

THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE **(LESSON THIRTY-SIX)**

THE SECURITY OF THE CHRISTIAN **(PART NINE)**

In the previous Lesson, we considered some passages of Scripture which, on the surface, seem to indicate that it is possible for a saved individual to lose his or her salvation. We discovered that when these passages are examined in the light of their proper context, the seeming contradictions are resolved. In this Lesson, we will look at a few more passages which appear to pose similar difficulties. Before doing so, however, we will make a statement in respect of these and other “warning” passages located in the Bible.

We will never be able to understand the security of the saved person’s position in Jesus Christ, on the one hand and the scriptural exhortations for the saved person to persevere to the end and overcome on the other hand, if we view them as mutually exclusive. The persevering and overcoming of the saints are not independent things that are **added** to God’s safeguarding of them. God’s safeguarding of the saints and their persevering and overcoming are entirely interrelated and harmonize. Our persevering and overcoming are completely linked to God’s safeguarding of us.

There is no reason to see a tension between the security of the Christian’s position in Christ and the urging of the Scriptures for him or her to persevere and to be an overcomer, unless we mistakenly believe that our persevering and overcoming **complement** God’s safeguarding of us. If that is what we believe, we would be contending that our being justified by God and clothed in the righteousness of Christ would be only the **starting point** of our security, and our ultimate security would be realized by us preserving ourselves! Such an idea is foreign to the entire Scriptures. Any biblical exhortation for Christians to persevere and overcome independently of their being safeguarded by God, would be a mockery to them and an insult to God! Such exhortations have meaning only with reference to the divine safeguarding. It is noteworthy that Jude, who calls us to keep ourselves in the love of God (**Jude 21**), closes with a hymn of praise to Him who can preserve us from falling and can present us faultless before the presence of His glory (**Jude 24**).

It is only in light of God’s ability to keep the saints from falling and to present them faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy that they can persevere unto the end. It is only on the foundation of **being** in Him that the children of God are called to **abide** in Him and to maintain a watch over themselves.

The warning passages of Scripture urging Christians to persevere and overcome, do not imply that we contribute our part and that God contributes His part. Our persevering is inseparably bound up with His safeguarding of us, and it is included in it. Faith can never say, and will never say, “This is my contribution” to anything relating to salvation, because faith understands that it is a gift from God (**Ephesians 2:8**), and therefore, has no merit apart from God. Faith understands the connection between the promise of God to keep His elect secure and the admonition of the Scriptures for the elect to be watchful. Faith recognizes the mystery of the relationship between grace and exhortation.

Faith appreciates the connection between God’s sovereign grace and His loving mercy. In the midst of all the weakness and instability of the saints, the trials and temptations of their daily struggle, faith allows them to confess this grace and mercy as their beginning and their end. Faith persuades them that the same God who began a good work in them will without fail bring that work to a successful conclusion (**Philippians 1:6**). Faith assures them that the God who conferred grace upon them at the beginning, will mercifully confirm and secure them in that grace even unto the end. In the initial conferring of grace and the continual confirming of grace, there is no limiting of God’s grace. The child of God who understands that he or she has been saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, will always confess that he or she is dependent on the grace and favour of God alone to secure him or her.

This dependence on God will never take the grace of God for granted and as an excuse to continue in sin, but will always serve as motivation for adoration, devotion and commitment. This faith is not the Christians' contribution to their salvation. This faith confesses grace to be sovereign and unmerited. This faith confesses **God's faithfulness**, and it is persuaded that God will not let go of the work of His hands. Because it knows this, it prays in its own weakness for this divine preservation.

When we understand the relationship between faith and grace, we are able to appreciate the security of the Christian's position in Christ. This security has as its foundation and cornerstone the faithfulness of God and the steadfastness of His love. The faithfulness of God and the steadfastness of His love do not stand in opposition to the warnings of Holy Scripture. This is because the Holy Spirit who issues the Scriptural warnings and exhortations directed to the saints, is aware that it is the desire of the saints to abide in Christ. The Holy Spirit is also aware that the saints' ability to abide in Christ, to trust in God's grace, and to mature in that grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, is based on the effectual work of God in their lives through Him, the Holy Spirit (**Philippians 2:12-13**). There is, therefore, no contradiction but rather a profound harmony.

It is, therefore, a mistake to conclude from the warning passages of the Scriptures that there is the possibility of a total loss of grace. The **certainty** of the saints' ultimate security does not imply that the **means** of that preservation are unnecessary. In God's order, the means by which the saints are preserved are inseparably connected with the preservation itself.

At no time must we ever think that the ultimate salvation of the saints is left up to them. How could this ever be the case? Even the thought of it is foolish! The doctrine of the preservation of the saints and their security in Jesus Christ is based on the fact that the love of God **precedes** all human activity, and it is therefore possible only in the act of faith, which does not point to itself, but to grace **alone**. The significant thing about faith is *that it does not exist in itself and cannot be seen apart from its content*. The content of faith is God. True faith is not a human contribution to salvation. True faith is the state of being aligned to God's grace, being directed by God's grace, being located in God's grace. True faith is not a grasping of God by man, but rather it is a grasping of man by God; it is not a conquest of God by man, but rather man being conquered by God and therefore, in the light of God's grace, there is a foundation for permanency!

The doctrine of the security of the saved person's position in Christ may seem presumptuous, but in reality, this security has nothing to do with a dependence on one's own faithfulness and stability of character, but on one's dependence on the faithfulness of God.

THE "WARNING" PASSAGES IN HEBREWS

HEBREWS 2:1-3

"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him."

HEBREWS 3:7-12

"Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.) Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God."

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.”

HEBREWS 10:26-29

“For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?”

In examining these passages and all the other “warning” passages contained in the epistle to the **Hebrews** the historical background of the book must always be considered. The unbelief and sin referred to in these passages which the writer warns against, is that of a Jew of the first century who after leaving the temple sacrifices, identifying himself with the visible Church and making a profession of Jesus the Messiah as High Priest, was now on the verge of renouncing that profession and returning to the temple sacrifices. This sin is spoken of in **Hebrews 2:1** as letting New Testament truth slip away, in **Hebrews 3:7-8** as hardening the heart against the Holy Spirit, in **Hebrews 6:4** as falling away and crucifying the Son of God, and in **Hebrews 10:26** as a willful sin.

These passages serve as a warning against apostasy. As we stated in **Lesson 35** when we examined **1 Timothy 4:1-2**, apostasy is the deliberate and permanent rejection of Christianity after a previous profession of faith in it. Apostates are those who move toward Christ, right up to the point of saving belief, who hear and understand the Gospel, and are on the verge of saving faith, but then reject what they have learned and turn away. It is my believe that our Lord gave examples of these persons in His parable of the sower in **Matthew 13:1-9** and **18-23**. They are represented by the seeds that fell upon stony places and those that fell among thorns. These persons were never genuinely saved. They were closely associated with the church but were never really part of it

Willful sinning carries with it the idea of sinning continually and deliberately. The true disciple of Jesus Christ may lapse into sin from time to time and lose temporary fellowship with God. But he or she will eventually come back to God in repentance because our heavenly Father will continually woo and convict such a one until he or she cannot stay away any longer. The true apostate will continue to sin, deliberately, willingly and with abandon. As John tells us in **1 John 3:9**, *“Those who have been born into God’s family do not make a practice of sinning, because God’s life is in them. So they can’t keep on sinning, because they are children of God”* (**New Living Translation**). **C.H. Spurgeon** spoke the truth when he said, “God does not allow His children to sin successfully.”

Having turned his or her back on the truth, and with full knowledge choosing to willfully and continually sin, the apostate is then beyond salvation because he or she has rejected the one true sacrifice for sins, the Lord Jesus Christ. If Christ’s sacrifice is rejected, then all hope of salvation is gone. To turn away willfully from this sacrifice leaves no sacrifice; it leaves only sin, the penalty for which is eternal death. These passages are not speaking of a child of God who falls away. This is obvious for it is manifestly clear to all who have even a passing interest in Christianity, that genuine Christians have backslidden and have, afterward, been led to repentance and restoration by the grace of God. These passages are speaking of someone who may claim to be a believer, but truly is not. Anyone who apostatizes is proving he or she never had genuine faith to begin with.

2 PETER 1:5-10

“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.”

Peter is not suggesting in these verses that a Christian can lose their salvation. He is contending that persons who claim to be transformed must order their manner of life accordingly. He urges the saints to indicate by their manner of life that they are indeed the elect and called of God. In fact, Peter's point seems to be that only those who have been elected and called by God can truly possess and abound in the qualities that he lists in verses **5-7**.

In verses **5-8** of the chapter, Peter warned his readers that the doctrine of Christianity should be manifested in their lives. He urged them to ensure that they bridged the gap between what they professed and what they practiced. He is encouraging his Christian readers to demonstrate **the reality** of their calling and election.

When Peter urges the saints to make their *“calling and election sure,”* the reference is obviously to themselves and others. They were to live their lives in such a way as to assure themselves and those, who not only hear their testimony but also observe their lives, that they had been chosen and were truly called into the kingdom of God. It cannot refer to God, for no act of theirs could make their calling and election more certain on His part! It was He who had chosen them in Christ before the foundation of the world! (**Ephesians 1:4**) It was He who foreknew them and predestinated them to be conformed to the image of His Son! (**Romans 8:29**) The exhortation is that the saints should assure themselves and those who watch their lives, of the fact that they are saved, by seeing to it that the Christian graces mentioned by Peter are evident in their lives. There is no idea here of making sure that we retain our salvation but rather, that we fully embrace it.

2 PETER 2:20-22

“For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.”

In this passage, the apostle is not referring to genuine Christians but to false teachers. This is evident from the context. In verse **1** of the chapter Peter clearly indicates the nature of the persons who he is dealing with: *“But there were **false prophets** also among the people, even as there shall be **false teachers** among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.”*

The subject of verses **20-22** is still the false teachers of verse **1**. In that verse Peter says that these false teachers deny the Lord that bought them, indicating that they deny the doctrine of atonement by the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus. They are, therefore, not saved but are only professing Christians. They are said to have had a knowledge of the Lord Jesus. It is one thing to know Him personally, as a believer does, and another to know of Him, namely, the facts about Him, and to give mental assent to these facts. Such a knowledge resulted in the false teachers escaping the pollutions of the world. The influence of the Word of God had acted as both a detergent and a deterrent upon these false teachers to the end that their outward lives had been relatively pure. But they had not been transformed internally. That is exactly why Peter refers to them as dogs and sows. Why does a dog return to his vomit and a sow to her wallowing in the mire? Because it is their nature to do so!

These unsaved teachers were cleaned up on the outside and had experienced an outward moral reformation. But they had not experienced an inward regeneration. In a similar manner to the dog and the sow, they went back to their vomit and their wallowing in the gross forms of sin which they had temporarily renounced.

That there are professing Christians, some of whom may even advance to leadership in the church should not surprise us. There is nothing new under the sun. In **2 Corinthians 11:13-15**, Paul writes the following words: *“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.”* These false apostles were actually operating in the Corinthian church in Paul’s day and were highly regarded by the saints.

Still today, there are many who may speak in tongues, dance “in the spirit,” sing “under the anointing” preach with passion and eloquence, attire themselves modestly and live lives which are outwardly pure and chaste but have never been genuinely saved. It is of these persons that our Lord spoke in **Matthew 7:21-23**: *“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”* Our Lord will not say to these persons, “I once knew you, but I do not know you now.” He will say, “I **never** knew you.” In other words, they were never really His at any time. And yet they were prophesying, casting out devils, and doing many wonderful works, all in His name. And our Lord never said that they were lying! The parable of the wheat and tares (**Matthew 13:24-30**), will suffice to indicate how difficult these false brethren are to detect and to remove.
