



## **CAN A CHRISTIAN FORFEIT SALVATION?**

### **PART 1**

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Greetings and welcome! It's my pleasure to be with you and study the word of God with you today. For today's study, we take up one of the most common and hotly debated questions surrounding the bible and the Christian's relationship to God. Can a person once saved, through sin and unbelief, forfeit their salvation? Is it possible to be saved and later be found in a lost condition? That theological dispute has raged for centuries and continues to divide the religious world today. It is common to hear preachers claim that a genuinely converted person can never lose their salvation regardless of what they say, think, or do. Some say that if a professing Christian is lost, they were never saved to begin with. And others live in perpetual fear that the slightest mistake or misstep while trying to live the Christian life may doom them to hell. What does the bible teach?

Let's read together from Galatians 5:1-4 *"Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace."*

The Galatians were being influenced by false teachers who were trying to convince them that keeping the Law of Moses was necessary in order to be saved. They were erroneously teaching that unless one was circumcised as the Jews were commanded to be under the old covenant, that they were not in good standing with God. Paul teaches the opposite. He says that circumcision in and of itself was neither right nor wrong for a person in Christ but if they were being circumcised (meaning they were trying to find favor in God's eyes by going backward and keeping the Jewish law) that they were forsaking Christ and going back to a system that could not save. The King James says, "you make Christ of none effect." The ASV and ESV say "you are severed from Christ"; and the result is "you have fallen from grace." I've heard several preachers perform some impressive mental and rhetorical gymnastics to claim that this verse is

not speaking of a person's salvation, but doesn't it sound strange on its face to say that one can be "severed from Christ" and "fall from grace" and yet be IN CHRIST and be eternally saved? Think about it. Our subject today will be "Can a Christian Forfeit Salvation?"

The doctrine commonly known as "once saved, always saved", also referred to as "eternal security" is one of the five tenets of Calvinism. The 16<sup>th</sup> century reformer, John Calvin, building on the beliefs expressed by Augustine centuries prior, organized his system of theology into five major headings that all rested upon the idea that humans do not have free will to choose or reject God but instead were predestined to either grace and glory or eternal condemnation. The doctrine suggests that through the inherited guilt of Adam's sin, all people are born into sin and are total depraved from birth and do not have the capacity to respond to God's overtures of grace. Since all men are born in this condition and cannot choose God, then it was up to God to select and predestine certain ones to be saved while arbitrarily excluding everyone else. This election is unconditional and refers to individuals whom God chooses for salvation. As a result, Christ died only on behalf of those individuals and not as an offer of salvation to the whole world. Those who were specifically chosen by God are then called with an irresistible calling by the Holy Spirit and thus are saved. And since their election was unconditional and their calling irresistible, then it follows that their salvation is irrevocable. That is, if their salvation is by God's choice and not theirs, then they cannot choose to think, say, or do anything that will interrupt God's sovereign will and thus they cannot think, say, or do anything to forfeit the salvation God has given them. Now, I admit, if I accepted the first four tenets of Calvin's doctrine, I would logically have to accept the fifth. But on the other hand, if the bible does not teach the fifth point (the perseverance of the saints), then it could not logically teach the first four.

Well, I reject the notion that man does not possess free will or that God has not given him the choice of accepting or rejecting God's grace. Nearly 1,600 times in the King James Version, the bible uses the word "if". More than 200 of those times, it uses the phrase "If thou..." suggesting that something is conditional, and the person being spoken to has a choice in the matter. "If you do this, then that will be the result or consequence" or "If you do not do this or the other, then you will not receive this or that..." Clearly, the bible teaches that God puts choices before us, and we are accountable for how we respond to those choices. But it would logically follow that if we are just pawns on God's chessboard of time and space and we are not given the ability to choose, then the doctrine of Calvin would be possible. Clearly though, God does put choices before men and women and there are consequences to those choices.

Now, as I say, if the doctrine of "once saved, always saved" is not taught in the bible, then neither could the other four tenets of Calvinism be logically taught in scripture. So, today, let's consider this doctrine of "once in grace, always in grace" and see if it accords with God's word. There are at least five explanations of this subject in the religious world today. First, Calvinists, like we just mentioned suggest that since salvation is all the work of God with no choice on man's part, then that saved person cannot make any choice that would condemn him. If he was saved solely by an arbitrary act of God, then it would take another arbitrary act of God for them to be lost. Then others say that Christians can indeed sin, but God won't allow them to die and be lost because of those sins. They believe that God will chasten and correct them until they repent. They may miss out on some of the blessings and joys of the Christian life, but God will make sure that sin is purged from their life before they go to judgment. Some go so far as to say that a Christian who dies in a sinful and impenitent state will still be saved. They may lose some of their heavenly reward, but they will still go to heaven. Others say that a PROFESSING Christian can sin and be lost but all that proves is that that person was never saved to begin with. No person, in other words, can truly possess salvation and then lose it. If so, they never had it.

And then there is a fifth view that says God expects Christians to be faithful to Christ but if they turn away from Christ and disregard His commandments, their soul stands in jeopardy. If they abandon the faith or go back into a life of sin, then they forfeit their place in Christ and are in danger of being lost. What do the scriptures teach? That's the question. It's not how you or I feel about the matter. It's not what seems right or fair according to our way of thinking. It's not what the creeds of various religious bodies affirm (Westminster Confession or otherwise...) and it's not even what the majority of preachers and theologians say. What does the bible say?

The book of Galatians, from which we took our textual reading a few moments ago, is a warning to a church in danger of apostasy. They were dealing with what we call Judaizing teachers who were trying to enforce the law of Moses on Gentile converts to Christianity. They were telling them that unless you are circumcised and keep the Old Testament Law you can't be saved. Paul calls such teaching in Galatians 5:1 a "yoke of bondage" and he goes on to say that those who go down the path of being saved by keeping the Mosaic law were obligated to keep the entire law (which no man except Jesus Christ was ever able to do). His conclusion is, in verse 4, "You have become estranged from Christ" and "you have fallen from grace." If salvation is found in Christ, how can you be saved while estranged from Christ? If salvation is by God's grace, how can you be saved having "fallen from grace" which, by the way, many say is impossible for the Christian to do. That's not what Paul said. He said you CAN fall from grace. He said you CAN become severed from Christ.

Now, some will counter that Paul told the Romans in Romans 8:38-39 that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. But we can't pit scripture against scripture. They are both true. Friend, the fact that God loves us; cares for us; wants us to be saved; and has acted in the most supreme way to work for our good; and that nothing can separate us from that love expressed in Christ doesn't mean that WE cannot willfully turn away from Christ and forfeit all that God offers us in Him. Paul said you CAN be severed from Christ. You CAN fall from grace. Yes, Jesus also said in John 10:27-28 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand." That's true, thank God. No one can snatch you out of the hand of Christ including the devil. When you trust in Christ, you are secure from Satan's vices. "Submit yourself to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you", said James. But what if you refuse to submit to God? What if you don't resist the devil? What if you choose to follow sin and go back to the life you came out of? Well, Peter answered that in 1 Peter 5:8-9 "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking WHOM HE MAY DEVOUR..." Can a person fall prey to the devil and be spiritually devoured by him and still be in a saved condition? Think about that! No, Peter instead, like James, urges the Christians in the next verse to "Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world." You see, the devil can't steal you away from Christ, but you can stop trusting in Christ, living in Christ, serving Christ, and you become a ready meal for the roaring lion, the devil. Friend, that's more than losing some measure of reward. That's a matter of losing your soul. That's a matter of perishing! And when you leave Christ; when you, by your own choice, are severed from Him, that's what will happen to your soul. It may be a comforting doctrine to suggest that nothing a person once saved can say, think, or do will put their eternal soul in jeopardy but such a doctrine is simply not upheld in the word of God.

I want to stress that we are not talking about a Christian walking a tight rope to heaven and never knowing whether we are saved or not; we're talking about one who refuses to submit to God; one who knowingly rebels against Christ; one who stops believing and following the word of Christ walks away from the faith. Listen to the position that puts a Christian in, according to Peter in 2 Peter 2:19-22. I

want you to listen carefully to Peter as he describes the former and then latter conditions of these apostates. He's not writing about people who are earnestly trying to follow Christ. He's writing about people who have turned away from Him. He says, "While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A DOG RETURNS TO HIS OWN VOMIT," and "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire." Notice! Verse 20: "they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" Verse 21: they knew "the way of righteousness." They turned "from the holy commandment delivered to them" Verse 22: they are like the pig who was "washed" but RETURNED to her wallowing in the mud and mire. Peter knew nothing of the teaching that one could not turn away from Christ and return to a life of sin. He says of one who does so "the latter end is worse for them than the beginning" and it "would have been better had they never known it" than to turn away from it. My friend, the New Testament and Old alike are chock full of such warnings and admonitions written to Christians. Oh, in an effort to affirm their comforting doctrine, I've heard preachers and others say "all of those verses are being taken out of their context" but rarely do they attempt to show how. They just make the accusation to cast doubt on those who challenge their doctrine. But in these and many other verses, they in plain unequivocal language warn Christians in danger of leaving the faith or stubbornly and flagrantly living in sin that there are damning consequences to such a course.

When Paul wrote to the troubled church at Corinth, he rebuked their ungodly behavior surrounding their assemblies and their observance of the Lord's Supper. They were making a mockery out of eating the one loaf which represented the one body of Christ and drinking of the cup which represented their covenant relationship with Christ and one another sealed by the blood of Jesus by treated one another in an ungodly way. They were coming together and having a meal, or it was called in ancient times a "love feast" where anything but love was being shown. It was a gross and gluttonous display of one-upmanship where the rich were shaming the poor. They were then coming to the table of the Lord with such a disgraceful spirit and Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:20, according to the American Standard Version, that their attitude made it "impossible for them to eat the Lord's Supper." That is, they could not worthily and rightfully eat the Lord's Supper with such attitudes prevailing among them. He says they were to examine themselves as they partook. They were to examine their hearts and attitudes and discern the precious body of which they were apart as they approached the table. This was such a serious matter that some of them were already being judged by God for their conduct. Paul says some were sick and some had already died. I personally believe that Paul was referring to their being stricken with illness because of their sin but that's another subject for another time. But now, listen to what Paul says about this judgment they were receiving for their ungodly behavior: Verses 31-32: "For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world." Paul is saying that this was occurring as a corrective warning from the Lord so that "we may not be condemned with the world!" Does that not suggest that they were in danger of being condemned along with the world if they did not accept Paul's rebuke and repent of their sin?

In the same letter, Paul mediates a dispute they were having over the eating of meat that came from pagan temples and idolatrous sacrifices. Now, Paul concludes that since an idol is nothing to a Christian and the person is just taking sustenance, not engaging in pagan worship, that it was not sinful to eat

such meat. But he warns that some with a weaker conscience could be led to sin against their conscience if the stronger are not careful about how they practice their liberty. Notice in 1 Corinthians 8:11 what he says could happen and try to reconcile this with the Calvinistic doctrines of limited atonement and perseverance of the saints or eternal security... 1 Corinthians 8:9-11 "But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?" Well, he's obviously not talking about physically perishing so how else could they perish other than spiritually? They could destroy that person's conscience and cause them to fall away from the faith altogether. If that happened, a person "FOR WHOM CHRIST DIED" would "PERISH".

Now, we have only touched on a few passages that contain such warnings. Are they not enough to warn us of the eternal implications of departing from Christ and from the faith? If the bible warns us not to do so, doesn't that mean that it's possible to do so? Lord willing in our time together next week, we'll continue our look at this important topic: Can a Christian Forfeit Salvation? So, have your bible and notepad handy next week as we notice several other pertinent passages. I'll return with more, after another song.

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