

COMMENTS ON THE OBJECTION TO THE DOCTRINE OF 'ONCE SAVED, ALWAYS SAVED'

1)"ONCE SAVED - ALWAYS SAVED". Now, having got people falsely "saved", we create another ear-tickling wonder to make sure that they sleep on contentedly in the pews. While emphasising 'tithing' and attending church (-in that order) the main thing now is to keep them warm and happy - convinced of their "eternal security".

The language could be more gracious when making accusations of a general nature such as we read in the passage above. Doubtless there are false shepherds who deserve rebuke. But there are true shepherds who, like the author of the passage, do not want people to be 'falsely saved'.

2) And so we lull them with a doctrine saying that if they once got "saved" (ie. prayed the 'little prayer') - even if it was 20 years ago, then it is "IMPOSSIBLE" for them to lose their salvation. No holiness needed! Of course, we have to rely on the fact that they do not read their Bibles - lest they find out that such a doctrine is a complete fabrication. Thus, we conveniently leave out of our preaching such Scriptures as this: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. MANY will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works IN YOUR NAME?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART from me, you EVIL-DOERS.'" (Mt 7:21-23). Hmmm. "Eternal security", anyone?

The verses above clearly applies to a class of people who are 'falsely saved' - and who use the Lord's name for selfish ends, as shown by their exposure as 'evil-doers' on Judgement Day. Remember that the Lord also said, 'Not everyone!' There are true prophets in the body of Christ.

3) And of course, we must also leave out parables such as "The Five Foolish Virgins" because it contains this verse: "And cast the WORTHLESS SERVANT into outer darkness, where there shall be WAILING and GNASHING OF TEETH" (Mt 25:30). Notice that both the above Scriptures are speaking of people who think they are 'saved' but who END UP IN HELL. -And Jesus says there will be "MANY" like this.

Of course we must not leave out parables such as 'The Five Foolish Virgins' because it does teach that when one is truly saved, one is truly watchful, like the wise virgins. One should also look at the preceding parable involving the servant who buried his single talent in the ground. To this 'wicked and lazy servant' the Lord issued the stern judgement: 'And cast out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' Matthew 25:24

It is quite obvious that these severe words are not addressed to a lazy or negligent Christian but to an offender whose attitude, actions and words reveal a heart that is basically antagonistic to the master. (Note: We should be careful not to build doctrines on parables. Otherwise we might just jump to the conclusions that our

salvation has something to do with the illustrative details such as keeping a supply of oil or engaging in profitable investment of money!)

These parables are meant to warn people about what James writes so succinctly in his letter: **You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. James 2:24** Who could put it better than the Lord, who said: **A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them. Matthew 7:18 - 20**

We conclude that there are saved and unsaved people in this world. This is a fact of life. Jesus Himself pointed this out: **The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat . . . Allow both to grow together until the harvest. I will say to the reapers, 'First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather up the wheat into my barn'** Matthew 13:24,25,30

Question

The Scriptural verses that the author quotes are not really relevant to the topic of the eternal safety of Christians as they speak of the behaviour and fate of those who are not true Christians. What has the lostness of unsaved men got to do with the security of the truly saved? What is of concern is the author's labeling of the important Biblical truth of the eternal safety of believers, namely, 'once saved - always saved', as 'a complete fabrication' (see 2 above). It is not a fabrication, as we shall see. It is taught in the Bible to comfort and challenge the people of God.

To be fair, let us first hear his arguments.

4) And then there are dozens of other Scriptures such as, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," and "Those who do such things shall NOT inherit the kingdom of God," and "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord," etc, etc. -So many Scriptures have to be ignored if we are to preach this cheap "Once Saved - Always Saved" doctrine.

So we look in full at the first Scripture quoted.

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling. Don't neglect the next verse!! **For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.** Philippians 2:12, 13 Paul is telling his Christian friends (note his 'my beloved' in v 12) to live their lives with deep reverence and fear. After all God is the One Who motivates and empowers them. The important principle we learn here may be applied to all Scripture dealing with the eternal safety of Christian believers. We persevere to please our God, while our God delights to preserve us. Our perseverance is balanced by His preservation. When God works in you He will never fail to accomplish His good pleasure in and through you. These verses do not argue against the eternal safety of believers. In fact they do the opposite. They show how God actively helps His own to be obedient and holy and in so doing keeps them close to Him.

Let's look at the second Scripture quoted:

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are immorality, impurity... drunkenness, carousings, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practise such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.
Galatians 5:19 – 21

The question that crops up from this verse is: if there is no possibility of losing one's salvation why the warning about not inheriting the kingdom of God? Before we try to answer the question, look at the two verses further down:

Now those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Vv 24, 25

The warning about not inheriting the kingdom of God is addressed to men and women who have freedom in choosing to obey or not obey their sinful impulses. Unbelievers habitually rebel against God's moral laws; Christians habitually try their best to obey them. 'Therefore by their fruits you will know them,' the Lord has said. Being a Christian makes a difference to how we react to the temptations of life.

What Paul is doing is comparing what life in the flesh (our sinful nature) is like to what living in the Spirit should be. On one hand readers of the Bible (believers and non-believers alike) are shown what evil men do when they disobey and want to have their own way. They become socially disruptive and hurtful. Obstinate behaviour by rebels against God and His laws and, by implication, the Gospel, carry the ultimate consequence of not inheriting the kingdom of God. Now, Christians have pledged their grateful allegiance to the Lord and are not rebels anymore. But they still need to be warned against following the ways of the old sinful nature. Hence the verses of warning, as part of God's word, are good for them as well.

On the other hand readers of the Bible (believers and non-believers alike) are shown the attraction of bearing the fruit of the Spirit and the blessed consequences of inheriting the kingdom of God and becoming more Christlike. The non-Christian may not fully understand what he reads, but he understands enough.

The possibility of losing salvation, (not inheriting the kingdom of God), therefore, is a general warning, just as the Gospel is a general announcement to all peoples. Christians are not troubled by the thought of the possibility that their sins might not actually be forgiven. They trust that God has willed that they have been, by the death of His dear Son on Calvary on their behalf. Similarly, losing their salvation should not be an issue for Christians because God has willed to keep them safe as those who belong to Christ. Salvation is in His able hands from beginning to end.

Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified these He also glorified. Romans 8:30

Look carefully at the Scriptures given below. If our understanding and faith in God's will for our eternal safety were as strong, we would proclaim wholeheartedly with Paul:

I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have committed to Him until that day.
2 Timothy 1:12

To which the Apostle Peter echoes on behalf of every Christian:

...to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God, though faith, for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 1 Peter 1:4, 5

And to this the Lord has said:

I pray for them. I do not pray for the world, but for those You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world. And I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your Name those whom you have given Me, that they may be one as We are. John 17:9 – 11

Note that the Lord Jesus makes a distinction between those who are true believers and those who are not. When this distinction is blurred it is not surprising that some conclude that Christians can apparently lose what they have received from God – forgiveness and eternal life.

Examine further the following verses from John's Gospel. Jesus said:

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word. Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. John 17:20, 24

See how often Jesus refers to us as those whom the Father has given Him. It is to the honour of God's Name, and to His glory, that He is able to save and able to keep those He has given to His Son. Don't you think so? We may also be assured that the Father will answer the prayer of His Son for our eternal safety and welfare. Do you believe that?

Conclusions

1. One should prayerfully arrive at a conclusion by examining all of Scripture, paying particular attention to those parts that are inconvenient to our point of view or present understanding.
2. Scripture is to be interpreted with Scripture. That is, one should allow the Bible to comment on itself. The clearer part of its teaching should guide our understanding of the more obscure. Not the other way round.

Thus considered, the doctrine of eternal salvation is entirely consonant with what the Bible has to say on the subject. What moves people to question the validity of the doctrine is their unhappy experiences of those who call themselves Christians while denying their faith by the way they live. They themselves may be shaken by their

own waxing and waning love for the Lord. So sadly, they conclude that salvation is not as firm or sure after all.

What disturbs the brother who disparages the doctrine is his experience of the profound lack of holiness today among Christians, who still cling to their profession of faith by church-going and the associated activities. No doubt, among these are true believers who are away from the Lord. And then there are those who have never truly repented and received Christ as Saviour. Our task is to help these two groups of people in whatever way we can.

But the answer to these complex problems is not by discarding a valuable doctrine for persevering in our Christian walk. It teaches us that ultimately we shall be brought safely home to inherit that glorious kingdom which God has promised to all who love Him. It will then be seen to be all of grace, from the beginning of our salvation to its end.

How we need to affirm even more strongly this glorious doctrine of our security in Christ. The anchor will hold despite the tempests of the endtimes!

Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal; 'The Lord knows those who are His.' And 'Let everyone who names the Name of Christ depart from iniquity' 2 Timothy 2:19

In Christ,
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