

## **Once Saved, Always Saved**

**Aaron Erhardt**

Many in the religious world, most notably the Calvinists, teach that a child of God can never so sin as to lose his salvation. They say he is "once saved, always saved." The Westminster Confession of Faith put it like this:

"They, whom God has accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved" (Of the Perseverance of the Saints, 17:1).

A Baptist preacher once took this doctrine to its logical conclusion in a tract entitled "Do A Christian's Sins Damn His Soul?" He boldly declared,

"We take the position that a Christian's sins do not damn his soul. The way a Christian lives, what he says, his character, his conduct, or his attitude toward other people have nothing whatever to do with the salvation of his soul...All the prayers a man may pray, all the Bibles he may read, all the churches he may belong to, all the services he may attend, all the sermons he may practice, all the debts he may pay, all the ordinances he may observe, all the laws he may keep, all the benevolent acts he may perform will not make his soul one whit safer; and all the sins he may commit from idolatry to murder will not make his soul in any more danger...The way a man lives has nothing whatever to do with the salvation of his soul" (Sam Morris, Stamford, Texas).

Is that true? Is it impossible for a child of God to fall from grace even if he persists in sin? Let's investigate.

### **Hebrews**

The Hebrew brethren were members of the early church. They were called "holy brothers...who share in a heavenly calling" (Hebrews 3:1). There can be no doubt that the writer of the book was in fellowship with those Christians. Yet we see that they could fall away from the living God (3:12), be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (3:13), fail to reach the promise (4:1), fall by the same sort of disobedience (4:11), spurn the Son of God (10:29), profane the blood of the covenant (10:29), outrage the Spirit of grace (10:29), throw away their confidence (10:35), fail to obtain the grace of God (12:15), become defiled (12:15), refuse Him who speaks from heaven (12:25), etc. Surely no one believes that a person who does those things is still saved.

## **"If"**

The word "if" is a little word with a big meaning. It is a conditional word. If a father tells his son, "I will take you to the movies if you clean your room," we all recognize that the son must meet a condition before going to the movies — he must clean his room. The same is true with our salvation from sin. There are conditions we must meet and maintain. For instance, we are His disciples "if" we abide in His Word (John 8:31), we will be honored "if" we serve Him (John 12:26), we are saved "if" we hold fast to the Word (1 Corinthians 15:1-2), we will reap "if" we do not give up (Galatians 6:9), we are holy "if" we continue in the faith (Colossians 1:22-23), we will never fall "if" we practice certain qualities (2 Peter 1:10), we are cleansed "if" we walk in the light (1 John 1:7), etc. Every honest person can see that there are conditions that a child of God must meet and maintain to be saved. Even the most stubborn soul must concede that "if" is a conditional word.

This is not to say that a child of God has no assurance or confidence. We all believe that he has assurance. In fact, Jesus promised that the believer "does not come into judgment" (John 5:24). However, we must understand that a believer can become an unbeliever. He can develop "an evil, unbelieving heart" (Hebrews 3:12). The blessed assurance of "not coming into judgment" is promised only to those who "walk in the light" (1 John 1:7). As long as a child of God walks in the light he can have absolute assurance in his salvation!

## **Examples**

There are examples of actual people who fell away in the New Testament. Hymeneus, Alexander, Philetus, and Demas are all identified as having fallen from grace (1 Timothy 1:19-20; 2 Timothy 2:17; 4:10). Ananias and Sapphira were members of the church at Jerusalem who were struck dead for lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-10). What about Simon? He was a child of God who was certainly in danger of losing his soul (Acts 8:22-23). These names are etched in history as a vivid reminder that a child of God can forfeit his salvation. He can "depart from the faith" (1 Timothy 4:1).

Some advocates of "once saved, always saved" argue that a person who falls away never really believed in the first place. They say he was only a pretender. However, Jesus made a statement that destroys this argument. In the parable of the sower, He said, "And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away" (Luke 8:13). Notice that they "believe" and then "fall away." No one can say that they did not really believe, for Jesus said they did! Hence, this argument is proven erroneous. Furthermore, the Israelites are another example of believers who fell away. The Bible says they "believed in the Lord" (Exodus 14:31). Yet thousands of them later fell (1 Corinthians 10:8). Do not be deceived by such arguments.

## **"Fall"**

Probably the most obvious way to determine if a child of God can fall from grace is to look at the word "fall" in Scripture. Is it there? How is it used? What does it teach? We already noted that Jesus spoke of those who "fall away" when tested (Luke 8:13). New Testament writers warned that Christians could "fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12), "fall away from grace" (Galatians 5:4), "fall under condemnation" (James 5:12), Paul warned Christians to take heed lest they "fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12) and said that those who sought justification through circumcision had "fallen away from grace" (Galatians 5:4). James warned that Christians could "fall under condemnation" (James 5:12), etc. The fact that the word "fall" is used in reference to Christians settles the issue. Obviously a child of God can fall from grace.

## **Questions**

A child of God can lie (Colossians 3:9). What if he lies, but never repents? Will he still be saved? The Bible says that all liars shall have their part in the lake of fire (Revelation 21:8). A child of God can also get drunk (Ephesians 5:18). What if he gets drunk, but never repents? Will he still be saved? The Bible says that drunkards will not inherit the kingdom of heaven (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Furthermore, a child of God who refuses to provide for his house is worse than an unbeliever (1 Timothy 5:8). Will he still be saved? These are appropriate questions that need to be answered.

Peter, in graphic detail, describes the pitiful condition of those who fall from grace. He wrote, "For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. What the true proverb says has happened to them: 'The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire'" (2 Peter 2:20-22). How sad.

The "once saved — always saved" doctrine is false. Christians must remain faithful to stay in favor with God and to receive a crown of life (Revelation 2:10). A child of God can fall from grace.