

The Danger of Falling From Grace

Sermon by Ed Bousman

Millions of people believe that once you are saved you never can be lost. One of the passages of scripture that is used to prove the point, or perhaps I should say misused to prove the point is John 10:28, "And I give unto them > eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." It is argued from this verse that since Jesus gives us eternal life, He will never take it away. After all, He said they shall never perish. No one shall snatch them out of my hand. If this is all it said, there might be some reason for believing this. However, this is not all. If they would read the preceding verse, the sheep are identified. In the 27th verse, Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me." Here the sheep are identified as those who hear His voice and who follow Him. It is true, as a child of God, you will never perish and no one shall snatch you out of His hand, unless you stop hearing Him and following Him. When you stop hearing the voice of Jesus and stop following Him, the "deal" is off. Let me say it again! The sheep that Jesus is talking about are those who hear His voice and follow Him. Those who no longer hear His voice and who no longer follow Him are not His sheep. They do not qualify for the promise of, "they shall never perish." Those who continue to hear His voice and who continue to follow Him are in His hand and they shall never perish. No man can snatch them from His hand.

Another verse that is used to prove this point, and again I say misused, is John 5:24, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation: but is passed from death unto life." It is argued from this verse that Jesus is saying as a Christian you have passed from death to life and can never come into condemnation. This is exactly what He means when He says that if you hear His word, and believe the One who sent Him, that is true. **BUT SUPPOSE YOU STOP HEARING HIS WORD AND STOP BELIEVING WHO SENT HIM?** We know many that have. When this happens, the "deal" is off. The promise is for those who hear His word and believe the One who sent Him. As long as you continue to hear His word and believe the One who sent Him, you have it made; the promise is yours. In these verses cited that promise us eternal life, the danger of falling away is evident. **HEAR MY VOICE! BELIEVE HIM THAT SENT ME! HEAR MY VOICE! FOLLOW ME!** Yes, you can fall away; you can fall from grace. Many and varied are the verses in God's word that sustain this. We will mention a few.

THE WICKED SERVANT

In Matthew 18 is the story of the wicked servant. Jesus said, ". . . Thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all thy debt because thou besoughtest me: shouldst not thou also have had mercy on thy fellow-servant, even as I had mercy on thee? And his Lord was wroth and delivered him to the tormentors till he should pay all that was due. So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you if ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts." In this story Jesus had told the story of a King who had reckoned with his servants. One who owed ten thousand talents (an impossible sum) was forgiven when he had not wherewith

to pay. This same servant went out and found another servant who owed him a hundred shillings (just a few dollars). When his fellow servant asked him mercy, the wicked servant had him cast into prison till he should pay all that was due. When the king heard of this, his decision was to revoke the forgiveness and to cast him into prison. Jesus said that the Father would do the same to us, if we did not forgive those who sinned against us. In these words of Jesus, we learn that God can and will take back His forgiveness, if we are unforgiving. Remember that Jesus said, "SO SHALL ALSO MY HEAVENLY FATHER DO UNTO YOU..." From this word of the Lord Himself, we conclude that a person can fall from grace.

ANOTHER WICKED SERVANT

In Matthew 24 there is a story of a servant with the chance to be faithful or unfaithful. Jesus said in verse 50, "The Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he expecteth not, and in an hour when he knoweth not and shall cut him asunder and appoint his portion with the hypocrites . . ." Jesus in his sermon on the end-time said, "Who is the servant that the lord has set over the household to render them their food in due season." This is a picture of an elder--one set over the household, the church, to feed. Jesus said, "Blessed is that servant, if when the master returns, he finds so doing." It is a great honor to be an elder of the church. The faithful elder has no idea what joys await his faithfulness upon the return of the Master. But said Jesus, "If that evil servant shall say in his heart, 'My Lord tarrieth,' and shall eat and drink with the drunken and beat his fellow servants, that servant will be cut asunder and cast into the outer darkness." Perhaps not many elders would be found on Sunday evening in saloons eating and drinking with the drunken at the time of the evening service, but if they are at home drinking coffee, and eating potato chips, while watching some booze sponsored TV program, are they not eating and drinking with the drunken? Jesus said that wicked servant would be cut asunder. BEING CUT ASUNDER IS NOT WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE FAITHFUL, WHEN THE LORD RETURNS. Since the Lord was talking about a servant that he had personally set over his household, what other conclusion can we reach? ELDERS CAN FALL FROM GRACE.

FOOLISH VIRGINS

In the story of the ten virgins that Jesus told in Matthew 25, He said that five were wise and five were foolish. At the end of the story in verse 11, we hear the foolish say, "LORD, LORD, OPEN TO US." And we hear Jesus say, "Verily, I say unto you, I know you not." The ones ready went in with Him to the marriage feast and the door was shut. The foolish virgins were shut out. If I could find Jacob's ladder, and climb up to heaven and come up through a man-hole of the golden sidewalks of glory, I am sure that I would not get very far until I would be chal-lenged--HALT! WHO GOES THERE? But on that day when Jesus comes I will not be challenged. No angel or saint will question my right to be there because I shall go in with Him. There is a song that the wicked have no right to sing, but the Christian can sing it and with every right to do so. WHEN THE SAINTS GO MARCHING IN, WHEN THE SAINTS GO MARCHING IN, LORD, I WANT TO BE IN THAT NUMBER, WHEN THE SAINTS GO MARCHING IN. Remember that

the door was shut and the foolish virgins could not get in. This is certainly not the picture of those who are saved and who will make it. The story of the wise and foolish virgins definitely warns us about the possibility of falling from grace.

THE ONE-TALENT SERVANT

Again in Matthew 25 in the story of the talents we are warned about the danger of falling away. In verse 30 the Lord said, "And cast ye out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth." In this story the Lord told of a certain man who gave talents unto his servants. The talent was a sum of money, not talent as we usually think of it. However, it doesn't make any difference because he gave unto them according to their ability. It was the man with one talent that Jesus was talking about, when he said he hid his lord's money. It could have been about the five-talented person, no doubt. Many a five-talented person has buried his talent, but in this case it was the one. This man Jesus was talking about was a real servant. Jesus said he was his lord's servant. Because he buried the talent, he was cast out. Notice that he was not cast out for doing something wrong. He is not charged with murder or drunkenness or immorality. It wasn't anything that he did that was wrong; it was what he did not do. To be cast out is not the fate of the faithful when the Lord comes. From this story it is evident that a person can fall from grace by sins of omission.

UNFRUITFUL BRANCH

In the 15th chapter of John is the statement of Jesus about the unfruitful branch. "I am the true vine and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away. Every branch that beareth fruit he cleaneth it that it may bear more fruit." That unfruitful branch was a branch that was in Him just as the fruitful branch. When I was growing up, we had a grape arbor. One day I saw my Dad do what appeared to be a very foolish thing. He took some shears and began to cut most of the branches back. I thought he had ruined it. That year we had more grapes than ever before. If you are a fruit-bearing branch, the Lord will cut you back sometimes. He will trim you a little bit. Did the Lord ever give you a trimming? I get trimmed all the time. It may hurt a little but it is good for you. You will bear more fruit. But what about the branch that does not bear any fruit. Jesus says in verse 6, "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch and they are withered and they cast them into the fire and they are burned." To be cast into the fire and to be burned is certainly not the fate of a faithful Christian, but of the unfaithful child of God. From this statement of Jesus about the casting forth of the unfruitful branch we are warned of the danger of falling away.

THE OLIVE BRANCH

Romans 11:21 has a very graphic way of telling about the one who falls from grace. "For if God spared not the natural branches, neither will he spare thee. Behold then the goodness and the severity of God: toward them that fell, severity, but toward thee, God's goodness, if thou continue in his goodness; otherwise, thou shalt be cut off. And they also

if they continue not in their unbelief shall be grafted in again; for God is able to graft them in again." In these lines we are instructed that the Jew was the natural branch and was cut off because of unbelief. The Gentile was grafted in. Paul's argument is that if the Jew could be cut off, so can you. His descriptive word is, "THOU SHALT BE CUT OFF." Certainly this is not the terminology of those who will endure unto the end. From this analogy we are instructed in no uncertain terms.

THERE IS DANGER IN FALLING AWAY.

BUFFETED BODY

First Corinthians 9:27 is where Paul tells us that "I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage lest by any means after that I have preached to others I myself should be rejected." Paul reminds us that he has trouble with his body. He has to fight with it to bring it into bondage. Who is the boss in your life? You or your body? Does your body tell you what you will do, or do you boss your body? Many times we have heard people say in desperation to defend "once in grace always in grace" that if you fell, you will lose the joy of your salvation, not your salvation. This is not what it says. Paul says he could be rejected. This terminology is not favorable to the idea of "once in grace always in grace." Paul uses the idea here of a boxer. He says, "So fight I, as not beating the air." Paul was not engaged in shadow boxing. This was a real life and death fight. His opponent was his body. Evidently he was the winner of the bout, because he would later say as he faced execution, "I have fought a good fight..." From this story of Paul's battle with the flesh we conclude that a person once saved can be lost.

EXAMPLES OF FALLING

In the next chapter, the 10th of First Corinthians in the 12th verse, Paul reminds us, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." This is good advice for anyone caught up in the "once-in-grace, always-in-grace" doctrine. You may think you stand and can never fall. Paul said take heed, "You can fall!" Several illustrations from the Old Testament were given. (A) They lusted after evil things and were overthrown. (B) They were idolaters and were overthrown. (C) They committed fornication and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. (D) They made trial of the Lord and perished by the serpents. (E) They murmured and were destroyed by the destroyer. Then Paul said that these things happened to them for our examples. **WHAT IS THE EXAMPLE?** The example of falling. Hear Him again, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." What other conclusion is there to this message from Paul, but that a saved person can be lost? **KEEPING THE LAW** One of the most direct statements in Holy Writ about falling from grace is when Paul said to the Galatians in the 5th chapter and 4th verse, "Ye are severed from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." There it is as plain as it can be. Ye are fallen from grace. He was talking about those who were trusting in the law to save them, in addition to Christ. He said, "YE ARE SEVERED FROM CHRIST." Now you cannot be severed from something you were not a part of. I have part of a missing finger on my right hand. The end was severed. When Paul says these people were severed from Christ, they could

not be severed from Christ if they were not a part of Christ in the first place. If people who are a part of Christ can be severed from him for not trusting enough in him, then why could they not be severed from him today? YE ARE SEVERED FROM CHRIST. YE ARE FALLEN FROM GRACE. Need any more be said? FIRST PRINCIPLES

In the 6th chapter of Hebrews we are told to leave the first principles and press on unto perfection. For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and tasted the good word of life and the power of the age to come and then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh and put him to an open shame. It says here that if you fall away, it is impossible to renew you to repentance while you crucify afresh the Son of God. Those who fell away were Christians, because they had been partakers of the Holy Spirit. Certainly this does not apply to sinners. God says they fell away. That settles it.

TRAMPLING THE BODY OF CHRIST

Hebrews 10:26 is equally instructive on this matter. "For if we sin willfully after we have received a knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins." In the preceding verses the sin that he was talking about was the sin of neglecting to assemble together. If we commit this sin, there is no more sacrifice for sins. In verse 29 we are told that those who commit this sin have trampled under foot the Son of God counted the blood of sanctification an unholy thing and have done despite to the spirit of grace. When a person misses the Lord's supper, in particular, he stomps on the body of Jesus. He might as well pour the fruit of the vine down the toilet, because he has despicable used the Holy Spirit. Many years ago, A. B. McReynolds of Kiamichi fame had a piece in the Kiamichi News about an Ohio preacher. He did not know it, but I was the Ohio preacher he was talking about. He did not know me at the time, but evidently had seen this article I had written and commented on it. He said, "The Ohio preacher was right." This is what the Ohio preacher said, "I would rather stand on the front porch on Sunday morning and drink a bottle of whiskey and throw the bottle at the first passerby and curse him, as to miss the Lord's Supper." The Ohio preacher continued, "I would not want to do either one, but of the two sins, the latter would have the most blighting effect on my eternal, imperishable, ever living, never-dying soul." Perhaps that is not exactly the way I would say it now in these days of my life, but the truth is still there nevertheless. SIN WILLFULLY, AND THERE REMAINETH NO MORE A SACRIFICE FOR SINS. Is it possible that anyone who reads this statement could believe in "once in grace, always in grace?" Perhaps they can, if they are more loyal to Calvinistic doctrine, than to the word of God.

HOGS AND DOGS

Then how about the famous passage from 2nd Peter 3:22, "It has happened unto them according to the true proverb, the dog turneth to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to wallowing in the mire." Peter was referring her to those who escaped the

defilement's of the world and then were again entangled therein and overcome; the last state of them is worse than the first. He even says it would be better for them if they had never known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered unto them. His analogy is graphic: You are like a dog turning to his vomit and like a hog that returns after being washed (or baptized) to wallowing in the mire. When the sheep cease to hear His voice and follow Him, they become hogs and dogs.

BOOK OF LIFE

And now a final proof from Revelation 3:1-6. Jesus tells the church at Sardis, "He that overcometh shall thus be arrayed in white garments and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels." From this verse it seems that the pen Jesus uses to write your name has an eraser on the other end. He mentions the fact that He will not blot out certain names. He had told this church that it had a name that it lived. But he said, "You are dead." It looked like a live church. If it takes a big preacher to have a live church, Sardis had it. If it takes a big building to make a live church, Sardis had it. If it takes a big crowd to have a live church, Sardis had it. It was a church that looked alive, but Jesus said it was dead. To this dead church He said, "I have found no works of thine perfected before my God. But said he, there are a few names in Sardis who have not defiled their garments. They shall walk with me in white for they are worthy." I WON'T BLOT OUT THEIR NAMES OUT OF THE BOOK OF LIFE. The ones who will walk with Jesus in white are the ones who have not defiled their garments. When the Bridegroom cometh will your robes be white? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb? Are you freely trusting in his grace this hour? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?

CONCLUSION

There are many more verses and passages that could be mentioned to pile up as evidence that once saved you can be lost, but surely these are enough. This message is not presented merely to prove that "once in grace always in grace" is not a Bible teaching, but to warn people about the illusion that if you were once a Christian, you can never be anything less; you can never be lost. It is more prevalent among us than some would think. At any funeral the preacher is expected to put the deceased on the front row of heaven with a harp in his hand and a crown on his head, regardless of what kind of life he lived. If he was baptized and was faithful for a while, that is all that matters. He may have fallen away and gone back to the old way of life, but that's O.K. He will make it. Officially in the Church of Christ (if it is lawful to use that term) we do not believe in once in grace always in grace, but we practice it anyway. As a parting shot I leave you with the words of Jesus to the church at Smyrna in Revelation 2:10, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life."

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"GOD IS JUST A PRAYER AWAY"

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