

WHY DO WE TEACH THAT A CHRISTIAN CANNOT LOSE HIS SALVATION?

The Bible teaches that salvation, from start to finish, is an irrevocable gift of God's grace. Just as we cannot earn salvation by good works, so we cannot keep salvation by good works. That is precisely Paul's argument in Galatians 3:1-5. He strongly corrects the Galatians for believing that what one begins by faith can be completed by works: *"After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?"* (v.3).

How good must one be to earn salvation? The Bible clearly answers that one must be *as good as God*. Since no one is as good as God, the only hope for salvation is the imputation of Christ's righteousness: *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."* (II Corinthians 5:21).

How good must one be to keep salvation? Why should the answer be any different than in the paragraph above? If human works enter into the retention of the gift of salvation, then the smallest sin would invalidate it. Both the obtaining and the keeping of salvation are gifts of God's grace: *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."* (Ephesians 2:8-10).

The Bible teaches that the believer is kept safe by the power of God. Opponents of this doctrine emphasize that just as one can accept God's gift of salvation, so one can subsequently reject the gift and thus lose his salvation. Such a view emphasizes that the Christian has a gift, but it overlooks the truth that the Christian is a gift. Jesus taught this in John 6:37-40: *"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away."* and *"...this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."* (vv. 37, 39-40). The Christian not only has a gift, he is a gift of the Father to His Son. Therefore, a believer's salvation is not something he can repudiate if he wishes. He would have to petition God the Father to rescind His gift of that believer to Jesus. Salvation is not a two-party transaction. It is three-way: the believer (who receives the gift of salvation), the Father (who dispenses the gift) and Jesus (who provided the means of salvation and receives each believer as a gift for Himself from the Father).

The Bible teaches that not everyone who claims to be a Christian is truly saved. When a professing believer repudiates Christianity it is evidence that he was never a born-again child of God. The Apostle Paul urged members of the Corinthian church to not be casual about assurance of salvation, but to make sure: *"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you - unless, of course, you fail the test?"* (II Corinthians 13:5). The Apostle John spoke of many antichrists arising within and departing from the church. He clearly identifies them as false professors of Christianity, not Christians who lost their salvation: *"They went out from us,*

but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us." (I John 2:19).

The Bible teaches that the motivation for holy living is not fear of condemnation, but rather 1) a healthy fear of God's fatherly chastisement (Hebrews 12:5-13), 2) realization of the worthlessness and destructiveness of sin (Romans 6:19-21), 3) realization of the worth and fruitfulness of righteousness (Romans 6:22), 4) the attractive warmth of the love and grace of God toward us (II Corinthians 5:14 - "*Christ's love compels us*"; Titus 2:11-12 - "*...the grace of God...teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives*"), 5) the desire to meet Christ at the Rapture confidently and without a sense of shame (I John 3:3 - "*Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself*") and 6) the desire to have a favorable judgment of our works and receive heavenly rewards (II Corinthians 5:9-10 - "*So we make it our goal to please him...For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*").

The "difficult" passage in Hebrews 6 is one of the most disputed texts in the Bible. In such a case it is important to interpret the "unclear" passage in light of the "clear" passages of the Bible. We believe this text can be interpreted honestly and in harmony with the rest of Scripture.

Among the readers of this epistle were Hebrew Christians who were tempted to return to the practices of Judaism. The author's argument assumes that the readers are truly saved and then demonstrates *hypothetically* what would happen if a Christian should "*fall away*" (v.6) from the faith by repudiating Christianity. In other words, this is an "if...then" warning. The author implies this in verse 9, "*Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case - things that accompany salvation.*" Therefore, the objective of this text is to convince Hebrew Christians of the logical fallacy of turning from grace back to the law. It does not teach that a saved person can become an unsaved person. Incidentally, for those who believe that this passage does teach possible loss of salvation, note that "re-conversion" is ruled out (vv.4-6 - "*It is impossible...if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance*"). Other passages that employ "hypothetical case" arguments are Galatians 3:12, James 2:10 and John 9:39. In each case an impossibility is assumed to be true for the sake of argument.

These confused Hebrew Christians, although secure in their salvation, could be compromised in their witness and spiritual growth by the teachings of legalism. This warning was designed to prevent that tragedy in a young and immature church. We interpret the warning passage in Hebrews 10:26-31 similarly.

The teaching of the security of salvation (the *perseverance of the saints*) is a major tenet of Calvinistic (derived from John Calvin, 1509-1564) theology. The major competing theology is called Arminianism (derived from Jacobus Arminius, 1560-1609). At the root of each theological system is the question of the origin of faith. Calvinism holds that the origin of faith is God (*unconditional election*). Man is so morally obtuse and so alienated from God that he is unable to summon faith within his soul without the initiative and direct

supernatural aid of God. A Calvinistic Christian, when asked to explain how it is that he became a Christian, will answer that it was only because God chose him to be saved and drew him to himself. An Arminian Christian will answer the same question by saying that *he chose* to accept the offered grace of God, which is openly offered to all men. Arminianism, therefore, is much more optimistic about the moral ability of mankind to perceive and respond to the offered saving grace of God. On the other hand, he is pessimistic about the security of salvation. He believes that what a man has the free ability to accept, he has the free ability to reject, or to forfeit by defective behavior. Calvinistic theology affirms that what God initiates, God will bring to completion.

Herein in a theological paradox. The Bible teaches that from start to finish, salvation is a matter of God's initiative aside from human merit or initiative. On the other hand, Calvinism lives with the logical tension of the free Gospel invitations in the New Testament, *He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* ³¹ *They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved-- you and your household."* (Acts 16:30-31) The paradox is that 1) God must initiate the gift of faith and that initiative is rooted in his elective choice, and 2) Man must make a moral choice to accept the offered gift of salvation. Those two truths seem blatantly contradictory. Calvinism embraces both truths as clearly taught in the Bible despite the apparent impossibility of reconciling them to each other. Arminianism is uncomfortable with the paradoxical tension, and indeed eliminates it by making salvation simply a matter of man's free will to choose or reject God's offered gift of salvation. That view is easy to understand, eliminates the paradox, and seems much more "fair," but fails to account for all the biblical data.

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