Eternal Security & Backsliding

A study of the doctrine of eternal security of the believer in Christ

"Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen." (Jude 1:24-25)

Introduction

All Christians at one point or another get concerned about their walk with the Lord. And that is good. We should be concerned at all times about the condition of our relationship to God. But because of improper teaching about the grace of God and what salvation really is, many are led to believe that they can lose their salvation if they commit certain kinds of sins or a certain number of sins after Christ saves them.

Also, many who think they CAN lose their salvation really do not possess true biblical salvation. They have a false works-based salvation that of course you can lose since that is what their gospel – their false gospel – is all about… salvation by man's performance, "salvation on the maintenance plan".

If we are truly saved blood-bought sinners for whom Christ died, and if we truly understand that "Salvation is of the Lord" [Jonah 2:9] and based entirely on the performance of Christ (and His ability to purchase a complete, full and lasting pardon for His people), and NOT based on our performance, then we will be less likely to be led astray by those false preachers who claim that a believer in Christ can lose their salvation. Similarly, if we are truly saved and if we understand the severity of the punishment inflicted on Christ for our sins, we will be less likely to perpetrate further crimes against our merciful, loving Saviour. We will realize what David meant when he said:

Psalm 51:4 – "Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight"

Do we believe what God has said about salvation?

If we could lose our salvation, then God is a liar, for He said:

*1 John 5:13 – "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; **that ye may know that ye have eternal life**, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God"*

A person can't know they have eternal life if there is a possibility of losing it. Speaking through Paul, God said:

*Titus 3:5 – "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy **he saved us**, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost"*

NOTE that 'saved' is PAST TENSE. For the saved, those whom God converted (versus those who converted themselves or who were converted by men), salvation is a completed transaction. Those who are 'in Christ' have been bought with a price (1 Cor 6:20) which is the work of righteousness done by Christ, and that purchase was not on the installment plan. Paul wrote this in his letter to the church at Rome:

Romans 8:38-39 – "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

NOTE that the power and love of God is in *Christ Jesus*, not in *us*.

Contrary to popular teaching, our faith is not an "instrument" God uses to save us. The Bible declares that we are spiritually dead until and unless God saves us (Eph 2:1). If we think that there is any power or ability in us to stay saved, then we may not be saved. In order to understand that you cannot lose your salvation it is important to understand the lostness, sinfulness, and total depravity of fallen man. That way, you will then understand a saved person's total dependence on Christ for keeping him from falling. If you ever thought your salvation in any way hinged on your performance then you must not understand the scope of what God is saying in Isaiah 64:6 where He calls all our righteousnesses "filthy rags":

Isaiah 64:6 – "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."

If staying saved depended on anything the believer did or did not do, then no one would make it to heaven. But it depends on Him who is able to keep us from falling:

Jude 1:24 – "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy"

Don't we have to stay holy?

Hebrews 12:14 – "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:"

If you will just look 4 verses above verse 14 to verse 10, you will see that the

holiness referred to is *Christ's holiness*, which we receive when we become born-again:

*Hebrews 12:10 – "For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of **his holiness**."*

We get Christ's holiness if and when we become saved by God's grace. A true Christian doesn't lose Christ's holiness because he can't lose God's grace:

2 Timothy 1:9 – "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began"

Can true Christians 'fall from grace'?

We might get the impression that we can lose our salvation (fall from grace) when looking at the following isolated verse:

Galatians 5:4 – "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace."

But then when we look at the verse that immediately follows, we get additional information regarding what Paul was talking about:

Galatians 5:5 – "For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith"

Paul is saying here in Galatians that salvation (i.e. Christ's righteousness) is received by faith, not by the works of the law. His point is not that we can fall from grace. He is telling the Galatians that they are missing the whole meaning of grace if they think they are justified by the law. In fact, this point is the main reason for him writing the epistle to the Galatians. The Greek word for 'fallen' is 'ekpipto' which means "to be driven out of one's course". So the Galatians were falling off course with respect to their understanding of the Gospel of grace. So was Paul telling the Galatians they were in danger of losing their salvation? Not in view of 2 Timothy 1:9, Jude 1:24, and other verses mentioned above, and we are not at liberty to ignore these other verses in order to get some interpretation that we like.

Whose faith saves?

Salvation doesn't depend on the believer maintaining a proper level of faith. Salvation depends on Christ and His faith and His faithfulness:

*Galatians 2:16 – "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the **faith of Christ**, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." (KJV).*

The problem is, many people are led astray because the modern Bibles have been mistranslated to say "faith in Christ" when they should say "faith of Christ". Christ is the only person who was ever faithful in obeying all God's laws all the time. He faithfully fulfilled the law and also faithfully executed God's plan of salvation by giving His life as a ransom for many:

Matthew 20:28 – "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Whose faithfulness keeps the believer secure?

Only God's faith and faithfulness can keep a believer secure in his salvation:

*1Corinthians 1:9 – "**God is faithful**, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord."*

*1Corinthians 10:13 – "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but **God is faithful**, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."*

*2Thessalonians 3:3 – "But **the Lord is faithful**, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil."*

*1John 1:9 – "If we confess our sins, **he is faithful** and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

Sinful man is not capable – in and of himself – of possessing perfect "saving" faith. But Christ, who is eternal God and who is without sin, is certainly very capable of possessing perfect faith and the kind of faithfulness that enables a believer to endure to the end.

Can we be blotted out of the book of life?

Some Bible verses seem to indicate that our names can be blotted out of the book of life, such as here:

*Revelation 3:4-5 – "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. **He that overcometh**, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and **I will not blot out his name out of the book of life**, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels."*

Revelation 3:5 is an admonition to **true believers** (i.e. he that overcometh) to live godly lives, not a statement declaring that God was going to go back on His Word. A person is an overcomer based on Christ in them, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27) not based on their own abilities. We have God's

promise that “the Lord knoweth them that are his” (2 Tim 2:19) and that “we are more than conquerors through him that loved us” (Romans 8:37), not through ourselves or by our own power. As for those who “are worthy” (Rev 3:4), it refers to those who are washed in the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7), not those who are washed in their own good works (see Isaiah 64:6), since our worthiness is NEVER in ourselves. Other scriptures refer to the same idea but always our sufficiency is of God in Christ and Christ alone:

2 Corinthians 3:5 – “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;”

God will share his glory with no man. God is grieved when a works-oriented gospel is preached and that is what it boils down to when we say we can lose our salvation if we **do** this or we don’t **do** that. If we are truly saved, then we are saved and kept by grace ALONE, on account of the full penalty that Christ paid for those He came to save, which is something to rejoice about! Why else would the Lord say: “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: **for great is your reward in heaven**: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” (in Matthew 5:12). If we could lose our salvation, He would have said: “for great ***may be*** your reward in heaven **if you maintain all the good works necessary to stay saved.**

Another important point – when does the kingdom of God begin?

First, it is helpful to see what the Bible says about where the kingdom of heaven is:

*Luke 17:21 – “Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, **the kingdom of God is within you**.”*

When does this happen? When does a person enter in God’s kingdom?

We enter God’s kingdom at the point of our conversion by God, when we become saved which is when God puts His Spirit in us, if indeed He saves us:

*Ezek 36:26 – “A new heart also **will I** give you, and a new spirit **will I** put within you: and **I will** take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and **I will** give you an heart of flesh. 27 And **I will** put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.”*

Is there any more proof for our conclusion about when the kingdom of God begins? Well, let’s see:

Rom 14:17 – “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”

The kingdom of God represents the spiritual condition, the spiritual state that a believer is in. It is not a physical kingdom – it is not "meat and drink".

1Cor 15:50 – "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption."

It is not our mortal bodies that inherit the kingdom of God, but rather our immortal souls which become alive in Christ at the point of salvation. If we have not been saved by God, we are still dead spiritually and so we are outside of the kingdom of God:

*Eph 2:1 – "And you hath he quickened, **who were dead in trespasses and sins**;"*

*Col 2:13 – "And you, being **dead in your sins** and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;"*

1Cor 4:20 – "For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power."

Once God saves a person, they have the power of God in them and that makes them a **citizen** of the kingdom of God:

*Eph 2:19 – "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but **fellow citizens** with the saints, and of the household of God"*

Citizens in God's kingdom never lose their citizenship, else Christ would have to "un-suffer" and "un-die" for them but that CANNOT happen since Calvary is a done deal.

Bible references to "the kingdom of God":

Matt 12:28 – "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you"

Mark 9:1 – "And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power."

Luke 7:28 – "For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

But what about some apparent future references to the kingdom of God?

Luke 14:15 – "And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of

God."

Believers eat bread in the kingdom of God when they celebrate communion.

Luke 17:20-21 – "And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: 21 Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you."

So why is the Church so worldly today?

There are **many** in the local congregations today who are not true believers. Christ said the wheat (believers) would grow up among the weeds (the damned). But I doubt that the unsaved are solely responsible for all the carnality, worldliness and lack of evangelism in the Church today. We are all to blame – some more than others. We enjoy the things of the world too much to want to preach against them. Television and other forms of entertainment have shepherds and sheep hypnotized and anesthetized. If we are really honest about things, we will have to admit that this materialistic, pleasure-seeking society we live in has had serious effects on the Church. We are indeed in those perilous times that Paul talked about in these verses:

2 Timothy 3:1-5 – "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away."

2 Timothy 4:3-4 – "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables"

We must never forget that our corrupt flesh is constantly lusting and warring against our spirit – our new nature – as mentioned in Galatians 5:17. The influence of this sinful world is just as real and as powerful today as it was before we were saved. However, as Christians, we now have the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome the works of the flesh:

Galatians 5:14-16 – "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh."

Ephesians 3:14-21 – "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be

*strengthened with might **by his Spirit** in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."*

The Lord quite emphatically stated just how secure the salvation of believers is when He said in John chapter 10 that His sheep shall *never* perish:

*John 10:27-29 – "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall **never perish**, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."*

Some people argue that even though no one can pluck sheep out of the Father's hand, the sheep are able of their own to walk away from or abandon Christ. But we must not twist scriptures or take them out of context. We must remember that in John 10:28, Jesus said His sheep shall NEVER perish and never means never. If a sheep walked away from Christ, they would perish, and Jesus would be a liar which He most certainly was not.

What does it mean to 'backslide?

The following verse can help answer the above question:

*Proverbs 14:14 – "**The backslider** in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and **a good man** shall be satisfied from himself."*

Now this verse may be **contrasting** an unsaved man (one who is filled with his own ways and not God's ways) with a saved person (a 'good' man). The verse could also be just comparing a backslider with someone who is not a backslider. In any case, it clearly says that a backslider is someone who is filled with his own ways, meaning ways that are contrary to God's laws. A Christian can find himself filled with his own ways if he repeatedly lets his selfish sin nature have its way until he finds himself **sliding back** into the habit of practicing sins that he thought he was free of. Due to preoccupation with sin, he may forget that Christ had to endure the wrath of God the Father for each and every one of his wicked sins. He can willfully ignore the voice of the Holy Spirit and he may even look to backsliders in the Bible to justify his own backsliding. But a true believer will be chastised by God when he sins as can be seen in the situation with David committing adultery with Bathsheba (and God then took David's son at childbirth and allowed David's grown sons to go their own way) and Jonah not doing what God told him to do – go to Ninevah and preach to the people (and then God caused Jonah to be swallowed by the great fish).

If it is possible for Christians to backslide, why would they?

Jeremiah 8:5 – "Why *then* is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual **backsliding**? they hold fast deceit, they refuse to return."

A backslider wants to be deceived *so that he may satisfy his lusts*. He wants to forget the consequences of sin. He wants to believe that his sin is not that serious. He wants to believe that it doesn't really matter because he believes that Christ already paid for his sins (which is ONLY TRUE of God's Elect). He wants to be deceived into believing that God doesn't see him sinning. He wants to be deceived into believing that God will not chastise him or that the Lord's chastising will not be that bad… it will be worth the risks associated with falling back into a habit of sinning again.

God wants His children to put off the old lusts and walk in the spirit by the power of the Holy Spirit:

Ephesians 4:22 – "That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;"

True Christians have that ability AND THE DESIRE to say 'no' to sin since they have the Spirit of God in them revealing sin to them and convicting them of sin. The unsaved are blind to sin and are slaves to it so they will not have the desire to avoid sin, other than to avoid the unpleasant consequences of sin (getting caught, being punished, etc.). The unsaved do not realize and do not care that they are violating the laws of a holy God. But Christians should care because they should realize that Christ had to suffer the wrath of God for each and every sin they committed and will commit. For TRUE Christians to willfully continue in sin, is to say that we don't really care about the punishment inflicted on Christ for the sins we commit, and those kinds of "Christians" need to seriously examine themselves to see if they are indeed "in the faith", that is, truly saved.

One reason why a Christian may not care enough about sin is because he may not have a good understanding of the wrath of God that was poured out on Christ at Calvary. Christ, the sinless, perfect Lamb of God, endured the wrath of God for all the filthy sins of all those who will be in heaven with Him someday. How that was possible, can only be explained by realizing that He was both man and eternal God and that He was not bound by time and space. What a tremendous relief it is, for a true believer, to never have to experience the wrath of our Almighty thrice-holy God. What sorrow it should bring to the believer, each time he sins, knowing that Christ suffered for that most recently committed sin also.

So how do Christians get to the point where

they can’t seem to get out of a habit of sin?

Christians may fall into sinful practices and habits for specific reasons, mainly because their relationship with the Lord is not what it should be. This becomes a vicious circle, because once you sin you will feel further and further away from God if you do not confess your sins and repent of them.

Let’s examine the contributing factors to falling into a habit of sin (and not being able to get out of that habit), through a series of thought-provoking questions.

1. Do you take lightly your responsibility to God to redeem the time?

Ephesians 5:15-16 – “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil”

2. Do you allow things to pollute your mind and cause you to stumble, like TV, ungodly movies (which includes most of them these days, even the animated “children’s” movies, pornography, worldly music, books, magazines, newspapers and bad company?

Psalm 101:3 – “I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes”

1 John 2:15-16 – “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.”

1 Peter 2:11 – “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;”

3. Do you neglect your mind’s need for clean, healthy spiritual food?

Psalm 119:11 – “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.”

4. Do you allow your relationship to the Lord to deteriorate by letting things interfere with your time alone with God in prayer?

1Thessalonians 5:17 – “Pray without ceasing.”

Psalm 61:2 – “From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”

5. Do you realize your old nature is still there and it is at war with your new nature?

A battle is constantly going on in the life of every Christian. A battle between God’s laws and our old sin nature. It is a battle we need to be continually

aware of, continually on guard against, and continually fighting:

Romans 6:12:16 – "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?"

Sin will always want to reign in our bodies, but we must not let it. We must combat it by staying close to the Lord through prayer, studying the Word, fellowshipping with believers who are good role models, ministering to others, and proclaiming the Gospel, so that our minds will be on Christ and not on ourselves.

Are you really a child of God?

Many people who think they are backslidden Christians are really not saved at all. Are you really saved? Is God's Spirit in you? Is there a time in your life when you began to see how holy God is and how much He hates sin? Was there a time in your life when your desire to sin was radically altered by God and sin became repulsive to you and it became something to be avoided at all costs? Did you come to realize that your sins were an act of rebellion against someone who you owe perfect obedience to? Do you feel disturbed when people around you sin (such as when they take the Lord's name in vain)? Do you feel compelled to warn people about the coming wrath of God? If you answered 'no' or 'not sure' to any of these questions, then you need to examine yourself, using the Bible, to see if you are in the faith:

2 Corinthians 13:5 – "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"

Summary:

If you are not sure about your salvation after reading this paper, I would suggest that you start reading the Bible, asking God to show you your true spiritual condition. You may wish to start with the book of Genesis (a great place to start) or the Gospel of John or the book of Romans. And in searching for truth in God's Word, may you come to the point in your life where you can say with Paul:

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." – Galatians

2:20