God's grace and power. You do have the promise of God that as long as you ARE believing, you are being kept by the power of God. Here is how the Spirit states the case: You have been begotten by God in order to obtain an eternal inheritance, you "who are kept by the power of God THROUGH FAITH unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet 1:5).

PRAYER POINT: Father, in the name of Jesus, grant me grace to not only believe, but to avoid foolish speculations about Your great salvation.

-- Tomorrow: **WHEN GOD SHOWS HIS WAY** --