

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

1 Can Salvation Be Lost ?

Scripture: Ephesians 1:1-14; II Thessalonians 2:13-17

Last Sunday morning a sermon was preached from the pulpit of Hope Church which was drawn from John 10:28 and entitled, Attempt to Steal A Miracle. The thrust of that message was to assure believer's that there is no possible chance that a sincere and true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, as personal Savior, can ever lose his or her salvation. Since that time certain questions have been raised by some who were present regarding the position that was taken in that message. I welcome these questions and am proud to serve a congregation that takes very seriously what is being said from the pulpit front from week to week, even if there is disagreement in a given matter. I wish to use that sermon and the deep concern which has been shown on this subject as a catalyst to begin a new series of Sunday School studies which I am going to call, **Questions We Want Answered**. Long ago the King of Israel was visited by the Queen of Sheba "to prove him with hard questions." Solomon "told her all her questions: there was not any thing hid from the King which he told her not." (I Kings 10:1-3) We have no Solomon present but we do have a complete body of Scripture and the Holy Spirit to help us answer the questions which continually besiege our minds and trouble people everywhere. Religious questions often disturb people because they seem so unanswerable or opinionated. But there is a very real way in which a loving God has made this kind of question the most answerable of all and it is with this assumption that we will proceed with this series.

Can salvation be lost? Is there Scriptural warrant for believing that a person can be a Christian today and be lost tomorrow? It is reasonable to me that some have asked me about the sermon last Sunday because strange as it may seem, evangelical Christianity is divided into two schools of thought on this matter. Briefly, let us note the following information about them.

1. Arminianism:

Some Christians answer our question in the affirmative. They believe that in spite of the fact that an individual has come to an acceptance of Christ as Savior, such a person is not necessarily assured of eternal life. If such a person is out of fellowship with the Lord and commits sin without coming to

the point of confession before death, salvation is forfeited. This is known as the doctrine of "falling from grace." It is a doctrine which was taught by Jacob Arminius, a professor at the University of Leyden, in South Holland, during the latter part of the sixteenth century. Later this theology was expounded by John Wesley in the eighteenth century. The five cardinal beliefs of Arminianism are: **(1)** The partial depravity of Man, **(2)** Conditional election - God elected those He foreknew would believe, **(3)** Universal atonement - Christ died for all men, **(4)** Resistible grace - a person can successfully resist the prompting of the Holy Spirit, **(5)** Falling from grace - salvation can be lost. An understanding of the above would reveal that the crux of salvation is placed in man's hands rather than God's. In this position man - not God makes the ultimate decision. The Arminian view has been a very popular one in the Protestant Church since the days of Wesley.

2. Calvinism:

Other believers would answer our question in the negative. This is called the doctrine of "eternal security" or the "perseverance of the saints." Simply stated, it is the position that once a person has in faith accepted Jesus Christ as personal Savior, he is eternally saved, his pardon is irrevocable. This doctrine is part of- a system of thought commonly known as Calvinism, gaining its name from John Calvin, the sixteenth century reformer who was the founder of the Presbyterian Church. Calvinism is known for its great emphasis on the sovereignty of God. This doctrine received its first systematic theological formulation from Augustine who wrote around 400 A.D. He taught absolute predestination and because of his influential position in the church at that time, he brought the subject into the center of theological thought. Augustine founded his belief on the writings of the Apostle Paul, particularly the ninth and tenth chapters of Romans and by his own testimony, I Corinthians 4:7 which reads, *"For who maketh thee to differ from another: and what hast thou that thou didst not receive: now if thou didst receive it why dost then glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"* During the Protestant Reformation the sovereignty of God was stressed by Wycliffe, Huss, Luther, Knox and Zwingli and this position was systematized in the writings of John Calvin. There are five key tenants of Calvinism which are: **(1)** The total depravity of man, **(2)** Unconditional election, **(3)** Limited atonement - Christ died only for the elect, **(4)** Irresistible grace - this means that salvation is a sovereign work of the Lord, from which one cannot fall,

(5) Perseverance of the saints - commonly known as eternal security. John Calvin-was a stern, dogmatic, impatient man. He often referred to the "wild beast of his anger." He was demanding and not patient with those who did not agree with him. As a result he made many enemies. Such reaction was voiced in the person of Jacob Arminius. It should be noted that both men sought to understand the Scripture, both were honest and sincere. They should have been able to have fellowship around their common faith in Christ. The same is true of us today. While we may not agree about eternal security, this should not in any way infringe upon our ability to have warm fellowship through our mutual faith in Jesus. A divided church will never speak to a divided world, neither will it edify itself.

For my part, I believe that the Lord Jesus Christ not only has the power to save an individual, but He has the power to preserve that individual in a state of grace and that there is not a single exception to this keeping power in the life of a person who has truly repented of sin and trusted Jesus as Savior. My mind has not been satisfied in this matter because such is the most appealing position to hold. Truthfully, I feel an inward prejudice against the doctrine of eternal security because it seems so unreasonable to me. But a security that is grounded in the sovereignty of God overcomes any notions that I may have about the matter. Therefore, I have taken my stand, not so much on the quantity of a person's salvation experience, as upon the quality of that experience. Qualitatively, we have a salvation which finds its source, substance, and sustenance in God and not ourselves. Those attributes of God which concern themselves are:

1. His Sovereignty:

(absolute power Deuteronomy 4:35 "*the Lord He is God; there is none else beside him.*" Romans 9:14-16 "*What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion, so that it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.*" Romans 9:20 -21 "*Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it. Why has thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?*")
Salvation is God's work, if it is ours, it will fail.

2. His Omnipotence:

The second attribute of God which figures in the believer's security is the fact that God is all-knowing. He knows everything from eternity. This means that no unforeseen developments can take place which can take God by surprise and spoil His original plan. Psalm 139:2-6 tells us that God knows all about us. *"Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high. I cannot attain unto it."* God knew all about us before ever we saw the light of day and with that knowledge which covers our entire life span He fixed His love upon us because He chose to. Ephesians 1:4 is very clear on this matter. *"According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world"* It seems to me that the omniscience of God is a very strong case for the believer's security. God would not choose a person knowing that his salvation would not last. It is easy to reason here that God then saves those whom He knew would last. Here we must be careful to understand what God's foreknowledge is not. A very great mistake is to reduce it to a mere human advance knowledge the way we can predict the conduct of some people on the basis of past performance. We pretty well know where some people will be found on Sunday morning by what they have done on scores of Sunday mornings in the past. This is mere human judgment come to by evidence. Something else about foreknowledge, it is not this same advance knowledge on the highest level possible. Here God would have perfect understanding of what is going to happen and he would adapt His plans accordingly. Here we would have a man controlled fatalism. God's foreknowledge is an advanced determination to fulfill a plan born in the counsels of His own will. It is not an early knowledge of what man may decide to do. This is a heavy doctrine, but let us overcome the desire to drag God out of His heaven and His eternity only to reduce Him to a being of time with a past and a future such as we are.

3. His Immutability:

The third attribute of God which concerns this study is the fact of God's unchangeableness. He doesn't change His mind. A sample reference might be James 1:17, *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and"*

cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." I must take the time to refer to David as he writes in Psalm 89:30-35, "*Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my loving kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once I have sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David.*" (CORRECTION: This is a Psalm about the covenant made with David.) God will never change His mind about us. He knew all about us, every single detail of our lives from the first moment to the last, every weakness, every failure, every defeat, still He focused His love upon us. We may be certain He will never change His mind. That's the way He treated David, it is the way He will remember us. "*I will not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.*"

Thus I have come to rest in the sovereignty, omniscience, and immutability of God confident that "*He which hath begun a good work in His people will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*" (Philippians 1:6) I would like you now to think about some very necessary safeguards to what I have been talking about lest we drift into an unscriptural extreme which is known as Hyper-Calvinism. Very often it is because these safeguards are not understood that there is an unnecessary prejudice against the doctrine of eternal security.

The doctrine of the sovereignty of God has been a stumbling block to so many that it is necessary to understand the following aspects of this subject as it touches the eternal security of the believer.

1. God Is Not the Author of Sin:

Sin is not a result of the decrees of God, The sovereignty of God does not mean that God has produced sin rather than man. The Scripture is clear on this point. See James 1:13,17 and 1 John 1:5. This is what is called an antinomy, a mystery which is solved only in the mind of God. How God can ordain everything that comes to pass without Himself being responsible is a matter the Calvinist is unable to explain. Partial explanations are helpful. While God does not foreordain sin, He decrees to allow man to sin. God hates sin. He does not lead men into it by constraint or by alluring. He has decreed for infinitely wise ends that the creature is allowed to sin. Augustine in The City of God speaks of the fact that there is no efficient cause of the evil will. It is not an efficient cause, but a deficient cause. Thus he feels we may have evil

without God as the author. The illustration given is that no other sense but the ear can perceive silence and yet it is perceived by not hearing. Lest we be upset about this mystery, lets remember that any philosophy or theology which has a God must claim mystery at some point. It will be there because we are finite, and there is lack of revelation at this point.

2. God Hinders No One from Believing:

Responsibility is not removed from man because every person has a will in the matter. The human will is essential in all the progress of the soul. God hinders none from believing, from taking the narrow way-over the broad. God does not violate the will of His creatures. Our wills have an important place in the order of causes and God works out His will through ours. In John 19:11 the Lord Jesus said, "*Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above.*" Since evil has a deficient cause, when I sin, it is not because God allowed it, but it is because I will to sin. Of course man acts within the confines of his nature which frees him only to do sinful acts. When we sin, we refuse the offer of salvation, we do it freely and we are responsible for our sin. Do you wish for eternal life today that comes through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ? If you answer yes then God has chosen you. If the answer is no, then do not grumble about not being chosen to something you do not want in the first place. God hinders no one from believing.

3. God Has Ordained the Means:

God has chosen that people will come to salvation through the proclamation of the gospel. When we are faithful in this ministry we may be confident that those whom He calls to Himself will come. The strongest believers in the absolute sovereignty of God historically have been among the greatest workers in the Church of Christ. Extreme Calvinism has suggested that God will bring people to Himself regardless of any human effort. It is interesting that following Paul's strongest predestination passage in Romans 9, in chapter 10, verses 14 and 15 He says. "*How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard and how shall they hear without a preacher and how shall they preach except they be sent?*"

We can conclude by saying that salvation is the work of God in which no one is hindered by God from receiving the gift of eternal life when the gospel is

proclaimed for the purpose of inviting people to Christ. Finally, I would like to state reasons why I believe we can believe in the eternal security of the believer.

THE BIBLE TEACHES THAT SALVATION CANNOT BE LOST BY DISTINGUISHING PEOPLE:

It is important to follow the Scripture closely here. We can see that God allows the believer to work beside the mere professor. (Matthew 13:24- 30: 36-40) It is impossible to tell the difference. (I Samuel 16:7) Not even the disciples were able to identify the traitor. (Mark 14:17-21) We know it is possible to honor Jesus with one's lips while at the same time the heart is far from Him. (Matthew 15:8)

THE BIBLE TEACHES THAT SALVATION CANNOT BE LOST BECAUSE OF REWARDS:

There are two parts to every disobedient act of a true Christian. One aspect has to do with sin, and because Christ bore the penalty for sin on the cross, the believer will not stand in judgment for it. The other side of the act is a work and for this every Christian must give account. At the Judgment Seat of Christ some Christians will suffer loss. They will not lose their place in heaven but will go unrewarded. The verses to study here are: II Corinthians 5:10, I Corinthians 3:11-15. No equal status in heaven. I Corinthians 15:41 reads, "*There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead.*" Christians will differ following the bema judgment of Christ for works.

THE BIBLE TEACHES SALVATION CANNOT BE LOST BECAUSE OF THE SHED BLOOD:

The passage here is Hebrews 9:11-14. The word "obtained" is in the perfect tense indicating an act once for all accomplished. In verse 14 the word "purge" is in the present tense indicating linear action which is continuous. The blood of Christ continues to purge the life of the Christian today, tomorrow and until he arrives safely home in heaven. We can sing therefore, "O, precious is the flow; That makes me white as snow; No other fount I know; Nothing but the blood of Jesus."

THE BIBLE TEACHES SALVATION CANNOT BE LOST BECAUSE THE TRUE CHRISTIAN WILL NOT USE HIS SECURITY AS AN EXCUSE FOR SELF-INDULGENCE:

I have never met a real Christian who is out kicking up the heels because he knows that he is going to heaven no matter what he does. I have met backslidden Christians who have chucked the whole thing (so they say) and are willing to take their chances with everybody else in the world. I have never heard a person say, "I'm living it up and still going to heaven. How can you go wrong?" See I John 3:9

THE BIBLE TEACHES SALVATION CANNOT BE LOST THROUGH THE DIRECT STATEMENT:

Romans 8:35-39 mentions "*any other creature.*" Some feel that means what it says, and includes the impossibility to separate oneself from Christ. Philippians 1:6 says God "*will perform*" (continuing or linear action) His good work without interruption until eternity comes, that is until the Christian is welcomed into the presence of his Lord. Five statements were recorded by John in 10:27-30 which are not conditional and describe the finality of Christ's holding the Christian. Romans 8:17 speaks of a sure inheritance, "*And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.*" Man's laws are not like God's. A human father can disinherit a son for several reasons. But God is bound by the character of His nature. There is no possible ground upon which God will disinherit a child. The whole idea of justification goes out the window if the system is on one day and off the next.

THE BIBLE TEACHES THE BELIEVER IS SECURE BY THE SEALING OF THE SPIRIT:

In Ephesians 1:12-14 Paul declared, "*That we should be to the praise of His glory. in whom also after that ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.*" Two truths here: The moment a person becomes a Christian he is sealed with the Spirit. The official seal of Paul's day showed ownership and that is what he is saying in the spiritual realm. God tags His own before the watching host of heaven. They are no longer on the auction block, they have been bought with a price. Secondly, the seal was also a guarantee of security. This is the meaning of the word "*earnest*" in verse 14. It is a pledge that the deal will one day be fully consummated. God gives the believer this assurance through the Holy Spirit who

resides within. Of course, there is also the baptism of the Holy Spirit which is understood metaphorically and means a change of identity. Paul wrote, "*Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?*" (Romans 6:3) So we were placed or positioned in Christ and the whole scope of His being from eternity to eternity. There is one baptism of the Holy Spirit and it means that every believer has been eternally identified with Christ, joined to Him.

THE BIBLE TEACHES THE BELIEVER IS SECURE BECAUSE SALVATION IS A GIFT:

We are familiar with Romans 6:23 and Ephesians 2:8-9. We keep salvation the same way we received it. If we earned it as a wage or won it as a prize, then we must continue to work in order to hold on to it. If, on the other hand, we received it on the merits of Christ then we have it until He fails. He who has done the giving will also do the keeping.

THE BIBLE TEACHES THE BELIEVER IS SECURE BECAUSE OF CHRIST'S PRAYERS:

In John 17, the wonderful intercessory prayer of the Savior, He asked for three things relative to the believer's security. (1) That the believer might be kept from the effects of evil - v. 9-17, (2) That the believer might be sanctified with Him in eternity - v. 24a; (3) That the believer might have the privilege of seeing His glory - v. 24b. Christ's prayer in John 14:16-17 regarding the Holy Spirit was answered. His prayer in Luke 22:31-32 regarding Peter was later answered. This prayer will be answered also. The Hebrew writer also reminds us, "*Wherefore also He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God through Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.*"

If it were possible for a believer to lose salvation it would be much better just to go to heaven the moment Christ comes into the life. But Peter speaks of an inheritance that is reserved in heaven (I Peter 1:4). If it is reserved no one can touch it and we can't spoil it. Let us remember that when we fail the Lord, and we all do, there is forgiveness. If we are careless about His love, He will chastise us. The thing to do is not to despair about losing one's salvation, but to repent and ask forgiveness.

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NOTES