

Once Saved, Always Saved?

The Unconditional, Eternal Security of the Believer

By
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It is literally an eternal life/eternal death question, and, because we are now corporately (though not, necessarily, individually) the “generation” who will experience either the tragedy of the “foolish” virgins or the glory of the “wise” virgins...we need to re-examine this issue prayerfully, asking the Spirit of truth to confirm the truth of God to us no matter what doctrinal position our denominations, our fellowships, or our pastors have taken on this question.

Let me quickly state, lest I lose the attention of those who most need to read this testimony, that God will not reject any believer from covenant status with Him because of sin.

Our covenant with God is through Christ. The covenant written in the blood of Jesus Christ is between the Father and the Son of Man, Jesus of Nazareth, who fulfilled all the requirements of the Law as a man.

Our participation in the eternal covenant is by our incorporation into the spiritual body of Christ by grace through faith. The sealing, also known as the “baptism,” of the Holy Spirit, is the process of incorporation into the spiritual body of Christ because of our faith, and it is our deposit or guarantee (our “title-deed”) to our ultimate experience of full redemption at the resurrection.

Therefore, the covenant cannot fail, and our sins, past, present, and future, have been covered by the blood of Jesus.

But this deposit (of the Holy Spirit) is only the initial event of our complete redemption, which will not take place until the resurrection of the righteous living and dead saints on the last day at the last trump (or for the metaphorical 144,000 on some future Pentecost).

At the time of this writing not one single saint, from Adam forward, has experienced the fullness of their redemption. There are many, many saints present with Jesus in the heavenly realm, and nothing can prevent them from experiencing the completion of their redemption on the last day. But that status does not belong to those of us who are still alive.

The only question that remains, then, is whether or not it is possible for a man or woman to remove themselves from covenant status with the Father by rejecting their faith in Jesus Christ.

This question MUST be addressed in the church and confirmed with absolute certainty by the Spirit of truth to all believers, because of the dangerous times in which we live.

I first came to faith in Christ in a denomination well known for holding to the doctrine of the unconditional, eternal security of the believer, or “once saved, always saved,” and, typically, each worship service included an overextended altar call for the lost.

Having no doctrinal tradition and only a shallow understanding of Christian doctrine from my youthful attendance of an Episcopalian church, I naturally adopted (assumed) the doctrines and practices of my new church fellowship and its denominational doctrines, practices, and interpretations of scripture.

I began to teach the Bible early in my walk with the Lord, but to the alarm of denominational authorities in the local church, my approach to the examination of scripture was and still is inductive, meaning that I allowed scripture to reveal truth to me as the Spirit guided rather than allowing my denomination to dictate truth to me. That ultimately led to a conflict between what my denomination said the scriptures revealed and what the scriptures, illuminated by the Spirit of truth actually revealed to me.

For three years I examined and struggled with the doctrine of once saved, always saved, not teaching it or revealing my struggle to others. Yet, I was unyielding in my search for the truth.

Clearly my assumption of the doctrine of once saved, always saved from the authorities and tradition of the denomination to which I belonged came from some original presumption of this doctrine by the founding fathers and founding influences of this denomination. And, as I have continually and persistently proclaimed, it is man’s intellectual presumptions, adopted and promoted through authoritarian assumption, that have divided the body of Christ (i.e. “winds of doctrine”) and kept us in a state of immaturity and divisiveness that does not glorify Christ.

Although my original denomination was not Calvinist or a part of the Reformed Church movement, the doctrine of once saved, always saved has its roots in Calvinism and Gnosticism. The primary Calvinist doctrines of predetermination (i.e. you are either “elect” and “chosen”, or you are not) and of the absolute sovereignty of God (i.e. God will do what He will do) would say that if one is “elect” or “chosen” then his/her election will become evident at some point in time, which leads to the conclusion that “election” cannot be reversed.

Gnosticism, one of the primary bastions of doctrinal error assaulting the truth of God in the early church, taught that those who had been saved (regenerated or “born again”) could not be hurt by sin, and they, therefore, openly, and without shame, indulged themselves in sinful behavior of all kinds.

St. Thomas Aquinas identified this process of presumption followed by assumption as “appetitive” behavior, as in a hungry animal being driven to hunt. His specific application would be that the original false intellectual belief or presumption (a belief not confirmed or revealed by the Spirit) is the “hunger” that drives us to adopt and promote the satisfying assumption of that same false, intellectual belief.

"With regard to despair, every appetitive movement that is conformed to a false intellect, is evil in itself and sinful. Now presumption is an appetitive movement, since it denotes an inordinate hope. Moreover it is conformed to a false intellect, just as despair is: for just as it is false that God does not pardon the repentant, or that He does not turn sinners to repentance, so is it false that He grants forgiveness to those who persevere in their sins, and that He gives glory to those who cease from good works: and it is to this estimate that the movement of presumption is conformed." - *St. Thomas Aquinas ("Summa Theologica" 13th century A.D.)*

Being well versed in all the assumptive proof texts for “once saved, always saved” I was somewhat startled by my discovery of numerous scripture passages that contradicted my appetitive assumptions.

What I learned was that all apparent paradoxes in scripture are a Holy Spirit signpost saying, “Dig Deeper Here.” The absolute truth of God is available to us regarding all doctrine and practice. But we are hindered in discovering it, because, when we encounter a paradox, we choose to believe and confirm intellectually for ourselves, whatever appetitive and authoritative doctrine or practice satisfies our natural hunger (i.e. our tradition, our sense of belonging, our spiritual pride, our dependency on earthly authorities, etc.).

In this particular instance I dug deeper when I encountered the paradox, which began a lifelong habit of willingness to dig deeper upon encountering such paradoxes, and I am satisfied that the truth of God has been revealed and confirmed to me without being hindered by any appetitive drive other than my absolute, unyielding drive to know and conform to His truth.

The first scripture passage that caught my attention was in Paul’s first letter to the church in Corinth. In this letter Paul rebuked the Corinthian Christians for tolerating the behavior of a “brother” (a born again, regenerated believer) who was having an adulterous relationship with his mother-in-law.

Paul’s command to this church was, “When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present...,” (his God-given authority in regard to this church), “...you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.”

The first thing we note is the fact that this “brother” was, in fact, in danger of the possibility that his spirit would not be saved in the day of the Lord, IF he persisted in this behavior. But we are not told why.

Delivering the man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh was the act of removing the man from whatever protection and covering he had in fellowship with the other believers in Corinth. He was not allowed to fellowship with them. They were not to pray for him. They were to abandon him like a herd of zebras leaving one of their own weak or wounded ones behind for the hyenas.

The destruction of the “flesh,” though, was not related to physical death, but to the man’s experience of torment by Satan and his assigns so that the man would recognize and acknowledge that the consequences of his sin far outweighed the supposed benefits.

At that point, in brokenness, he would be willing to repent so that he could be brought back into fellowship with the Lord and with the Corinthian believers, which is exactly what happened as confirmed in Paul’s second letter to that church.

Yet, if he had failed to repent, according to Paul, his spirit ultimately would not have been saved in the day of the Lord (resurrection day).

Paul also confessed the possibility that even he could become a “castaway” if he did not keep his flesh (all of his natural faculties apart from the influence of the Holy Spirit) in subjection to the Holy Spirit.

But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

1 Corinthians 9:27

The word translated in the KJV as a noun, “castaway,” is actually an adjective that, in the original Greek means not standing the test or the standard required, as in the testing of metal, and the obvious “test” is whether or not we are “in Christ” by faith.

Thus Paul believed that it would be possible for him to reject his faith in Christ if he did not deliberately keep his flesh subjected to the Holy Spirit, but at no time did he ever indicate that God would reject him from covenant status as long as he maintained his faith in Christ.

Our spiritual conscience is the natural conscience receiving input from the Holy Spirit so that we know conclusively what is right or wrong as far as our thoughts, words, or actions are concerned. This is what is meant in scripture by God’s law being written on our hearts (our unique spirit-soul connection with the Holy Spirit). The Corinthian man, though, was in danger of developing a seared conscience.

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared...

1 Timothy 4:1,2 ESV (emphasis is the author's)

What I noticed next were the clear warnings by the Lord in the Olivet prophecy given to Peter, John, James, and Andrew as recorded in Matthew 24 and 25, Mark 13, and Luke 21, and His clear warnings to the seven churches addressed in Revelation 2 and 3.

Then they will hand you...(My followers)... over to suffer affliction and tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake.

And then many...(of My followers)... will be offended and repelled and will begin to distrust and desert [Him Whom they ought to trust and obey] and will stumble and fall away...(from faith in Me)... and betray one another and pursue one another with hatred.

And many false prophets will rise up and deceive and lead many...(of My followers)... into error. And the love of the great body of...(Christian)...people will grow cold because of the multiplied lawlessness and iniquity, but he who endures to the end will be saved. Matthew 24:9-13 Amplified (inserts and emphasis are the author's)

It's almost impossible to miss the truth of the Lord's warning in this passage. At that point in time when all the followers of Christ are persecuted and hated by the world, MANY will begin to distrust the One whom they once trusted and desert Him who they once obeyed by faith.

These will "stumble" (the process of falling by the searing of our conscience) and fall away from faith in Christ. But what is even more disturbing (if anything could be more disturbing) is that these same former born again, regenerated believers in Christ will betray other believers and pursue other believers with (demonically inspired) hatred.

So it is affliction and persecution unto death that causes these to begin to distrust and desert Christ, but it is the demonically empowered false prophets rising up out of these same apostate believers who will deceive and lead others into error.

For false christs and false prophets will arise...(from among those who have rejected their faith in Christ)...and perform great signs and wonders, so as

to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Matthew 24:24 ESV (inserts are the author's)

This passage is not saying that it is not possible to lead the elect astray. It is saying that it IS possible to lead some of the elect astray. And this interpretation is supported by the body of the text. Therefore, the warning to us is that we should prevent this possibility by being so sold out to Him as bond-servants that deception, affliction, persecution, and the threat of death have no power over us.

And they have overcome (conquered) him by means of the blood of the Lamb and by the utterance of their testimony, for they did not love and cling to life even when faced with death [holding their lives cheap till they had to die for their witnessing]. Revelation 12:11 Amplified

While those of us in America are not, yet, faced with the threat of physical death because of our faith in Christ, we need to take care that we do not love our lives of devotion to the fulfillment of the flesh so much that we are unwilling to die to the selfish ambitions and needs of the sin-trained mind lest we develop a seared conscience as many will during that time we call the “tribulation.”

Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day...(the day of the Lord)... will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction...2 Thessalonians 2:3 ESV

What we need to notice is that Paul gives this event of the rebellion or apostasy of a great number of Christians in the end times equal billing with the revealing of Antichrist. These are the two BIG events that will occur in the final days, and they are related.

The falling away of nominal believers would scarcely be noticed, either then or now, but the rebellion and falling away of great numbers of born again, regenerated Christians because of persecution and extreme deception by demonically empowered false prophets would and will be noticed. And the fact that these same defectors from the faith will themselves betray the church and be filled with a demonically empowered hatred for the church, also gets our attention.

This word, “rebellion,” is the Greek word transliterated as *apostasis* (Strong's #646), also translated as “apostasy,” “falling away,” and “forsaking.” This cannot be reduced to meaning that those who are nominal, but not born again, regenerated believers, will reject the faith.

“*Apo*” means “right,” and “*stasia*,” means “standing.” No one has right standing with God apart from regenerating faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, the

great apostasy or falling away is the massive rejection of faith in Christ by those who once experienced regenerating faith in Him and were “sealed” by the Spirit.

That [Spirit] is the guarantee of our inheritance [the firstfruits, the pledge and foretaste, the down payment on our heritage], in anticipation of its full redemption and our acquiring [complete] possession of it--to the praise of His glory. Ephesians 1:14 Amplified (emphasis is the author’s)

Therefore, the sealing of the Holy Spirit that causes us to become spiritually united with Christ and with other believers is a “deposit” and a “pledge” of redemption, but it is NOT the complete fulfillment of redemption.

In the Lord’s message to the church at Sardis of whom He said that they had a reputation for being “alive,” but they were in reality, “dead,” He gave this warning:

So call to mind the lessons you received and heard; continually lay them to heart and obey them, and repent. In case you will not rouse yourselves and keep awake and watch,...(in case you do not repent)... I will come upon you like a thief, and you will not know or suspect at what hour I will come.
Revelation 3:3 Amplified (inserts and emphasis are the author’s)

This warning was given to the church, not nominal believers, but the church, and coming upon them like a “thief” indicates a loss of salvation, confirmed by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:4,5 Amplified:

But you are not in [given up to the power of] darkness, brethren, for that day to overtake you by surprise like a thief.
For you are all sons of light and sons of the day; we do not belong either to the night or to darkness.

The next passage that caught my attention was 2 Peter 2:20-22 Amplified:

For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through [the full, personal] knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they again become entangled in them and are overcome, their last condition is worse [for them] than the first.

For never to have obtained a [full, personal] knowledge of the way of righteousness would have been better for them than, having obtained [such knowledge], to turn back from the holy commandment which was [verbally] delivered to them.

There has befallen them the thing spoken of in the true proverb, The dog turns back to his own vomit, and, The sow is washed only to wallow again in the mire.

This is Peter's warning to the church about the danger and consequences of developing a seared conscience and rejecting our faith in Jesus Christ (apostasy), and he describes it as those who have "escaped" the eternal consequence of sin by the regeneration that accompanies saving faith in Jesus Christ and become "entangled" again in the sin that previously condemned them.

Holding fast to faith (that leaning of the entire human personality on God in absolute trust and confidence) and having a good (clear) conscience. By rejecting and thrusting from them [their conscience], some individuals have made shipwreck of their faith. 1 Timothy 1:19 Amplified

But they were broken (pruned) off because of their unbelief (their lack of real faith), and you are established through faith [because you do believe]. So do not become proud and conceited, but rather stand in awe and be reverently afraid.

For if God did not spare the natural branches [because of unbelief], neither will He spare you... (who are currently saved and sealed by the Holy Spirit)... [IF you are guilty of the same offense].

Then note and appreciate the gracious kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen... (from their original state of being in right standing with Him through faith)..., but God's gracious kindness to you—provided you continue in His grace and abide in His kindness... (by maintaining your faith)...; **otherwise you too will be cut off (pruned away)**. Romans 11:20-22 Amplified (emphasis and inserts are the author's)

In the prophetic parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-12) the Lord gives His disciples the details concerning the causes and result of the great end time apostasy. In this parable all ten "virgins" (unmarried kinsmen of the Lord) represent born again, regenerated believers, and all ten fall asleep when the Lord tarries. (The current condition of the somnolent church at large)

Falling asleep does not indicate death, but indicates a lack of diligent faith, and all ten virgins wake up from this lack of diligent faith when the groomsmen makes his announcement: ***Behold! The bridegroom is coming.***

Whatever this announcement event represents in the prophetic future of the church, it will be recognizable in scripture and it will impact the entire regenerated body of Christ.

However, half of the virgins are “wise” and half of the virgins are “foolish.” The distinguishing difference is that the wise virgins have made provision to maintain oil (the presence of the Holy Spirit) in their lamps (souls) while the foolish virgins, though they had oil in their lamps and started the process of trimming the wicks of their lamps (repentance along the lines of the Lord’s message to the seven churches) after the announcement event, they did not do what was necessary to maintain or keep oil (the Holy Spirit) in their lamps (souls). (See [The Prophetic Parable of the Ten Virgins](#))

As a result of their failure to maintain their faith in Jesus Christ their ultimate fate is recorded in the final three verses of the parable.

Later...(at the last resurrection, the resurrection of unbelievers)... *the other virgins...*(the “foolish” virgins)... *also came and said, Lord, Lord, open [the door] to us! But He replied, I solemnly declare to you, I do not know you [I am not acquainted with you].*

Watch therefore [give strict attention and be cautious and active], for you know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man will come.
Matthew 25:11-13 Amplified (inserts and emphasis are the author’s)

Note that He said, “I do not know you.” He did NOT say, “I never knew you,” as He will say to those nominal believers who never, at any time, experienced regenerating faith in Him as recorded in Matthew 7:22-25.

This event of the “foolish” virgins rejecting their faith is even more tragic than the Israelites, led by the “foolish” Pharisees and religious leaders, rejecting Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah, and, though this truth will offend many, it must be brought to the attention of the sleeping virgins who will soon receive the groom’s wake up call, ***Behold! The bridegroom is coming.***

It is not my intent, therefore, to close the door and nail it shut on this doctrinal issue for any believer, but rather to start end time believers on a journey in which they maintain a Berean attitude of desiring the truth of God more than they desire human, authoritarian confirmation.

And, in doing so, many who were once destined to become “foolish” virgins will become “wise.”