

Can Salvation be Lost?

Those of us who call ourselves “born again Christians” and genuinely are, know, and rightly so, that it was through God’s graces that we came into the faith, and that through that Faith we are saved, that is destined for eternal life in heaven. We find comfort and assurances in this fact, because the Lord in His own words told us so. In John 3:3 Jesus tells Nicodamus that “..except that a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” In John 3:6 Jesus continues, “...that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit.” Then in Ephesians 2:8, 9, Paul says, “..for by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God: not works, lest any man should boast.” There are many other passages in the Bible that add clarity and confirmation to this fundamental fact. Therefore, in essence, there is a moment when if we truly accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, knowing with certainty that He died for our sins and was resurrected, we are born again forever, and irrevocably. That rebirth gets us a new spiritual heart, which becomes the permanent home of the Holy Spirit We are thus saved, and nothing can, under any circumstances, take away that salvation! If salvation could be lost, then God could not be omniscient. He would have been unable to see the future event, attitude-changed belief, that caused the soul that He saved to no longer be in a state wherein it was qualified to remain saved. This, of course, is absolute foolishness. He is omniscient, and can see all future aspects of one’s life. The real issue is not the possibility of losing salvation, but of never having it at all!

But is that all there is to it? Yes, in response to the question. However, the answer given hereinabove begs further clarification in order that no one misunderstands the full extent of how salvation is assured. The tragic fact is that there are many millions of souls who believe they are saved but are not, because through false or inadequate preaching, teaching or evangelism, they have failed to understand all that is involved in the process that causes one to be saved.

The essence of it all came from our Lord’s own mouth when He told Nicodemus that one must be born-again if one is to see the kingdom of God, and to be saved to eternal life. Born again! This is the perfect and most beautiful description, encompassing everything

involved. When one is physically born, he or she enters the world as a totally helpless innocent, unknowing creature who needs the most basic elementary care and nurturing. But the newborn grows and learns and matures eventually to adulthood. With a comparatively few unfortunate exceptions, this process is inevitable and irrepressible. With adulthood should come ever-increasing understanding, responsibility, dependability and accountability. All of this is the natural process of the flesh, the physical body. This we know is the process of birth, growth, life and death of all flesh.

However, being born-again as Jesus taught is to be born of the spirit and to have a wholly different, yet similar growth process. The newborn spirit, that which comes into being once a genuine acceptance of Jesus as both Lord and Savior occurs, is also totally helpless, innocent and unknowing. However, the difference is that the Holy Spirit indwells in the infant's new heart, and is ready and willing to care and nurture this new born. As inevitable as it is for the newborn baby to grow, so also must the newborn spirit grow and mature. If evidence of this growth is not apparent, a tragic situation may exist which needs to be dealt with. If that growth is not evidenced, it is highly likely that there has been no re-birth, no indwelling of the Holy Spirit and therefore no salvation. Because a sincere, genuine commitment to Jesus was lacking, a saving faith did not manifest. That is the tragedy of pandemic proportion in these last days when so many false prophets and false teachers, along with half-truth preachers and evangelists, flood the airways, pulpits and literature. Because there is so little bedrock knowledge of Scripture in the populous, these misleaders convince many to believe that they can obtain salvation through ways other than through the strict biblical truth.

The only test or clue we seem to have of the vitality of the newborn is the nature and extent of the changed life, which only the indwelling Holy Spirit could orchestrate. Even this, however, can be exceedingly deceptive, because of the rampant counterfeiting, which is occurring in these end times. Will this life remain changed in the desired way? Does this changed life carry with it a uniqueness characteristic of only a born-again faithful follower of Jesus? This is not always easy to discern, because there are many truly virtuously behaving people whom, by all superficial evidence, could surely typify

the ideal Christian virtues, yet have greatly divergent beliefs. The fact is that one can lead a very Christian like life, yet not be a Christian and therefore not saved. However, I doubt that one can be a Christian and not diligently and sincerely pursue a Christian life. Also there are many truly sincere people. However, sincerity is of no relevance unless it is associated with faith in the one and only triune Godhead and His fleshly manifestation Jesus, as our one and only Lord and Savior.

Clearly, there must be more to this than is commonly understood. If there is, it is vital, to anyone truly seeking salvation, that there remain no question or doubt as to the sufficiency of their faith and their Christian walk. A reliable source of this truth can only be found in God's own words, The Bible. Perhaps, those verses on which the Armenians rely for their interpretation can add an additional dimension through which a clearer understanding can be found.

In Matthew 15:9 and again in Mark 7:7 Jesus says, "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." This tells us to always search the scriptures for the truth and to not rely on the words of men, which can be false or misleading into vain or false faith. Paul's message in Acts 17:11 cautions us against the same mistake. This is not necessarily relevant to the topic issue, which is whether or not we can lose our salvation, but it clearly focuses on the related issue as to whether we are saved at all through our chosen interpretation of how salvation is achieved. It suggests that one can be in grave danger of totally missing salvation if one's faith is built on words of others, which are not wholly verified and confirmed by Scripture. One must, as the Bereans did in Acts 17:11, "...search the Scriptures daily to see if these things be so." I believe that many Catholics, as well as those of other "faiths," are in this danger in that they rely wholly on the interpretations and words of others as their sole basis of faith and hope for salvation. This problem can be solved only if we pray sincerely and often and seriously study, learn and understand as much as possible the whole Word of God as presented in the Scriptures. Casualness or being "lukewarm" here is not a satisfactory option.

In 1 Corinthians 15:2, Paul says, "...by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye believed in vain." This suggests that one can know the truth, "keep in memory," as Paul related it directly from divine Authority, but a vain faith can still result. How can that happen? Perhaps we may find the answer in His own words as Jesus relates a parable and then explains it in Matthew 13:5-7 and 20-22 where He speaks of seeds sown and "...some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprang up because they had no deepness of earth: and when the sun was up they were scorched: and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up and choked them." Then Jesus explains as follows: "But he that receives the seed into stony places, the same is he that hears the word, and with joy receives it, yet hath he not root in himself, but endureth for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word, by and by he is offended. He also that receives the seed among the thorns is he that hears the Word; and the cares of this World and the deceitfulness or riches, chokes the Word and he becomes unfruitful."

Here the Lord gives two examples of what He may have meant by vain or non-saving faith. The first one might be called the "drop out" faith, where the Word of God is received and it sounds great, truly inspiring, but the soul doesn't have sufficient depth of soil in which faith can grow strong. With the advent of adversities this faith shrivels and dies. The second example of vain faith, which might be called lukewarm or cooled off faith, is that which also starts out vigorous and in sufficiently deep soil, however, the cares, temptations, responsibilities, successes, pleasures etc. of the world assume even greater importance in the believer's life, taking priority over, and choking out or fatally weakening our worship, faith, prayers, and true fellowship with Jesus.

Aren't we all, those who believe ourselves to be true Christians, vulnerable to this form of vain faith? How much do we rationalize that we live in sufficiency of these essentials of a true faith, when in fact we may have fatal deficiencies as we find ourselves struggling amongst the distractions of daily life?

How many of us are of the Church of Ephesus (Revelation 2:4) and have left our first love, our priority love, Jesus, perhaps in a misdirected zeal doing so much work for the King that we have forgotten to sufficiently worship the King? The Lord Jesus' letter to the seven churches in Revelation 2, 3 contains much insight into how easily sincere, well meaning Christians can live insufficient and misdirected lives.

Of those of us who critically examine ourselves regarding the sincerity and sufficiency of our faith, many discover that we are too deeply immersed in the world and hindered in our Walk by the dense "thorns" which surround us. If so, we should be greatly concerned and alert to the potential of this "vain" worship.

It's easy to say: "once saved always saved. I committed myself to Jesus, I pray often; I attend church faithfully; I read the Scriptures daily; and I see my changed life proving my salvation." Maybe that's all there is to it. I can't say that it isn't. However, I'm continually troubled by thoughts expressed in such words as sufficiency, sincerity, intensely, sustainability, intellectual vs spiritual etc, as I contemplate my status with Jesus and with eternity. While the Scripture is very gratifying in terms of its assurance of salvation through grace, it also, like it or not, imposes certain conditions beyond the simple commitment to Jesus as a prerequisite to salvation. Consider Hebrew 3:6 "...but Christ as a son over His own house; whose we are if we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." (note what I've underlined) Again see Hebrews 3:14 "For we are made partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of your confidence steadfast unto the end." Then again in Hebrews 6:4-6 "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame."

From these verses it is evident that it is a day-by-day, moment-by-moment, continuous commitment to, and fellowship with, Jesus that remains strong and uncompromised to the end, which is a demonstration of the true saving faith. It is a once and for all irrevocable

done deal the moment we truly, by the above definition, accept Jesus. However, only the Lord knows whether or not our individual commitments are of such sustaining quality, because only He knows the beginning from the end. I believe it is not for us to know the certainty of our salvation until we have drawn our last breath and heard the loving voice of Jesus calling us each by our name to come and join Him in our eternal home.

How can it be otherwise? Faith, which does not endure to the end, was never true faith. Because we can not possibly know at this time what will be in our minds and in our hearts 10, 20 or 30 years from now, what trials, tribulations and temptations we will encounter, how stifling will be the sea of “thorns” which surrounds us or how committed the devil may be to pervert and subvert our faith. It seems clear to me that without perseverance to the end we achieve nothing, and because we have no way to know when or how the end will be, we can not know until then whether or not we are saved. We can only continue in our prayers, strengthen our understanding of His word and Trust Him to deliver us safely through whatever trials and temptations may make difficult our remaining days.

I know that many who read this may rage with indignation at my claim that absolute assurance of salvation is not discernable until we have finished the race. That may not be an axiom. There may be many people who are rightly convinced of their salvation early, after, or even at the moment of its occurrence. I pray that this is so for those who so believe. For me, however, based on my understanding of God’s Word as I have studied it most seriously for almost nine years now, I find the need to be most critical of myself and my opinion of where I stand in this most important of all possible circumstances. As I see the diabolical workings of the great deceiver in the hearts of millions, my heart aches and I pray greatly for them. These are those who have spoken the right words, felt some twangs of emotion and now believe they have salvation, but do not. Satan can fill most any mind with apathy, self-satisfaction, compliancy and anything else that will deceive him or her into believing a lie. No one is immune to such attacks. From my reading and study of Scripture, I prefer the far conservative side of its interpretation, its directions. I believe, as Paul advises to periodically examine my faith. A backsliding saved soul is still a saved soul. But how about people like Charles Templeton? (See his story in the

paper called: How to loose your Salvation. For 20 years he was one of the world's greatest evangelists, preaching to many thousands at a time throughout North America and Europe. It's been said that during his evangelical career, he was even more effective than his contemporary Billy Graham. Then suddenly he no longer believed that there even is a God. He spent the later half of his life lecturing on his new religion, atheism. Should he not have checked his faith once in a while? Could this be simply a backslid saved Christian, or someone who was never really saved? If we didn't know better, we might conclude that here was a case of salvation lost! The issue of salvation is far too important to take casually, with compliancy or with presumptions. Most people believe that it is a good idea to have an annual physical examination for the sake of physical health. Given the far greater importance of ones spiritual condition, should that also be the object of a periodic examination?