

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, May 2, 2012 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

THE ETERNAL SECURITY OF THE BELIEVER “The Debate of Eternal Security” *Galatians 5:1-6, Hebrews 6:1-6, Hebrews 10:26-27*

Throughout the years, eternal security has been a hotly debated issue in theology. Many theologians say you can lose your salvation, and many claim you cannot. This doctrine of eternal security is sometimes referred to as “the perseverance of the saints” or “once saved, always saved.” Today, however, many believe a Christian can lose his or her salvation. Such a person is considered to have backslidden – to have fallen away from Christ.

I. CLAIMS OF THOSE ADVOCATE THE IDEA OF FALL FROM GRACE

3 Claims for A Believer to Fall From Grace:

1. **Salvation must be conditional** – That is based on something that we do or have done.
2. **Man must maintain salvation** - Since God has saved us, we will maintain our salvation as we continue to match up with God’s standards. If we fail to match up at any point we lose our salvation
3. **Salvation is based on a works-righteousness perspective** - The teaching that one can fall from grace must always insist that salvation should be seen from a works-righteousness perspective.

A Rebuttal of the 3 Claims that a Believer can Fall From Grace:

Claim 1: Salvation must be conditional –

Rebuttal: Scripture teaches that salvation is “unconditional” in nature and indeed doesn’t depend on anything that we do or have done.

Scripture:

- (1) **Ephesians 2:8-9** - *“⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith —and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.”*
- (2) **John 3:16** - *“¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*
- (3) **Romans 6:23** - *“²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in ^[a] Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Claim 2: Man must maintain salvation –

Rebuttal: Man could never match up or be good enough to match up to God’s standard according to Scripture.

Scripture:

- (1) **Isaiah 64:6** – *“⁶ All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.”*
- (2) **Romans 3:10, 23** – *“¹⁰ As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one’... ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*
- (3) **Matthew 7:21-23** - *²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”*

Claim 3: Salvation is based on a works-righteousness perspective –

Rebuttal: This claim would be in direct violation of Scripture. Scripture clearly teaches that we are “not” saved by works.

Scripture:

- (1) **Ephesians 2:8-9** - *“⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith —and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.”*
- (2) **Titus 3:5-7** – *“⁵ He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”*

II. CONTROVERSIAL PASSAGES ON THE SUBJECT OF ETERNAL SECURITY AND FALLING FROM GRACE

The following are three of the very debated and controversial passages that are often used to support the idea that one can lose their salvation. Often these passage have been used to bolster and entire theological and doctrinal stance that teaches one can indeed “fall from grace” and lose his or her salvation.

3 Controversial Passages and Questions:

1. **Galatians 5:1-6** – *Question Raised: Is it possible to fall from grace?* Someone in this passage is falling from grace... it is a biblical term/phrase. The question is “who” is falling from grace?
2. **Hebrews 6:1-6** – *Question Raised: If could lose your salvation, would it be possible to get it back (be resaved)?* This passage clearly says that if you want to read this passage as dealing with “losing one’s salvation” it is also teaching that once lost it could not be regained.

3. **Hebrews 10:26-27 – Question Raised: Is it possible that a Christian can sin so much that no more sacrifice remains to cover that sin and therefore he or she becomes lost?**
If this passage is dealing with losing one's salvation it indicates that when a believer sins at some point the sacrifice runs out.

Some Things to Remember When Interpreting a Passage:

1. **Always interpret a passage within its context** – A verse or passage of Scripture must be interpreted in context... both immediate and broader context. (*Ex. Galatians 5:4 seems to be saying that it is possible to “fall from grace”, but what does it say when it is read in the context of verses 1-6 and in the broader context of the book of Galatians?*)
2. **Always interpret a passage with an understanding of its background** – Historical background, literary understanding (type of literature... remember Scripture is filled with historical narratives, poetry, letters, prophetic and apocalyptic literature, etc.), grammatical background and understanding (remember Scripture was originally written in three languages; Hebrews, Greek and Aramaic, also grammatical issues, sentence structure, etc. are important in getting at a correct interpretation). (*Ex. Galatians 5:4 seems to be saying that it is possible to “fall from grace,” but understanding the type of literature that the book of Galatians, the historical background about what was going on and what Paul was dealing with, and looking at grammatical issues in the passage may reveal something quite different*)
3. **Always read the passage in light of what the rest of Scripture says** – Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture. No text of Scripture (properly interpreted in its context) will contradict another text of Scripture. When contradictions seem to exist, it is the task of the interpreter to explain the seeming contradiction. He must never seek to do so by ignoring or denying any part of the truth that is revealed in Scripture. (*Ex. Galatians 5:4 may indicate that it is possible to “fall from grace” but Jude 24 says He (Jesus) is about to “keep you from falling”... an apparent contradiction that can only be cleared up through careful interpretation of the whole of Scripture... remember Scripture does not contradict itself*)
4. **Remember that there is really only one proper interpretation of Scripture, and that is God's** – The Apostle Paul told us, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that, ***“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God...”*** (2 Timothy 3:16). The word translated in that verse as “*inspiration*” means “*God-breathed*.” So literally the Greek translates this way, “*All Scripture is breathed out by God...*” In other words it comes from Him, therefore, you cannot hope to arrive at a correct understanding of Scripture independent of God, through the person of the Holy Spirit. The illumination of Scripture can only come from the Spirit of God. 1 Corinthians 2:12-13 says, ***“We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. That is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.”*** Because the author of Scripture – God the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21, “*For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they*

were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”) – resides within the child of God (1 Corinthians 3:16, “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you.”), he or she is in a position to receive God’s illumination (1 Corinthians 2:10-11, “... God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.”). And, indeed, the Spirit of truth not only provides insight that permeate the mind, but also provides illumination that can penetrate the heart. This is why when we go to trying to understand and correctly interpret Scripture we must ask for the Holy Spirit to teach us, show us, guide us, direct us, guard us, in understanding the truth. We are not the final say on His Word, God is!

5. **Use available tools and resources** – This may be the most simplistic yet practical help in interpreting a passage. Use good tools are resources that are readily available to a student of Scripture. Good and reliable Bible Concordances, Bible Dictionaries, Biblical Commentaries, Biblical language helps, varying reliable translations, etc. are extremely helpful in getting at a right interpretation of Scripture. A word of caution here... be sure that you are using a “good” and “reliable” source. There are many Bible helps out there that are not theologically and doctrinally sound. Also remember that, there are just man made tools and should not be substituted for Scripture itself. They are helps! Scripture should still be interpreted using the above mentioned criteria.

NOTE: *With these basic rules for interpretation and ideas (helps) for understanding Scripture, let’s look at what these three controversial passages are saying concerning “falling from grace” or “losing one’s salvation.”*

A Closer Examination of 3 Controversial Passages Dealing with Falling from Grace:

1. **Galatians 5:1-6** – The focus seems to be on **verse 4** where Paul says, **“You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.”** The question is, “Who is falling from grace or fallen away from grace in this passage?” The Greek word of “alienated” means “to be separated,” or “to be severed.” The word for “fallen” means “to lose one’s grasp on something.” Paul’s clear meaning is that any attempt to be justified by the law is to reject salvation by grace alone through faith alone. Those once exposed to the gracious truth of the gospel, who turn their backs on Christ (Hebrews 6:4-6) and seek to be justified by the law are separated from Christ and lose all prospect of God’s gracious salvation. Their desertion of Christ and the gospel only proves that their faith was never genuine. This is a context issue. Galatians 5:4 seems to be saying that is possible to “fall from grace”, but what does it say when it is read in the context of verses 1-6 and in the broader context of the book of Galatians? Is the issue “falling from grace” or is the issue how a person is “justified” or “saved.” The context of the passage and the book give us a better understanding of what is being addressed in verse 4. The book Galatians is about being justified by faith through grace. Historically, Galatians was a circular letter written to churches in the region of Asia Minor known as Galatia. It would be in the area of present day Turkey. Paul had helped to establish these churches probably in his first

missionary journey. After his departure, false prophets and teachers known as Judaizers had come into these areas and begun to spread their false teaching, mainly that a person was saved by particular works and not just by grace. The works they emphasized were Jewish works. In other words they taught that in order to become a Christian, you must first become a Jew and obey Jewish laws, rites and customs. You must be “circumcised” and begin to obey all Jewish laws. It was the Judaizers and Galatians who were following them that were falling further and further away from God’s grace and thus, salvation. So the passage is not even talking about believers, but rather unbelievers and how they are trying to get to God. Their methods were leading them further away from Him, rather than to Him. Grammatical issues in the passage help us to better understand who is being addressed. Notice the change of pronouns between verse 2-4 and verse 5-6. Paul includes himself, as a believer, in the later among those who are being saved, justified by faith. And he addresses the unbelieving Galatians who were buying into the Judaizers’ works-righteousness method of salvation... namely circumcision.

Some important keys to understanding this passage:

- (1) This passage is dealing with unbelievers.**
- (2) This passage is not dealing with the subject of eternal security.**
- (3) This passage is not teaching that a believer can lose his or her salvation.**
- (4) This passage is teaching that an unbeliever who is trying to be saved by works is moving farther and farther away from saving grace.**

2. **Hebrews 6:1-6** – The focus seems to be on verse 6 and the idea of “falling away.” This Greek term “fall away” occurs only here in the New Testament. It is the equivalent to the apostasy in Hebrews 3:12 (“Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.”) The seriousness of this unfaithfulness is seen in the severe description of rejection with in this verse: they re-crucify Christ and treat Him contemptuously. The “impossible” of verse 4 goes with “to renew them again to repentance.” Those who sinned against Christ in such a way had no hope of restoration or forgiveness. The reason is that they had rejected Him with full knowledge and conscious experience (as described in the features of vv. 5-6). With full revelation they rejected the truth, concluding the opposite of the truth about Christ, and thus had no hope of being saved. They can never have more knowledge than they had when they rejected it. They have concluded that Jesus should have been crucified, and they stand with his enemies. There is no possibility of these verses referring to losing salvation. Many Scripture passages make unmistakably clear that salvation is eternal (John 10:27-29; Romans 8:35, 38,39; Philippians 1:6; 1 Peter 1:4-5). Those who want to make this verse mean that believers can lose salvation will have to admit that it would then also say that one could never get it back again.

Some important keys to understanding this passage:

- (1) This passage is dealing with unbelievers**
- (2) This passage is not teaching that a believer can lose his or her salvation.**

(3) If this passage is embraced by those choosing to interpret it as teaching that one can lose salvation, then it also must be teaching that one could never get it back.

- 3. Hebrews 10:26-27** – This warning passage deals exclusively with the sin of “apostasy,” an intentional falling away, or defection. Apostates are those who may move toward Christ, hear and understand His gospel, and are perhaps on the verge of saving belief, but then rebel and turn away. This warning against apostasy is one of the most serious warnings in all of Scripture. Not all of the Hebrews would respond to the gently invitation of vv. 19-25. Some were already beyond response. In verse 26 the author is speaking rhetorically. In v. 39, he excludes himself and genuine believers from this category. The Greek term translated as “Sin willfully” in v. 26, carries the idea of deliberate intention that is habitual. The sin is rejecting Christ deliberately. These are not isolated acts. The word “knowledge” denotes specific knowledge, not general spiritual knowledge. Though the knowledge was not defective or incomplete, the application of the knowledge was certainly flawed. Judas Iscariot is a good example of a disciple who had no lack of knowledge, but lacked faith and became the arch-apostate. The most frightening wording here is the phrase “no sacrifice remains” the truth being put forth here is that the apostate is beyond salvation because he has rejected the only sacrifice that can cleanse him from sin and bring him into God’s presence. To turn away from that sacrifice leaves him with no saving alternative.

Some important keys to understanding this passage:

- (1) This passage is dealing unbelievers... apostates**
- (2) This passage is not dealing with the subject of eternal security.**
- (3) This passage is not teaching that a believer can lose his or her salvation.**

III. SOME THINGS TO REMEMBER IN THE DEBATE

It is important to remember, in the ongoing debate over the subject of the eternal security of the believer, certain biblical truth facts. These are also key truth about salvation itself, that will keep you grounded.

3 Truths Worth Remembering About Salvation:

- 1. Salvation is the work of God**
- 2. Salvation is a free and undeserved gift**
- 3. Salvation is the gift of eternal life**

“It is utterly and absolutely impossible that the sentence of the divine Judge should ever be revoked or reversed... Sooner shall the lightnings of omnipotence shiver the Rock of Ages than those sheltering in Him be brought again under condemnation.”

-Arthur Pin, “Eternal Security”