



CAN A CHRISTIAN FORFEIT SALVATION?

Part 2

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Welcome to Let the Bible Speak. Thanks for joining me for today's program. Can a person once saved, fall from grace, and be eternally lost? Is it possible for a follower of Christ to turn away from following Him and thus forfeit salvation? That's the question we took up in our study last week and that we wish to continue today. It's an emotionally charged question and has divided the religious community for centuries.

Last week, we noticed several passages of scripture, but we began and spent much of our time in Paul's letter to the Galatians. If you missed that study, I encourage you to go back and watch it or order the free transcript. Today, we'll look at some other passages, but we want to spend a considerable amount of our time in the Book of Hebrews. This letter (possibly penned by Paul) is an exhortation for believers to stand firm in the gospel in view of the temptation to go back to the sacrifices of the Jewish temple. Jerusalem would soon be destroyed and all that the Jewish Christians had known would be shaken and only those things in Christ would remain. It would, therefore, be a futile and even dangerous matter for them to turn their backs on the faith and go back to an insufficient and doomed system.

For example, let's read from Hebrews 6. Beginning in verse 1 and reading through verse 6, the inspired writer says: ***"Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, [of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God and put Him to an open shame."*** What is the elementary teaching that these believers were to leave behind and what is the stern

warning about for those who refuse? That's just a portion of what we'll consider in part 2 of our lesson "Can A Christian Forfeit Salvation.

There are those who affirm the Calvinistic doctrine of 'Perseverance of The Saints' or 'Once Saved, Always Saved' who will go so far as to admit that regardless of the sins a believer commits and does not repent of, he or she will still be eternally saved. Most people who hold to the doctrine, however, try to make a more nuanced argument. They will often say that either, number one, a professing believer who renounces their faith and forsakes Christ was never saved to begin with; that they were a counterfeit Christian or a pretend believer. Number two, many will argue that a Christian may temporarily fall out of fellowship with God and suffer consequences in this life for their apostasy, but if they were really saved, God will correct them and bring them back to Him so that they will not be eternally lost. In any case, they believe that any person who was saved at any point in their life will always be in a saved condition, and they can never forfeit salvation. They claim that if it were possible for a saved person to sin and be lost, then God would be breaking His promises or that man's salvation is being earned by His obedience. I deny both of those claims and I believe that it is impossible to reconcile the doctrine of once saved, always saved with several plain passages in the Word of God.

Last week, we saw where Paul warned those being swayed by the Judaizers to depend on keeping the Law of Moses for their salvation that they would be severed from Christ and were fallen from grace. As we noted then, it is hard to imagine how a person could be 1) severed from someone they were never attached to, and 2) fallen from the grace they were never in, and 3) in a saved condition while at the same time be severed from Jesus Christ (our only hope of salvation) and fallen from the grace of God which is what brings salvation. Today, let's look at some other passages (some in the Book of Hebrews) which express the same idea and take much the same tone.

As I pointed out in the beginning of today's program, the city of Jerusalem and the Jewish temple along with all the things that allowed it to operate were on the cusp of being destroyed. Even though the Jewish Christians had accepted Christ as their Messiah, the temple was the only way of life they had known for most of their lives. As that old system was shaking and as those who sought to maintain and defend it were opposing and persecuting the church, it was a strong temptation for these believers to draw back and revert to their former way of worship. The writer of Hebrews makes a masterful argument throughout the letter that everything about Christ and Christianity is better. Whereas those sacrifices were temporary and insufficient, Christ's sacrifice was forever and able to forgive sin. Whereas the Levitical Priesthood was temporary and insufficient, Christ is the perfect High Priest for God's people. So, he uses that understanding to encourage them to resist temptation and press forward in their faith in Christ and not to turn away from Him, going back to an outdated and inadequate system. But it is not merely a matter of Christ being better and it being foolish to leave Him for those things, it was a matter of spiritual life and death. It was a matter of condemnation if they did so, and the scriptures clearly bear it out. For example, in chapter 2, he warns beginning in verse 1: "Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him..." And the writer goes on to show how the message of Christ was verified by the miracles the apostles wrought through the Holy Spirit. They should be willing to entrust their souls to this message, in other words, because it was confirmed by heaven itself. Now, notice that he warns his readers about the danger of drifting "away". How would you drift from someplace where you never were to begin with? If disobedience under the Old Covenant was punished

by God, how would it be worse for people under the New Covenant if they drifted away and disobeyed the faith?

Now, the writer continues that theme throughout the letter. He combines encouragement to cling to the Christ with warnings against forsaking Him. Look for example in chapter 3, verses 5-6: "And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are IF WE HOLD FAST THE CONFIDENCE and the rejoicing of the hope FIRM TO THE END." What if we don't hold fast that confidence? Again, how could they hold onto something they never had ahold of to begin with? What if they failed to hold onto their hope "firm to the end"? You see, the apostle makes the matter conditional with the word "if". He then continues in verses 7-11 to remind them of how their fathers tempted God in the wilderness and failed to enter the Promised Land and into God's rest. He then adds this strong warning in verses 12-14: "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called "TODAY," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ IF WE HOLD THE BEGINNING OF OUR CONFIDENCE STEADFAST TO THE END." Notice, he says they, through unbelief, could DEPART from the living God and therefore should exhort one another. He is not talking about Jews who had not yet accept the Christ. The people he is warning against departing from the living God were the same people who were to be exhorting one another in the Christian faith so they WOULDN'T depart from it.

Go to the next chapter: chapter 4, verse 11. He is still taking about those who failed to finish the journey and enter God's rest. He says, "Let US therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone FALL according to the same example of disobedience." Then, we go to chapter 5 where he rebukes them for not growing in their understanding when they should have already progressed to a higher level of faith. He then begins chapter 6 by saying: "Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God and put Him to an open shame."

Now, the writer says that they are to leave the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ. What does he mean by that? What are those 'elementary principles?' If you'll notice the list of foundational things that he then enumerates, you can see that he is talking about things of the Old Law that laid the foundation for Christ and the New Covenant that He would inaugurate. He says, "repentance from dead works and of faith toward God" He's referring to the calls of repentance found throughout the Old Testament. That phrase "dead works" only occurs here and in chapter 9 where it refers to works that leave the conscience still uncleansed. It's a reference to that inadequate and old system under which the people failed time and again and that could not, in and of itself, make them right with God. Then, he refers to leaving "the doctrine of baptisms (or washings)". He's not talking about New Testament baptism there because, for one thing, he uses a different form of the Greek word for baptisms which is not used to refer to the ordinance of baptism but to the ceremonial washings under the Old Covenant. The Jews were preoccupied with such ceremonies and washings in the law and that's what the Hebrew writer is talking about here. Next, he speaks of leaving behind the "laying on of hands" which refers to how the priest's laid hands upon the sacrifices of the Levitical system. He is saying (as he will continue to argue in this letter) that that means of dealing sin was to be left behind and they were to look to Christ.

He then mentions “resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment”. He’s not saying that Christians should not be concerned about the future bodily resurrection and be warning of the judgment day ahead for that would contradict Paul’s lengthy discussion of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 and so forth. He is referring to the Jewish speculations concerning to those shadowy ideas under the law before Christ came and made those things clear by the gospel and by His own resurrection from the dead.

So, Paul says they were to have moved beyond those things – those elementary or foundational elements – and move into the perfection or the true substance of those things in Christ and in the Christian faith. Now then, notice his warning! “For it is impossible for those who were ONCE ENLIGHTENED, and HAVE TASTED the heavenly gift” (the forgiveness of their sins from heaven); and have become “partakers of the Holy Spirit” (the gift that was first preached about by Peter in Acts 2:38 when they were told to leave their sins by repenting and being baptized); “And have tasted the good word of God (the gospel) and the powers of the age to come” (age to come being an expression in the bible to refer to the Messianic age). “And THEN (when? after seeing, hearing, tasting, and receiving those things) if they fall away (the ESV says ‘And then have fallen away’) to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.” Friend, if Christ and the gospel cannot change a person’s heart then nothing can. And if one turns away from Christ (having tasted and been made partakers of all these things) then he is turning away from his only hope. Can a straying Christian repent and return to Christ? Absolutely and you should do so immediately if you’re willing to repent. The problem is, those the writer is talking about are on the verge of repudiating Christ and in the process, so hardening their hearts (remember the warnings he has already given about doing that) that their heart becomes incapable of godly sorrow and then repentance. And anytime one willfully does that which he knows is wrong, he takes another step toward creating that condition in their heart.

Friend, I’m not suggesting that the Christian is walking some near-impossible tightrope to heaven and that God is gleefully waiting for the opportunity to pounce on us and take away our salvation. God forbid! God is on the side of those who love Him. He grants us the grace to grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior when we come to Him in yielding faith. God isn’t going to renege on His promise and arbitrarily take away your salvation. Nobody has the power to come and steal your salvation away from you. God isn’t looking for ways to deny you eternal salvation. He, in mercy and love, has made every provision through His Son for you and me to saved. But what of those who repudiate Christ as these Hebrews seemed on the verge of doing? What of those who rebel and cast aside their faith in Jesus? What of those who refuse to submit and obey what Christ tells them to do? Are we really to believe that one can do so with eternal impunity?

Quickly, look at Hebrews 10:24-29. “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking (the ESV says “not neglecting”) the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?” Who is in danger of that? Those who need to regularly assemble and provoke and encourage one another to remain faithful to Jesus! Who can deny that he is talking about people who were at one time genuine believers and then warning of eternal judgment?

Then, look at verses 35-36: “Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.”

And finally, look with me at 2 Peter 2:1. “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.” Did you get that? “Even denying THE LORD WHO BOUGHT THEM”. The doctrine of Calvinism says Christ only died for the elect. But here Peter warns of people who the Lord bought who will bring upon themselves God’s judgment and swift destruction. Friend, the doctrine of once in grace, always in grace is a comforting and appealing doctrine to many but it simply is not taught in the word of God. Christ is our hope of salvation, and we must place our faith in Him, submit to His will in obedience, and CLING to Him and we will not only know the abundant life here but have the hope of life in the world to come. If you once knew Christ but left Him and went back to the world and forsook the faith, you need to return. If your heart is capable of repenting, you need to repent today and do not harden your heart anymore. He’ll receive you and He’ll help you and form His image within you, but you must be ready and willing to surrender and yield to Him today.

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