



*"Your word is a lamp to my feet
And a light to my path."
Psalm 119:105*

"Once Saved, Always Saved?"

by James Jacob Prasch



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Introduction

I get a lot of letters, and no matter what people may think, I would say for every negative letter I or Moriel gets, I suppose there are a dozen good ones. But this week is not unusual in that I got a few letters from people who really like the fact that we do not agree with the Ecumenical Movement or they like the fact that we will stand against certain types of error and deception, but then they say, “But you don’t read the King James Bible”, or “You don’t believe ‘once saved, always saved’”, or “You don’t have a high view of the Reformation or the Reformers”. This becomes a barrier for them.

For me, and for most of us, I do not like to think in those terms. I have a King James Bible and I read it. It is not the only one, but I read it although I prefer to read the inspired Scriptures in the original Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic, not a translation. I always emphasize the priority of the original languages. But if somebody wants to read the King James, it is no problem.

If somebody sees something different on certain issues than me, that is no problem for me. For me, baptizing babies is crazy – totally unbiblical, but I know people who love Jesus who do not think so.

I am Pre-Millennial. I do not understand how anyone reading the Scriptures from a Hebrew perspective can be anything other than Pre-Millennial, yet I know people who do not see it that way. Martin Lloyd Jones did not see it that way and he was a tremendous expository preacher.

These things are not problems for me. As long as the essentials of the faith are in no way impacted, I have no problem. As I have said many times, there are four issues where we divide with someone:

1. Where they have a wrong view of Jesus or the Tri-Unity of the Godhead.
2. Unrepentant immorality.
3. Another way of salvation other than the Gospel (such as Sacraments or the like).
4. Having another doctrinal authority other than Scripture.

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If it is not one of those four things, I can fellowship with them; I cooperate with them in the Gospel. But some people do not see it that way.

“The Christ of Arminianism”

I have something here and I almost could not believe it was sent by one of these people who otherwise like me: *“The Christ of Arminianism”*. “Arminianism” means that you do not believe in an unconditional “once saved, always saved”, that you do not believe that Jesus died for only certain people, that He is willing to receive all. This is Arminianism in a nutshell. I will read from what they sent me.

“The Christ of Arminianism loves every individual person in the world and desires their salvation.”

That is true. I believe that Christ loves every single person in the world and sincerely desires their salvation. The Christ of the Bible did not desire the salvation of only those whom God has unconditionally chosen. Citing the verses that would back that, but ignoring the verses that would balance it, they continue...

“The Christ of Arminianism would offer salvation to every sinner and does all in His power to bring them to salvation.”

I believe that.

“His offer and works are often frustrated because many refuse to come.”

That sounds scriptural to me.

“But the Christ of the Bible essentially calls for Himself only the Elect and sovereignly brings them to salvation. None of them will be lost.”

And, again, he points to the verses which support his point of view, but not the ones that balance it.

“The Christ of Arminianism cannot regenerate and save a sinner who does not first choose Christ with his own free will by which they can accept or reject Christ that free will may not be violated by Christ.”

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True Arminianists do not actually believe that; we believe we **can** accept Christ, He has to give us the power to do it, but so this person thinks.

“The Christ of the Bible, however, sovereignly regenerates the Elect apart from their choice”.

According to this we have no choice.

“The Christ of Arminianism died on the cross for every individual person and therefore made it possible for everyone to be saved. The Christ of the Bible died only for God’s Elect people.”

In other words, the others were created to go to hell forever by some overstated kind of predestination. The Bible **does** say God created all things for a purpose, even the wicked for the day of judgment, but He would rather they be saved.

“The Christ of Arminianism loses many who He has saved.”

Jesus said many would fall away. (Mt. 24:10) Even if He does give eternal security as some say, it is not necessarily based on His will or His work but the choice of the sinner.

“The Christ of the Bible preserves His chosen people.”

And he concludes by saying that people, like most Pentecostals – people like John Wesley – do not have the same Jesus, the same Jesus as the Calvinists. George Whitfield was a Calvinist, John Wesley was not, but they never had this kind of recrimination where they said each other had a separate Jesus – two different Jesus Christs. Some people go so far as to say that if someone believes that Jesus died for everybody and that the Lord can receive everybody, that they have a different Jesus.

This is known as “extreme Calvinism” – “hyper-Calvinism”. Such people can go so far with this that if someone does not go along with it, there can be no fellowship. Very often they are the same kind of people given to such things that if someone reads another version of the Bible other than the “Authorized Version” there can be no fellowship. These groups push further into error and get into something the Bible calls “party spirit”: “We have it right and others have it wrong”. (Gal. 5:19) I get accused of that, but in fact it

is not true. I always stand by the basic things of the Bible. If someone departs from the basic truths, if they go into things the Word of God says are wrong, then I will take a stand. But to divide over these other issues I think is wrong. Nonetheless, let us understand the nature of the division – not *personal* division, but *theological* division.



Starting at One End of the Spectrum

On one extreme we have something known as “Pelagianism”. Pelagianists were a kind of monk who actually lived in Britain in the early centuries of the Church and Pelagius was opposed by Augustine of Hippo. What did Pelagius believe? Pelagius denied original sin; he denied the fact that man was fallen. Pelagius said we can choose God ourselves because we do not have a fallen nature. The Bible says that is not true.

The Bible says that because of the Fall of man in the sin of Adam and Eve, we have a fallen nature. We are born with sin, therefore we must be born again. Pelagianism is a total heresy. We will find extreme Calvinists, many in Scotland and Northern Ireland, saying that Arminianism is simply another form of Pelagianism or a diluted form of Pelagianism.

Just to the left of Pelagianism is called “Finneyism”, named after the North American Evangelist Charles Finney.

I do not deny that many people were saved through Charles Finney’s preaching. Things that seemed to be supernatural manifestations of God’s power are associated with his ministry. However, we need to be very careful about making those things a barometer of consensus. Charles Finney also denied that man had a fallen nature. The Bible says because we are born with a fallen nature we must be born again. He denied it, however he admitted we all have sin anyway.

In the Middle

In the middle there is something known as “Wesleyan Arminianism”. Arminius was reacting to extreme Calvinism. His ideas were taken up in this and other countries under

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the influences of the Great Revivalists, particularly John Wesley, and it is often called “Wesleyan Arminianism” in countries like Great Britain, America, Canada and the like. This view believed that man is fallen, that we are all fallen, and that all men fall short of the glory of God. (Rom. 3:23) This view **also** believes we cannot save ourselves. As a matter of fact, this view also believes we cannot even **choose** Jesus of ourselves.

We cannot save ourselves and we cannot choose Christ. He said, “I chose you”. (Jn. 15:16) However, this particular view is what I believe and which classical Pentecostalism believes: we are dead because of sin. We cannot choose the Lord Jesus, we cannot choose to be born again because our spirit cannot communicate with God’s Spirit because we are dead in our sins; God’s Spirit puts just enough light back in us to communicate with Him. And He gives us just enough of the original state before the fall to make the choice Adam had.

The Restoration of Choice

Adam had a choice between two things: the Tree of Life (the Lord Jesus and eternal life) and the tree of the world (the knowledge of good and evil). He made the wrong choice. Jesus came as the “Second Adam”. (1 Co. 15:45) Only two men had a choice: Jesus and Adam. Adam had a choice and Jesus had a choice.

In the Temptation narrative (Mt. 4:1-11; Mk. 1:12-13) Jesus was with the wild animals the same as Adam in the Garden. Christ was the Second Adam. The same things Satan tried on Adam he tried on Jesus. Before Jesus could have went to the cross and died, He had to be tested the way Adam was. In a sense, He had to earn the right to go to the cross tested as Adam. He identified with us.

Adam had a choice, Jesus had a choice, but we do not. What God does when He convicts somebody of sin is to make it possible for them to make a choice they would not make otherwise. We cannot choose Him – He chooses us, but He makes it possible for us to respond through His grace. Calvinists deny this. Calvinism (in its classical form) says we will never choose Him in any degree.

An unsaved person has no choice in sinning; they **must** sin because they are under the law of sin and death, much like the law of gravity. The most an unsaved person can

choose about sin is when, where, and how, but this they cannot choose. As believers, because God's Spirit is in us, have a choice – we do not have to sin. God gives us back our free will; we can choose to walk according to the Spirit or the flesh. Calvinism, in effect, denies the restoring work of Jesus Christ when He died and rose from the dead and gave us a new nature. God gives us back free will when we are born again. We have no free will before we are reborn and we cannot choose to be born again until God quickens it. That is what it means to be “Arminianist”.

Types of Calvinism

Then we have a more moderate form of Calvinism to the left of Wesleyan Arminianism known as “Four-Point Calvinism”, and then beyond that is a “Five-Point Calvinism” which, similar to Finneyism on the opposite extreme borders on the heretical. Let me explain what I mean about “Four-Point” and “Five-Point”.

There is debate among church historians: “Was Calvin a ‘Calvinist?’” “Calvinism” as we know it was not formulated by Calvin or from Calvin's *Institutes*, but by something known as *The Remonstrance of Dort*. It was Calvin's followers who later began to define Calvinism in the sense we know it. In the same way we must make something of a distinction between Wesley's own personal beliefs and Wesleyan Arminianism, we have to make something of a distinction between Calvin's own beliefs and what has come to be known as “Calvinism”. Classical Calvinism, which came out of *The Remonstrance of Dort* is called “TULIP”, an acronym or an acrostic.

“T” = “Total Depravity”. Calvinism and Arminianism both believe we are totally depraved. What does that mean? It does not mean we are as bad as we are capable of being; biblically we cannot get any worse. It just means we are totally fallen in body, mind, and spirit. Man is so fallen spiritually even his bodily members are taken with sin. He is totally depraved. It is like a six egg omelet where five of the eggs are good but one of the eggs is bad; the whole omelet is contaminated. Calvinists and Arminianists both believe in “Total Depravity”, that we cannot save ourselves and we are fallen. The problem is that Calvinists deny that once quickened by the Spirit and drawn to Christ by the Father that a measure of free will is given by divine grace making it possible to

accept Christ. To them because man is dead due to sin it is not only salvation by grace, but we have no option whether or not to respond to that grace.

“U” = “ Unconditional Election”. The complication is that Wesleyan-Arminians and Calvinists alike view grace as “Undeserved Grace”. I totally agree, Wesley would have totally agreed – we all agree that God’s grace is undeserved. Christ died for the ungodly; while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:8) We cannot do anything to earn salvation and it is a sin to even think that we can. (This is the rudiment of Calvinistic thought which I will explain shortly.) It was the reaction to the heresy and corruption of medieval Roman Catholicism. However, Calvinists since Dort at least redefine “Unconditional Grace” as “Unconditional Election” – that is, a doctrine of predestination where God intentionally creates some to go heaven and others so they can be eternally tortured in hell. There are multiple problems with this false doctrine. To begin with it directly contradicts too many scriptures that explain the divine nature relative to salvation which prove God does not create people for eternal torture (e.g., 1 Tim. 2:4, Eze. 33:11).

The second problem is that this notion of God intentionally making people for eternal torment for which they have no choice and others to salvation for which they have no choice logically contradicts the need for evangelism and carrying out the Great Commission since the predestined will, of necessity, be saved anyway and those created by a God of love to be eternally tormented have no choice. While alien to scriptural thought both theologically and philosophically, this is purely a westernized variant of the Islamic doctrine of “*Insha’Allah*”; philosophically Calvinism is Islamic, not Judeo-Christian.

It is easy to see why fundamentalist Islamic mullahs esteem the Puritans as they are two of a kind. As the Taliban, Iranian Shia and Saudi Wahabbis have their *mutaween* (religious police), so did Calvin's Geneva, Puritan England and Massachusetts. There was a “*kulturkampf*” or war on culture where the theater, the humanities and sports were replaced by public burning, hanging and flogging in lieu of entertainment. This carried over into Calvinistic support for slavery in the Southern USA by the Southern Baptists and Methodists, apartheid in South Africa by the Dutch Reformed Church, and plantation displacement of Irish peasants by the Anglo-Puritans in Ireland. Muslims call it

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“demitide”, Calvinists called it “election”. While John Wesley opposed the institution of slavery, even an otherwise outstanding figure like George Whitefield, because of the cursed Calvinism to which he foolishly subscribed owned Black slaves resulting in a shameful indictment on the memory of such a great man of God.

The Puritan-Presbyterian wars saw Calvinists slaughtering each other as well as non-Calvinists in Britain under Cromwell and Owen as a holy war just as in Islamic jihads Muslims slaughter each other as well as “infidels”. The status of women under Calvinistic Puritanism and in Islam is likewise identical; philosophically the two are the same. Jesus said we know them by their fruits and from Calvin's Geneva, to the Salem witch hunts, to slavery and apartheid we have seen the fruits of what Calvinists call “predestination” and what Moslems call “*Insha'Allah*” (all that transpires is the perfect divine will). As Muslims read the Judeo-Christian Scriptures through the prism of the *Quran* which combine elements of Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism with a recycled Arabian paganism and then re-interpret the *Quran* in light of the *Hadith* in a religion based on *The Five Pillars*. Calvinists read it through the prism of Calvin's *Institutes* which are a recycled Patristic theology of Augustine (the chief doctrinal founder of Roman Catholicism), and then reinterpret that along the lines of the five acronym terms of their “TULIP”. All of this tragedy, treachery, madness and hypocrisy stems from the mal-definition of “Undeserved Grace” as “Unconditional Election”. In the philosophical and moral sense, Calvinism is nothing more than Islam pretending to be Christianity.

The final problem is that the primary New Testament definition of “election” has to do with a corporate identity such as Israel being an elect nation or the collective Body of true believers. Calvinism distorts Romans 9-11 out of context to misapply election to individuals.

A Reaction to Catholicism

John Calvin was a Humanist scholar. None of his ideas were really original. He was a dynamic personality and a capable writer, but his ideas all came from Erasmus of Rotterdam, Martin Luther, and others from the first generation of Reformers and the Humanists before them. He was a Christian Humanist, but he was still a Humanist.

During the Middle Ages during the Renaissance a heresy was represented by people we know as “Thomists”, people influence by Thomas Aquinas, which was known as “Medieval Scholasticism”. Frances Schaffer explained it very well. What it virtually came to mean in the Renaissance was that although man was fallen, his intellect was not. (Do you see how nonsensical it gets?) And so all this religious argument begins revolving around man’s *intellect* as not having fallen but only his spirit. Even the Reformers never totally rejected Philanthropism, but the Humanist scholars who influence Calvin and Calvin himself who was a Humanist scholar set out to correct this error in medieval scholarship and delved into Gnostic hermeneutics and a lot of other things. So Calvin was reacting to Roman Catholicism in the Renaissance in the Middle Ages which said man was *not* totally depraved.

Secondly was the issue of “Undeserved Grace”. The Roman Catholic church’s teaching is sacramentalism and selling indulgences. (That is how the Vatican was built and what triggered the Reformation.) Luther reacted against Tetzels the Dominican. “When a coin in the coffer rings a soul from purgatory springs”. It expresses the belief that somehow one can earn salvation by buying it or by good works, and this is still found today in places such as Italy. It is terrible to see old ladies, elderly women, trying to go up the stairs – the Scala Sancta – on their knees with rosary beads trying to get their mothers out of Purgatory. Calvin was very likely acting against the depravity of Roman Catholicism.

The “T” and the “U” we both agree on, but then Calvin gets into the “L”.

The Beginning of Digression

“L” = “*Limited Atonement*” or particular redemption. “*Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world*”. (Jn. 1:29) Jesus said, “*If I am lifted up...I will draw all men unto Myself*”. (Jn. 12:32) Calvinism asserts that maybe He draws, but He is not intending to save everyone He is drawing, only the Elect, only the predestined, only those He foreknew.

God is omnipotent – He is all-knowing. He is omniscient. It is impossible to describe God with human intellect. Of course He knows the future. Of course He knows who will be saved. Of course He knows the one who will react to His grace. He chooses the ones He

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knew would respond – that is Arminianism. Calvinists say no, that it is only the ones whose names were written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world and that is all there is to it. Nobody else is going to be saved as their name is not in the Book, and there is nothing anyone can do to get their name taken off the “hell book” and into the Book of Life because that is the way they were born.

This is quite sad, is it not? One of the two versions of Christianity which cause the most mental illness perhaps, although the Jehovah’s Witnesses have a higher rate of mental illness than the general society, is Roman Catholicism. Take a country like Ireland with its very high instances of alcohol abuse, its high instances of child abuse and homosexual pedophilia – all of that stuff is built up in a psyche, a social psychology, that is influenced by the Roman church. The oedipus because of Mary, the sexual repression because of the influences of Augustine’s Manicheanism, and other such things begin to manifest themselves in different ways. Roman Catholic countries have a lot of mental illness and a lot of alcoholism. But look at the other extreme.

I was in Bible college with people who grew up in strict Presbyterian backgrounds in Northern Ireland and Scotland. They went from one extreme to another. Roman Catholicism teaches one gets saved by works and by the sacraments, so they are always working to get saved, driving themselves neurotic and giving themselves a guilt trip. Because faith without works is dead and the evidence of our faith, (Ja. 2:17) extreme forms of Calvinism say one has to do these works to prove they are saved. “I must be saved because look what I am doing.” Neither one of them seems to give a real assurance of salvation. **Neither** of the extremes gives the people psychologically an assurance of salvation and a real peace.

The modern forms of Calvinism do not drive people crazy. Having a mother who was Irish-Catholic I can tell you that Irish-Catholicism is a form of mental illness. And so is Hassidic Judaism. I have seen both close up. My family is a combination of both Jewish and Catholic and I have seen both sides of it.

“Limited Atonement” asserts that Jesus only died for certain people, full stop. So say the Calvinists, not so say the Arminians.

“I” = “Irresistible Grace”. This says no one has a choice. If God put a name in the Book of Life before the foundation of the world, they **have** to be saved, they **must** be saved, and they **will** be saved – they have no capacity to choose Jesus, that is it. God chose us, we have not chosen Him, therefore we cannot even respond to Him except that He has ordained our response to it.

“P” = “Perseverance”, which is “once saved (unconditionally), always saved”. Notice I said “unconditionally”. I believe “once saved, always saved”, but it is **conditional**; it is not **unconditional**.

The Other End of the Spectrum

The moderate Calvinists will hold to “Total Depravity”, “Undeserved Grace”, “Irresistible Grace”, and “Perseverance”. Even moderate Calvinists will not hold to “Limited Atonement”, that Jesus only died for certain people and the others are created to go to hell. Five-Point Calvinists would hold to it all.

Even going further, there is a form of Calvinism that is as heretical on one extreme as it is on the other: it is “hyper-Calvinism” in the sense of not just being “Five-Point” but by saying that because God has already foreordained the Elect, the Church does not have to witness or evangelize.

We laugh at it now, but that was the predominant thinking of Baptists in Great Britain until William Carey stood up and challenged them at the Baptist Convention. He wanted to send missionaries to the East to convert the heathens and pagans and was told, “Brother Carey, sit down and be quiet. If God wants the heathen He will do it without your help or mine.”

Another form of heretical Calvinism is licentiousness. Because somebody went out and made a confession of faith at some point, (they went up at a Billy Graham Crusade or put their hand up in a meeting or said a prayer at the back of the class) they are unconditionally “once saved, always saved” and can now go out and keep sinning. Most Calvinists would say that if they do that it proves they were never saved to begin with, but there are others who would say that even if they backslide, if they really made the confession, that it does not matter, they are still going to be saved; it is just their works

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which will be burned up. (1 Co. 3:12-15) This is heretical. This is not what “*man’s work is burned up*” means at all. It refers to the things we do in the flesh not ordained by God, the things we do to “get” saved instead of what we do because we have **been** saved. When a Christian is saved we do not work to “**get**” saved, we work because we have **been** saved. Catholics, Jehovah’s Witnesses, etc. do it to **get** saved, Evangelicals do it because they have **been** saved. But a lot of the works we do are, of course, in the flesh and a lot of us do a lot more worldly and temporal things than we do the things of the Lord, and those things will be “*burned up*”.

The Extreme Results of “Election”

These extreme forms of Calvinism can be quite brutal. This idea of “election” has been taken to such extremes that it has resulted in social injustice. Any time we have had a hyper-Calvinistic society of that extreme we have found its hallmark was not only terrible social injustice, but social injustice perpetrated in the name of Christ and the Church. Let us look at the three big examples of an hyper-Calvinistic church which most of us ought to be familiar with.

One is the American South, the extreme Southern Baptists who believed in slavery. The Baptist Church split between the American and Southern Baptists over the issue of slavery. “God elected us; we’re foreordained.” They said Black people were inferior, that God “elected” them to be that way. They took one verse in Genesis out of context about the son of Ham and so on to justify what happened to the Black people.

Look at Northern Ireland. No one hates the Roman Catholic Church and its heresy more than I do; it is from hell. I **despise** Roman Catholicism, but I **love** Roman Catholic **people**. If I did not love Roman Catholic people so much I would not hate the church that is leading them to hell as much as I do. However, hatred of Catholicism is one thing, oppression of Catholics is another. Look at what the strict Presbyterians did to the Roman Catholics in Ireland for centuries; it is unspeakable. Obviously I have no love for the IRA or anything like it – I think they are a pack of thugs. However, there is still a whole history in back of what is going on there that most people in Great Britain do not even know about, and would not want anything to do with, perpetrated in the name of an

extreme form of Calvinism. In the aftermath of the Plantation Period all kinds of things were justified by Calvinism in what amounted to social injustice against Catholic people.

The third is the Apartheid in South Africa. The Dutch Reformed Church were hyper-Calvinists.

Whenever we find an extreme form of Calvinism we find oppressors. Calvin had a virtual police state which he theologically designed in Geneva. People were burned alive for heresy. There is a Reformed church in Zurich founded by Zwingli who drowned Baptists. If someone believed in being baptized as a Believer, they cut a hole in the ice and drowned them. In Great Britain there was a terrible war with Presbyterians, Calvinists killing other Calvinists. In Massachusetts they burned witches. Whenever we find extreme Calvinism we find injustice and oppression. I know of no exception.

The more moderate forms of Calvinism, even the Five-Point ones such as the Puritans did other things which were good such as the establishment of Parliamentary democracy and so on based on biblical principles; I am only speaking against the extremes. I will speak against the extremes of Calvinism on the one side of the equation, but I will also co-equally speak against the extremes of Arminianism and beyond with the ideas of Finney and Pelagius on the other. The truth is in the Middle and that is the basic situation.

Arguments from God's Word

I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh...

(This introduces the sections of Romans 9-11 dealing with the soteriological, the salvific and prophetic purposes of God for Israel and the Jews, God's continuing love for Israel despite their popular rejection of its Messiah by what became of the majority of them.)

...who are Israelites, to whom belongs...

("Belongs" is in the present continuous active tense – God is not finished with the Jews. In the Greek it is present continuous active.)

...the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises...

(Indicating it was written **before** 70 AD, of course.)

...whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. But it is not as though the word of God has failed.

(Meaning the Torah.)

For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel;

(In other words, being a physical Jew is useless unless one accepts the Messiah.)

...nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED."

(Now he begins doing a midrashic exposition of the Book of Genesis.)

That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants. For this is the word of promise: "AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON." And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER." Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED." What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION." So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

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For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH." So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, (Rom 9:1–23)

Based on this Calvinists will say, "God is the Potter, we are the clay, who are we to argue with God? **He** chooses who goes to heaven, **He** chooses the Elect, the others are going to go to hell." And of course they even take "Jacob I loved I loved, but Esau I hated" in some cases and say, "White people I loved, Black people I hated" or "Protestant people I loved, Catholic people I hated", etc.

Remember that John Wesley's revivals were an Arminian reaction to the social injustices bred by a dead church that was permeated with Calvinistic thought. That is when the people began coming out of the coal mines and the sweat shops and began giving their lives to the Lord in the tens of thousands.

The Text in Context

So Calvinists say, "How can we argue with God? He can do what He wants, He is sovereign, He makes one son this way and one son that way." The first mistake these people are making is a text out of its context becomes a pretext. The context of Romans 9-11 is predominantly dealing with **nations**, not **individuals**. It is dealing with the Jews and the Gentiles. Paul quotes about the two twins. Let us read what he is commenting on in Genesis.

The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb; And two peoples will be separated from your body; And one people shall be stronger than the other; And the older shall serve the younger." (Gen. 25:23)

What these people do is take something that is talking about **nations** and apply it to people. There is a principle in midrash called "kal v'homer" – "light to heavy". It says that what applies in a specific situation should also apply in a heavy one. But before we use that principle, we must first look at the context. It is not talking about God creating some **people** for this purpose and that purpose, it is talking about His election of **nations**.

Moreover, we have something called "corporate solidarity" in Scripture. Corporate solidarity is where a person represents a nation or a larger group of people. Esau and Jacob respectively represent what becomes the Israelite and Arab nations. As time goes on, Esau is reconciled to Jacob. In Genesis God has prophetic purposes for the Arab people the same as He does the Jews. His election here has to do with His calling for service; it has nothing to do with salvation in the primary sense that these people are trying to make it.

This is the same in the Book of Obadiah. The name of the patriarch becomes a metaphor, or a general term, for the nations descended from him. So before going any further we have to realize that these people are taking something talking about nations and applying it to individuals when that is mainly not even what the text is talking about. It can **apply** to individuals in some degree, as the text goes on to describe about Pharaoh, but when the New Testament interprets the Old Testament, we have to go back to read the Old Testament's context.

The Example of Hardening a Heart

Pharaoh hardened his **own** heart. He **repeatedly** hardened his own heart. **Only** after he repeatedly hardened his own heart did **God** harden his heart. God raised him up and used him. He let the guy get away with murder. He let the guy get away with this, that, and the other thing while thinking he was the big cheese. He was deified by Egyptians, of course, and worshiped as god, and God used him for His purpose, only to bring him down. But it does not say God hardened his heart until he repeatedly hardened his own.

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*But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet **they were not** believing in Him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: “LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?” For this reason they **could** not believe, for Isaiah said again, “HE HAS BLINDED THEIR EYES AND HE HARDENED THEIR HEART, SO THAT THEY **WOULD** NOT SEE WITH THEIR EYES AND PERCEIVE WITH THEIR HEART, AND BE CONVERTED AND I HEAL THEM.”*
(Jn. 12:37–40)

Could not, would not, should not. God’s hardening of a heart is always in response to its **own** hardening. It was not a case where God just hardened their hearts. Even Calvin admitted that it worked that particular way and according to that kind of dynamic.

This does not quote from the Hebrew text, it quotes from the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament where the mood is subjunctive. The subjunctive mood in Greek allows for the possibility – “**Lest** they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and turn to Me and be converted”. The possibility of their repentance still exists in the Greek subjunctive.

More than that along this vein is the idea of “*be converted*”. The Septuagint takes Hebrew and translates it into Greek. “Converted” in Hebrew is “*teshuva*”. The Hebrew word for “repent” and “convert” is the same thing – it means to turn away from sin toward God. This idea that He arbitrarily, or by His own sovereign will, just decides who will do this or that is the result of only giving one side of the story. But the Bible speaks of something very different. When **He** hardens hearts it is because they have repeatedly hardened their **own**. How many times did He send Moses back to Pharaoh? But let us look even further.

The Potter in Jeremiah

“God is the Potter, we are the clay”. This comes from the Book of Jeremiah 18-19. Let us read the Old Testament text in its context to see what Paul is talking about.

The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD saying,

When we see the “*word*” of the Lord, it is “*d’var*” in Hebrew and the Greek would be “*logos*”. It is Jesus. This is Jesus Himself coming to Jeremiah in some kind of revelation.

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It is not like a **message** came, it is like a **person** came. It had to do with a personal encounter with what the rabbis call the “*d’var*” or the “*mamre*” (Aramaic), or what the New Testament calls the “*Logos*”, a personal encounter with Christ. When we read the Bible in the Spirit, it is not simply an encounter with the text, it is an encounter with the Person. What we get from the text derives from the encounter with the Person. If you are just getting information today you are not hearing from Jesus, you are just hearing from me. The question today is are you encountering Jesus? Are you encounter **the** Word or just words? If you have **the** Word the **Word** will be crystal clear.

The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD saying, “Arise and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will announce My words to you.”

He had to go somewhere. God was going to show him from the illustration of a potter how to understand something. God did not say, “I am going to show you something now”, but “I am going to show you something that will explain it as an object lesson”.

Then I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was, making something on the wheel. But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make. Then the word of the LORD came to me saying...

(We can almost say, “Jesus said to him”)

“Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter does?” declares the LORD. “Behold, like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel. (Jer. 18:1-6)

“*Can I not...deal with you as the potter does?*” Once again, who is He saying this speaking to: a person or a nation? They are taking something that predominantly applies to a corporate group of people – a nation, and over-applying it to individuals. Their second mistake is that they do not look at how the potter works.

How a Potter Works

When we take our study tours to Israel, we frequently show people in a Talmudic village in Galilee how the potter made earthenware vessels from clay. If it does not turn out right, the potter smashes it into mortar, lubricates it, and begins over. If he is not happy with that one he re-smashes it, but it is the same material. A potter in biblical times would normally not give up until he remade the thing at least a dozen times.

Jesus does not save people to lose them. When we drop our cross we pick it up. Although **we** goof our lives up, **He** does not give up. He may have to break us and remake us time and time again, but it takes a long time for the Potter to give up on the material. So it is with us.

People are always worrying about their salvation, thinking they may be lost, but the teaching of the potter is not like that; that is not how the potter works. However, there is a time, of course, when the potter does give up.

Not Individuals But Nations

“At one moment I might speak concerning...

...an individual? No...

*...a **nation**...*

The text of Romans 9-11 is nations, not primarily people.

*...or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it; if that **nation** against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it.*

(Like the story of Jonah and Nineveh.)

*“Or at another moment I might speak concerning a **nation** or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant it; if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will think better of the good with which I had promised to bless it. So now then, speak to the men of Judah and against the inhabitants of Jerusalem saying, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Behold, I am*

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fashioning calamity against you and devising a plan against you. Oh turn back, each of you from his evil way, and reform your ways and your deeds.” But they will say, ‘It’s hopeless! For we are going to follow our own plans, and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart.’ (Jer. 18:7-12)

God will raise up another nation, but if they repent He will take them back. That is what Scripture here says, and that is exactly what Paul is talking about in Romans 9-11.

Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell...

(That is, to the mainly Gentile Church.)

...severity, but to you, God’s kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. (Rom. 11:22)

What does Jeremiah say? If this other pot that the Potter makes does not work out well, He will get rid of that one! But what does Paul then say?

And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. (Rom. 11:23)

What does Jeremiah 18 say? The same thing. “If it repents then I will think better of the good”.

This is not the meaning of the “potter/clay” teaching in the way they are saying. I wish they would read the text in its context, but they do not.

It Is Not What They Cite, But What They Do Not Cite

You will notice that extreme Calvinists will always only use the verses which support their point of view. (I suppose Jehovah’s Witnesses do the same thing, and if we are not careful we can do the same thing, so we have to be careful.)

“The Christ of Arminianism loves every person in the world and sincerely desires their salvation”.

And he goes on to say that the Christ of the Bible is not like this; it is only the Elect He has unconditionally chosen. Let us look at some of the verses he does **not** cite.

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. (2 Pe. 3:9)

I have had Calvinists try to suggest to me, "That only means Christians". First of all, even they are right, even if it means "only Christians", how can Christians "*perish*" under "once saved, always saved"? (I have not received an answer to that yet.) But then it says...

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. (2 Pe. 3:10)

The context is talking about the end of the world for everybody. He is "*not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance*". Jesus does not want to lose anybody.

Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. (1 Tim. 6:12)

It is something that **must** be apprehended. It is not just something that is "there", it is something that must be apprehended.

And he says something even further in Timothy: the Lord says He does not want anyone to go to hell. He takes no joy in people going to hell, He takes joy in people being saved. But when Paul writes about this he is proceeding from a number of Old Testament contexts, one of which is in the Book of Ezekiel.

He Does Not Want to Lose Any

Ezekiel is prophesying at a very bad time, when judgment is well under way, and God tells Ezekiel...

"When I say to the wicked, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live,

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that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet if you have warned the wicked and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered yourself. Again, when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I place an obstacle before him, he will die; since you have not warned him, he shall die in his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand.” (Eze. 3:18-20)

God is telling Ezekiel here and in Ezekiel 33 directly (Eze. 33:11) that He takes no pleasure when the wicked perish; He would rather they repent. “Warn them so they will not perish”. He wants everyone to repent!

Our Calvinistic friends will say that only means “the Old Covenant”, but now we are under a new Law of grace. That is some idea of grace they have.

This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Tim. 2:3–4)

God “*desires **all** men to be saved*”! He knows not all men are going to be saved, He knows the ones who will reject His offer of salvation through His Son Jesus, and He knows the one who will accept; He foreordained it – He knows how it is going to turn out, but He wants everyone to be saved. Ideally, He wants them **all** to be saved.

We have to look at everything the Bible says on a subject for the full weight of Scripture. There is a balance. A major part of the problem comes from the fact that we are looking back to the 16th Century and the Reformers instead of to the 1st Century and the early Christians. We have to put ourselves in a situation that the 1st Century Christians were in to understand what the Apostles are writing and how it applies to us. But that principle is no less true when we look at Reformed (or Calvinistic) Theology. What was Calvin up against? Why is he writing the way he does? Obviously he was trying to free people from bondage, not put them in it.

The Roman Catholic Church was keeping people ridden with grief, guilt, and fear. And he was trying to tell them that “once saved, always saved” to keep them free from this oppression. On the other hand, there was another oppression that came as a result, this idea of only the Elect. It is **a** truth, but a misunderstood truth. He does not want to lose any.

There are so many verses.

*“And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw **all men** to Myself.” (Jn. 12:32)*

*The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, **not wishing for any to perish** but for all to come to repentance. (2 Pe. 3:9)*

This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Tim. 2:3–4)

And in Ezekiel 3, “Warn them so they will not perish”.

Such it is, but let us go further and understand why.

The Roots of Calvinism

Calvin came out of Humanism. It was something that later emerged into what we know as “The Enlightenment” and was worse than Rationalism. Whenever there is a change in scientific thought, that changes technology. And when technology changes, it changes the economy, and when the economy changes, it changes the culture and the political situation and people’s worldview begins to change.

Out of the Renaissance, Greek and Roman learning was rediscovered and ideas came from the East. Under medieval Roman Catholicism, Western Europe went into the Dark Ages. If you want to know what a Roman Catholic world would look like, look at what a Roman Catholic world **was** like – look at the Dark Ages. If you want to know what the

popes would do if they had their way in the world, look at what they did do; they had their way for twelve centuries. Look at the inquisitions. That is Roman Catholicism.

At one time, for instance, physics was based on Isaac Newton. It was a Newtonian worldview. But since the advent of Einstein and Relativity, we do not see physics that way. In the old physics matter was matter and energy was energy – the two were mutually exclusive. But there was a born-again Christian called Rutherford who moved to England who began to do experiments with photons (light particles) and found out they have mass – “matter”. A light particle is a “wave”; it is energy. But it also has mass? In the old physics matter and energy were mutually exclusive; in the new physics things we used to think were mutually exclusive are held in some kind of a tension. The worldview of Calvin could not grasp things not being mutually exclusive, that they could be held in a tension with each other.

In the new physics particle physicists today talk about a universe which is neither finite nor infinite but is “critical”. What is emerging in the world of physics is in many way closer to the worldview of the Bible than that which was the worldview of Calvin. Calvin was black-and-white: “once saved, always saved”. For those not conforming to this the explanation was that they were not saved to begin with. The view was that *either* someone as part of the Elect *or* they were not part of the Elect. He could not keep things in tension.

Holding Things in Tension

This does not begin with Calvin. Calvin simply amplified it for his time and we have been stuck with it ever since. It does not just go back to Augustine and Pelagius, it goes back to the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Sadducees were “determinists” – they were “fatalists”; the Pharisees were not. Jesus usually agreed with the Pharisees. Only on the issue of divorce did He seem to digress from their point of view. He had a more conservative view than they did, but the Pharisees were much closer to the truth than the Sadducees.

Jesus said, “The Son of Man must be betrayed for it is written, but woe to him by whom He must be betrayed”. (Mt. 26:24) The Pharisees said that all is foreseen, all is ordained, but choice is given. They agreed with Jesus. (Or Jesus agreed with them.) It was the

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Sadducees who were determinists. Calvinism is closer to the Sadducees than the Pharisees with whom Jesus agreed. Jesus held the two in tension. The way a physicist today can allow that light particles have mass, a physicist from a hundred years ago could not. Calvin could not accept it because of his worldview, but we **have** to accept it because it is the worldview of the Bible and it is the worldview today.

Think about human emotion. Because of the fall of man there is a curse on human relationships, including the relationships between men and women. A marriage is a love-hate relationship, isn't it? "I can't live with him, I can't live without him". The human brain is the only computer in the world which can hold two mutually exclusive points of view at the same time so they can be valid.

I am from New York City. New York is like London. If you talk to people who are big city people they will tell you, "I love it and I hate it at the same time". Talk to a Londoner. "Oh, yeah, the West End with the theaters and museums with the cosmopolitan atmosphere and the energy – I love it. But the congestion on the Tube and the crime – I hate it." There is a tension because we are emotional beings. We are made in God's image and likeness – "*Imagio Dei*" – and there is a tension in God. We can accommodate things psychologically and emotionally which are mutually exclusive that a computer cannot. We are not computers because we are made in God's image and likeness. We have to begin to think more like humans made in God's image and likeness than like computers. Things are held in tension.

If God gives us a backslidden son or daughter, do we love them any less? There will be times, maybe, where they drive us up the wall, when we want to get rid of them, but we cannot. That is the way it is. An unsaved wife, an unsaved husband – it is a tension to deal with. God holds things in tension as well. The difference, of course, is because He is God He knows what will happen. Calvin could not accept that with his worldview; with our worldview it is more easy.

Scripture They Omit

For every verse someone can show election in the sense that Calvinists interpret it, I can produce another verse showing He wants us all to be saved. Let us take this a bit further.

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In the Book of Acts it says they “might” be saved. (Acts 4:12) So the possibility of being saved is there and the possibility of **not** being saved is there. But where do we go from here? What is the next basis of argumentation? On the Calvinists’ list it is not “Limited Atonement”, it becomes “Perseverance”, that once someone is saved they are always saved, full stop.

It is wrong to say that Wesleyan Arminianism cannot give people the assurance of salvation; it can. We can be sure of our salvation right this minute. I can show extreme Calvinists who cannot. We can be sure of our salvation and we can be sure of it tomorrow if we continue in His way. There is an example that I always use.

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; (Phil. 2:12)

He begins by talking about obedience in connection with salvation. Why?

“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” (Jn. 3:36)

If there is real belief there will be an action upon it; we act according to it. “**Work out your salvation**” – it does not say work **for**. (It is “*katargazoma*” in Greek.)

Working It Out

Once upon a time there was a little boy named Donnie Berkowitz and he wanted a model airplane. This was a big model airplane that little Donnie barely could dream of getting the money for. It cost seventy-five quid and he was only 10 years old. Where was he going to get seventy-five quid? There was no way possible little Donnie could buy this model airplane. He wanted to get the instructions and build this model airplane and put it on the mantelpiece in his house so his parents would show people when they came to visit. But the price was just way beyond anything he could think of.

So his father decided for his birthday as a surprise he would buy little Donnie this airplane. Donnie opens the gift wrapping and inside of it is a box with a model airplane in the box. Little Donnie was given something he could have never possibly achieved by

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his own means. There was no way he could have gotten that airplane; it was well beyond the bounds of his capabilities. So he had a choice: he could open the box, build the airplane, and put it on the mantelpiece, or he could put the box on the mantelpiece and everybody could come and look at the picture on the outside of the box.

“Katergazoma” does not mean “work **for**”, it means “work **out**”.

His father gave him something he could not have got on his own, but he still had to act on what was given him. He had to open the box, assemble it, and put it on the mantelpiece. This idea that we profess faith in Christ but take it and just place it on the mantelpiece is crazy. Jesus said to His disciples...

“If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.” (Jn. 15:6)

This is not to do with “works” being burned up, it is talking about people who make some profession of faith at some point in their life but never bear the fruit of the Spirit. It is not about what we did but how much we became like Jesus.

Now “fruit” is the fruit of the Spirit. The wise man delivers souls (Pr. 11:30), but we are all witnesses. If we see a Christian who is not actively witnessing as a part of their Christian life, that is abnormal and as much a mark of unfaithfulness as not reading the Bible, not praying, or not meeting with other Christians. We should all be witnessing, bearing much fruit.

Hence little Donnie takes the box and his father says, “Donnie, I gave you that but now you have to put it into operation.”

Swimming the Channel

Another way to look at this is someone trying to swim from Calais in the north of France to the White Cliffs of Dover. A gale force wind comes and they begin to drown. He is going under and cannot swim his way out of it. He yells, “Save me! Save me! I’m drowning!” He is half way across the channel. He cannot go back to the north of France

to Calais, but neither can he continue on to England. He is drowning and it begins to rain, the storm is tumultuous, and the waves begin to overtake him.

All of the sudden, a helicopter appears in the sky with “Jesus” on printed on the side of it. The hatch on the helicopter opens and this Jewish guy with a beard says, “You want Me to save you?”

“Oh, yes, Jesus! Please save me! I will never make it on my own!”

Jesus says, “You really understand? You will really trust Me?”

The man replies, “Yes, Jesus, I trust You! I know I will never make it without You! I cannot save myself! Please save me! What do You want me to do?”

So Jesus takes a lifejacket, drops it out and says, “Put this on!”

The guy puts the lifejacket on and says, “OK, Jesus! I got it on! What do you want me to do now?”

“Keep swimming! The White Cliffs are that way!”

The Lord made possible for him to do something that he could never do on his own. Jesus saved him. Jesus did something for him he could not do for himself. Jesus did something for him that was unmerited, undeserved, but he had to put on the lifejacket and swim.

Now if somebody gets tired and stops along the way, they can always resume. But if they take the jacket off and try to go back to France or swim the wrong way, what is going to happen? They are going to drown. Whose fault is that?

The Restoration of Choice

What Jesus does in salvation is to make it possible for us to make a choice we could never make otherwise. He makes it possible for us to make a choice. He restores enough of our free will to chose Him. Nobody can resist God’s will ultimately, and His will is indeed for all men to be saved. But His will is also for us to be His children and to choose Him of our own volition. We cannot choose him of our own volition because of

the Fall so He “quickens” us – He gives us enough light. There is a balance: what Adam lost we get back in Christ. Calvinism denies this; we do not get back that free choice. Well, Jesus gave me a free choice.

To say I do not have a choice about being saved is no different than saying I do not have a choice about sinning. **Of course** I have a choice about sin – I do not **have** to sin. I might do it but I do not have to. Salvation is the same. God gave me the grace, the power, and the means to choose Christ, which I could never have done on my own. I still had to act on it. Once I accepted the Lord Jesus, although I get tired and drop my cross or get tired swimming the Channel, I am not going to take the lifejacket off. I am going to keep going. As long as I keep that lifejacket on I am secure. “Nobody can snatch them out of My hand” (Jn. 10:28) – that is true! Nobody is taking that jacket off of me, but **I** can take it off. I am not going to. I would rather drown at sea **with** the jacket. At least I will float to the surface one day, but I **can** take it off. As long as I leave the jacket on I am eternally secure. It is what Isaiah calls “the garments of salvation”. (Is. 61:10) We are going to be eternally secure.

The Example of Hebrews

Let us look at Hebrews, which was written to Believers – specifically Jewish Believers, where there is some suggestion of a falling away from belief in Jesus as the Messiah and trying to go back under the Law. This kind of thing was more the feature of epistles such as Galatians than it was Hebrews. In Galatians they were practicing a form of Nomianism. They were not really legalists saying we are saved by the Law but they were saying we are saved by keeping the Law **in addition** to Jesus. We are only saved by Him. We can never be saved by works. Christians do works because they have **been** saved, not to **get** saved. However, Hebrews was written to Jewish believers and there was some danger in going back to Judaism in some way, but not in the same way as Galatians. I am going to do this by examining the text in the original Greek and providing the English translation.

*Dio apentes ton tes arches tom Christos logon epi ten telioteta
pherometha en palon themelion kataballomenoi metanoias apo nekron*

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epyon kai pisteos epi theo. Baptismon dedache epithesos to keiron anastasis te nekris kai krimatos aionion.

“Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrines of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and a faith toward God, with instructions about absolution, laying on hands, of the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.” (Heb. 6:1-2)

So the writer of Hebrews begins. He talks about people who have been saved and how they need to lay this particular foundation. But immediately after that he introduces what must be built upon it. He begins with the Greek word “*dio*”, which means “for”. It is a way of explaining that because these other things have happened, let us press on. And he begins talking along the following lines, saying ...

“This we will do, if God permits, for it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit. They have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come. If they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold Him up to contempt.” (Heb. 6:3-6)

The word “*gan*” (in verse 4) means “for”. The Greek mood is not a subjunctive or conditional subjunctive, but it does imply the possibility that something can go wrong. It is not a subjunctive thing that it is doubtful it will happen, it is conditional. But then it goes beyond this. “It is impossible to renew them” – “*adenaton*” (in verse 6). This is the same word as we have in Hebrews 6:18 saying, “God cannot default” using “*adenaton*” – it is “impossible”. It becomes so impossible for these people to be renewed, that it means God would be false if they could because it is the same term. God cannot be false, but neither can these kind of people be renewed. What is this talking about?

Those Who Cannot Be Renewed

We only have one kind of sin where people cannot be renewed: blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. In its context, blasphemy of the Holy Spirit had to do with the Pharisees or the religious leaders of Jesus’ day attributing to Satan that which they **knew** was of God. They **knew** it was of God – they did not **think** it was of God – they **knew** it was of God.

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In the Parable of the Vineyard it says clearly in Matthew, “for they knew that He spoke the parable of them”. (Mt. 21:45) So they **knew** it was of God, but then **knowing** it was of God they said it was of Satan in such a way as to mislead others away from the way of salvation. That is very depraved. Someone **knows** something is of God but for their own interests they say it is not in such a manner so as to lead others away from the truth to bring them destruction. In its context, that was the description of the unpardonable sin

We do not know at what point the Holy Spirit leaves someone. A backslider does not know at what point that happens. When King Saul went the way he did, he did not know the Spirit had left him, did he? Moreover, he continued to prophesy. Remember, the gifts and calling of God go forth without repentance. (Rom. 11:29) The Spirit may have been **on** him in terms of the pouring out of the Spirit, but not **inside** him anymore. “Lord, did we not do this and that in Your name? I never knew you!” (Mt. 7:21-23) We do not know at what point that happens, but there is the possibility for someone to backslide so irrepentantly and so far, refusing to come back to Jesus, that they have come to a place where they have blasphemed the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit convicts a backslider continually – continually and **continually**. When someone falls away from the Lord they have no peace in the Lord, they have no peace in their prayer life, they have no peace in anything. They keep resisting and resisting and resisting. People like that ultimately will not be saved. They will go so far there is no coming back. That can happen. They can actually reach that point.

It is not easy, but there are people who have become so backslidden that they know the truth but they will not allow their wives to bring their children up in the Church. There are people who have husbands or wives who are so backslidden that they actually lead their own children away from the truth even though they themselves know the truth. This is a terrible kind of sin. There is some basis for associating this with blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

They Saw the Light

“For in the case of those who have once been enlightened” – *“phoristhentas”* is the Greek word. The idea is that they have “seen the light” or “come to the light”. It is not some abstract thing – they know **exactly** what it is.

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“Adonaton gan tous hapax phoristhentas genomentous te tes doreas tes epouranion kai metoxis genethentas pneumatous hagion.” (Heb. 6:4)

“Once being enlightened and tasting the gift (“doreas”) and the heavenlies...”

Not really a heavenly experience but “the heavenlies”...

“...and sharers – partakers, more sharers they are becoming.”

It is not that they “became”, but something ongoing (continuous present active). To become like that it was as a result of “the Spirit”.

There is no way that these people, who had actually been experiencing the Holy Spirit and in contact with their heavenly destination, were not Believers. It is about Believers, about people who have actually been saved. They came to the light – “*phoristhentas*”. “I saw the light”. (Ac. 22:9) “The true Light that was coming into the world that enlightens every man”. (Jn. 1:9) They came to Jesus.

They Tasted

As a result of coming to Jesus something else happened: they “tasted” of it. The Greek is “*gensomenous theon*” – “they tasted the goodness”. What this text is doing is basically drawing on Psalm 34:8.

O taste and see that the LORD is good; How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him! (Ps. 34:8)

These are people who have actually tasted it.

As we continue reading this text in Hebrews 6, for the one who tastes the Lord we have the Greek term “*theon rema*” – they tasted the “word”. But it is not the “*logos*”, it is the “*rema*”.

There are two basic terms for the “word” of God in the New Testament in Greek: “*rema*” and “*logos*”. They are virtually synonymous. We cannot make the kind of distinction which some people do to the degree they do. Some say the “*logos*” is the printed word

and “*rema*” is some kind of personal revelation from the Spirit. That is not true. What we can say is that the “*logos*” is objective. The Bible is the Word of God, and Jesus is Jesus, and it is Him in print. But the “*rema*” is what it becomes in experiential reality when it becomes truth in our life. Jesus is Jesus – He is the “*Logos*”; only when the *Logos* comes to us in a personal way does the Bible really come alive, and that is the term that is used here. “*Logos tos Theo*” is the term used in Hebrews 4:12 that the author of Hebrews is building up to in Hebrews 6. “*For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword*”. (Heb. 4:12) The word here is not “*logos*”, it is this personal encounter.

In other words, there can be an academic theologian, a scholar who knows Greek and Hebrew perfectly but he is not born-again. He will have the “*logos*” in some way, but the “*logos*” will not have become a personal experience in his life; there will be no “*rema*”, no real revelation – it will be purely intellectual. The Bible in the hand of a man like that is useless. It is always somebody with God’s Spirit inside them who is “partaken” of the Holy Spirit. That is what the author of Hebrews is saying here. If someone is **partaken** of the Holy Spirit, the subjective truth – the “*logos*”, now becomes the “*rema*”.

They Were Partakers

These are people who have really come to some kind of personal experience and faith in Jesus: “*partakers*” – “*metochous genethentas*”. In Luke 5:7 this word is usually translated in English Bibles as “comrades”. In other words, they are people who became our comrades; they were one of us. They were not people who were never one of us, they were one of us. They were saved and they partake of “*the heavenly gift*” – “*tes doreas tes epouranion*”.

This occurs in only one place in the Bible in this particular phrase, not using the word “*charism*” – “*grace*”, but “*doreas*”. We can say that God’s grace is in some way for everybody; He is gracious to everyone, even unsaved people. But this is not the word “*charism*”; it is not **that** kind of “*grace*”. It is “*doreas*”, the gift of salvation. It is His great, untold saving gift of the knowledge of the truth. It is more than the general type of grace that God gives to all people.

The reason I point this out is that Calvinists, arguing from Calvin's *Institutes*, will try to say that this means they did not come **all** of the way but only **part** of the way, but the text simply does not support that. Calvinists do what a lot of people do: they begin with a presupposition and then they have to begin doing monkey tricks with the text to fit that presupposition. But that is not what this text in its context in any way supports. These were people who knew the Lord.

They Fall Away

Then it says that they commit apostasy, that they go away in verse 6. That word for "apostasy", or if they had been falling away, is not "*apostasia*". "*Apostasia*" is something different. This is another word, a Greek conditional expressed in the participle, "*parapesontas*". It goes against the following argument.

There is an argument that these people were Jews who believed and the writer of Hebrews was saying to them there was no way they could go back to Judaism, that it was impossible since there is no longer a sacrifice outside of where they were (as explained in Hebrews 10), and it means that they needed to stay where they were. When we read it in that context it has nothing whatsoever to do with saying that someone cannot fall away, but that is an argument some people try to impose.

If the word was "*apostasia*", that would be one thing, but the word is not "*apostasia*", it is "*parapesontas*". "*Parapesontas*" goes directly against this; it means something very different. It means "falling away from **a standard**". "*Apostasia*" comes from an entirely different Greek word altogether. The Greek root of "*apostasia*" means "to depart". Someone is here and now they have left. This word for "falling away" describes someone who has not stopped believing it, but have stopped living it.

Their argument is that this was written to Jewish Believers and he was telling Jewish Believers in the 1st Century that they cannot fall away because it is hopeless to go back to Judaism (the Temple is about to be destroyed, etc.) and for them to stay where they are. They argue that this was written before the Temple was destroyed so therefore it just applies to these believing Jews and that the destruction of the Temple, etc. prevents them from going back and that this is not talking about Believers losing their salvation. If that was the case, the word would be "*apostasia*" – "depart", but it is not that word. **This**

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means “not living up to the same standard”. It describes someone who used to live a Christian life but has now departed from their belief; they are just not living it anymore. That fits the context exactly. Hebrews 6 opens with, “Therefore **leaving** the elementary principles”.

When we find people who after 10 years, 20 years, or 50 years who still eat “baby food”, that is not normal or healthy. When we see people who become stagnant in their Christian life and never grow in grace, never grow in their knowledge and understanding of the Word, never grow by having their character changed by the image of God into the image and likeness of Jesus – they are always the same, people like that are really backsliders. When I was a kid there was a Bob Dylan song and one of the lines was, “He who is not busy being born is busy dying”. It is something like that. If we are not going ahead we are going backward.

The word here for “falling away” is not “*apostasia*”, it is not people who have departed from their beliefs. It is not talking about people who say, “I don’t believe in the Bible anymore. I don’t believe in Jesus anymore”. “*Apostasia*” can mean that but this is not “*apostasia*”. This word means, “I haven’t departed from the faith – I still believe it”, but they are not living it anymore.

And so by not living it any more they go into a form of sin that is worse than before they were saved. We cannot meet the Lord Jesus and be the same person; we are either going to be better or we are going to be worse. If someone comes to Jesus they are either going to become better than they used to be or they are going to become worse, but they cannot get saved and remain the same. They cannot come to taste of the Lord, to be partakers of the Holy Spirit, to experience a foretaste of the heavenly, and be the same person. Either they go one way or they begin going another way much worse.

The writer of Hebrews uses a word here, “*anastaurountas*” – meaning “to crucify again”, expressing contempt for what Christ did. When we find people who adhered to one standard, and have now left that standard while still claiming to believe, they are worse than before they believed. This is talking about backsliders.

Inadvertent vs. Willful Sin

Having broken down the Greek meaning, I am just going to read it again in English...

“For in the case of those who have once been enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the power of the age to come...”

(Sounds like Christians, does it not?)

“...and then have fallen away not from believing but in living what they believe, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance.”

If any believe and fall away, they cannot repent and come back. The Greek does not have a present tense in the sense we do in English. It is present continuous active. In 1 John 3:9 where it says that he who is born of God does not sin, it does not mean that Christians do not **fall** into sin, the meaning is that they do not **practice** it.

Because he is writing here to Jews he is drawing on the Levitical mentality of Torah. The Torah had a provision for inadvertent sin, but it did **not** have provision for continually practiced, willful sin. The Torah in Leviticus had provision for inadvertent sin.

There are two Hebrew words for “sin” and two Greek words for “sin”. The two basic Hebrew words for sin are “*chet*” and “*tesha*”. One means “missing the mark” like shooting an arrow at a target, literally “not going far enough”; the other is “going too far”. We can sin either by not living up to God’s standards or going beyond it. The Greek equivalents are “*hamartano*” and “*harmatia*”.

Leviticus provides for inadvertent sin to right a sin of ignorance. We call this “*baru*” in Hebrew. The High Priest on Yom Kippur made atonement for the sins of ignorance. But there is no provision for people who practice willful sin even under the Torah.

“In the case of those who had once been enlightened, they came to the light...”

(They saw Jesus.)

“...they tasted of the heavenly gift and they have been made partakers of the Spirit and they have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come...”

(They **tasted** it.)

“...and **then** have fallen away”

Someone cannot fall away from where they have never been.

The other argument here comes from John Calvin in his *Institutes*, book 3, chapter 2, paragraph 11. He puts it this way, that they only saw a glimmering of light, that they heard the Gospel preached, understood it, and knew it was the truth, but only tasted it in on a surface level and did not go all the way with a full commitment.

First of all, the text does not justify that; it is not a “glimmering” light. That is not what the word means. When we look at the text in its context, these were people who knew the truth. We cannot get “*doreas*”(verse 4) – the “gift” of God of eternal life from Jesus Christ our Lord – unless we are saved. **No one** gets that gift unless they are saved. Mr. Calvin was dead wrong.

And, as I have said, we will find extreme forms of Calvinism who will go into licentiousness who think that because a real commitment was made at one time that they can still go on and practice sin. This is not common, but there are those who believe it. I have known people who teach this.

Backsliding in the Last Days

Hebrews 10 places this in an eschatological context and connects it with Ecclesiology – with church.

not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. (Heb 10:25)

This is using “*val k’homer*”, the first of the Midoth of Rabbi Hillel in Midrash. What is true in a light situation becomes **particularly** true in a heavy situation. In other words,

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fellowship is **always** important, but in the Last Days it becomes **especially** important. If we cannot stand together, we will never stand alone. By putting it that way we begin to understand there is a **particular** danger in backsliding in the Last Days. Jesus said many will fall away and betray one another. (Mt. 26:31) Backsliding is always possible but in the Last Days it become more and more troubling.

One of the things essential in God's economy in respect to backsliding is fellowship – Christians supporting each other, standing cemented together. When we find people out of fellowship with other Christians, it is a direct reflection that they are out of fellowship with the Lord. There is something wrong. It does not matter if it is 5 or 6 people meeting in a house or if its 500 or 600 meeting in a church, the question is where does God want you to be? If it is something beyond our control and no fault of our own (we are the only Christian in a village out in Saudi Arabia), that is something different. God will see those Believers through. But for us, when we find people out of fellowship, they are heading for trouble.

“Gnosis” vs. “Epignosis”

It is not a coincidence that this introduces what comes next in Hebrews 10:26.

For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, (Heb. 10:26)

“*Hekousios*” – “willfully”. He is drawing back to the Levitical concept that there is only provision for inadvertent sin.

But then he says something else: “*hemon*” – “if we”. He puts himself in the situation. The writer of Hebrews was not preaching to other people; he was also reminding himself. But then it goes on to say something more.

...the knowledge of truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.”

“*Tes alatheias*” means “the body of truth”, and the word for “knowledge” is not the normal word “*gnosis*” but “*epignosis*” which does not mean that we know “*a*” truth about something, but that we know the **whole** body of truth about something. These were not

people who understood only one aspect of the Christian life or salvation; these were people who understood the **whole** panorama.

Somebody can be told, “Jesus died for our sins and to give us eternal life”. Someone can “know” that; this is “gnosis”. But when they say, “Jesus called us to co-die with Him and we become new creations the same as He was when He rose from the dead”, and when they say, “His Spirit will inhabit us and give us the power to overcome the desires of the flesh”, and when they say, “The Bible is the infallible Word of God and the Holy Spirit interprets it for us and gives us the power to live it and we must follow its standards” – when they begin to say salvation means all these other things, that is not “gnosis”, that is “epignosis”.

These were not people who just knew or heard **something** about the Gospel, these were people who understood – they really **knew**. And they knew the full **body** of truth – “*tes alatheias*”.

A Point of No Return

but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? (Heb. 10:27–29)

Take note of the phrase, “*has insulted the Spirit of grace*”. It can lead to the point where they blaspheme the Holy Spirit. An unrepentant backslider can reach a point where they blaspheme the Holy Ghost. That is exactly what it is saying. We would have to do some monkey tricks to say this is talking about unsaved people. “*Katapateo*” – “*trampled underfoot*”. “*Koinos hegeomenos*” – literally meaning to be treating as common the blood of Jesus, and the word here is “*enubrizo*” – “insolence”, being insolent to God’s Spirit.

Yes, there is an unpardonable sin. Hebrews 6 and 10 directly connect to an unrepentant backslider who gets to the point that they begin to blaspheme the Holy Ghost. Hebrews

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6 raises the possibility of an unrepentant backslider blaspheming the Holy Ghost, Hebrews 10 reiterates the same point and says that is what is going to happen.

There *is* a point of no return. Go back to the illustration of the potter – he broke it, remade it, broke it, remade it, but eventually even the potter gave up. This is not in Scripture to get anyone discouraged, but it is there to make sure we understand what we have gotten ourselves into and that we do not take lightly what God has called us to. It is not “departing” from the Lord – this is not “*apostasía*”; this is departing from His standard. The whole theme of Jude’s Epistle is about backsliders in the Church. There are as many backsliders in *here* as there are out *there*. Scripture says that a backslider in heart is filled with his own ways. (Pr. 14:14)

Hebrews 28:10 states that it takes “*two or three witnesses*” in the Law of Moses to enact capital punishment. It will be worse for those who are Christians because they did not have what we have. “*Athetasas*” means “violated”. “*Dokeite*” – “do you think” in the Greek is rhetorical. To ask a rhetorical question means to already know the answer. If this is what happened in the Law of Moses when they did not even have Jesus nor the blood sacrifice that we have – if that is what happened when people did this under the Torah – what do we think is going to happen to us if we go this way? He is giving a warning, but he does not leave it there; he begins talking the need for endurance.

Assurance in Concert with Endurance

For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. (Heb. 10:36)

How do we endure? Keep the lifejacket on and keep swimming.

“Oh, we’re saved by faith through grace!” That is true, but what is faith? It continues in Hebrews 11:1, “faith “ is the “*hupostasis*” – “*the assurance of things hoped for*”.

In the Bible, “hope” equals “future fact”. I guarantee you that if we keep following Jesus that we will go to Heaven. I guarantee that if we do not take the lifejacket off we will not drown. It is not that I “hope” we will not drown, I **guarantee** we will not drown if we keep the lifejacket on. I guarantee we will go to Heaven if we keep following Jesus. This is the

way by which you can be eternally sure of your salvation. But if it is not this way we are playing with fire, and there are certainly people today who are playing with fire.

There is no way we can say as John Calvin does that this applies to people who heard the Gospel and came to a certain point and then withdrew. It is simply not so. They have a “*dorea*”. There is no way we can say it only meant that Jewish Believers could not possibly go back under the Law. It is talking about people who **can** fall away, who **can** depart from God’s standard. They have to play games with the text instead of letting it say what it means and mean what it says.

Imputed Righteousness

Calvinists will tell you that righteousness is imputed. So we have to understand what “imputation” means; it is an interesting term.

*What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?
(Rom. 6:1–2)*

Paul understands that imputed righteousness can be misunderstood. There were actually people in the Greek churches who believed that only the new creation mattered, that it did not matter what the old creation did so they could go out and keep on sinning in the old creation. Paul understood that imputed righteousness could be misunderstood, that people could think it is OK to continue to sin and still be saved. Look at what he is saying: he is writing to Believers. So therefore those who believe in an unconditional “once saved, always saved” will say, “If they go back and practice sin it means they were never saved to begin with; they were never truly born-again to begin with. They made an empty or false confession or they had some kind of experience, but they were never really saved.” That certainly does not mean Hebrews 6 and it certainly does not mean Hebrews 10.

Look at the Prodigal Son. (Lk. 15:11-32) The Prodigal Son has multiple interpretations. (The rabbis said a parable had up to seventy different interpretations, certainly meaning “multiple” anyway.) One of the interpretations of the Prodigal Son is that of a backslider. A backslider will wind up the way the Prodigal Son did, upon faith in humiliation, coming

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back to his father. When a backslider comes back, the Father will forgive him and take him back, but he has to come back. And what does the father say? *“This brother of yours was **dead**”*. (Lk. 15:32) He was dead!

How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised?

Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; (Rom. 4:10)

Getting back to this idea of imputation, in Romans 4 Paul uses the word *“elogisthe”*. **We** get the word “impute” from the Latin in the Vulgate, *“imputate”*. The Hebrew is *“chashab”*, meaning “think”. “Impute” means “to reckon”. It is not that it is really “given” to us, but it is “reckoned”; God takes it into account.

When Jesus died on the cross for our sins, God took our sin and put it on Him and took His righteousness and put it on us. Even though He was righteous, unrighteousness was imputed to Him on the cross. Even though we are unrighteous, His righteousness is imputed to us when we come to the cross. Yes, righteousness is imputed. Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him a righteousness. (Gal. 3:6; Ja. 2:23) But then what happens? Yes, the righteousness is imputed, but not the fruits. The fruit of the Spirit cannot be imputed nor can the fruit of the Spirit be ascribed. We are called to prove we are His disciples.

Overcomers

‘He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’” (Rev. 3:21–22)

To go to Heaven one must be an “overcomer”. We cannot overcome on our own strength and we cannot overcome in our own righteousness; it has to be in the righteousness and strength of Jesus. He does it for us. We can never swim the Channel in a storm in our own strength; somebody has to give us a lifejacket. But once somebody gives us the strength we must put it into operation, just like the example of little Donnie’s airplane. Heaven is for overcomers. God will give us the grace, the will, and the means

to do it, but He also gives us the free will to make a choice. When we get saved, our free will is given back to us.

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying. (Rev. 22:14–15)

“*Blessed are those who wash their robes*”. Some people wash their robes, but the Bible talks about those who make them dirty again. We can always go back to the blood of the Lamb and wash our robes, but taking the robe off, in figure, is like the young man who ran away naked when Jesus was arrested. (Mk. 14:51-52) When persecution came he ran away and lost the garments of salvation.

Back to the seven churches in Revelation 2, Jesus says, “*He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death*”. (Rev. 2:11) He was writing here to born-again Christians. He was telling **Christians** that if they overcame they would not be hurt by the second death. Obviously there is a theoretical possibility, at the very least, that these people **could** fall away.

‘He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. (Rev. 3:5)

Jesus actually says He will blot out names from the Book of Life. I would like for anybody to explain to me logically how one’s name can be erased from the Book of Life if it was never in there to begin with. They have to come with their presuppositions and do monkey tricks.

The Call to Work It Out

“Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Mt 25:30)

We are all given a certain amount of talents, and our talents are always in proportion to our abilities. (Mt. 25:15) When Jesus comes back He will not settle for people who bury their talents. The people with the highest rewards will be investors, but He will not settle for anything less than an interest bearer. Those who bury their talents are people who are really backslidden; they have religion rather than authentic Christianity. If you or I have a living relationship with Jesus, He is going to employ our talents.

For many years I led a congregation in Israel and was very active in evangelism. But I also had a day job. Israel has a six-day week. It was not easy having a day job and a family and being in ministry. I know how difficult it is, but I did it because God gave me the grace and will to do it, and I made the choice to cooperate with that grace.

A lot of ministers will stand up at a pulpit and tell us what we should be doing as if we are supposed to ignore the fact that they get **paid** for doing it. They do not know what it is like to go to the office or get up to in the middle of the night or to go to the factory. I thank God that for years and years and years when I was a tent maker. If I did not have to travel so much I would still be a tent maker. I prefer to have a secular job. What it all comes down to is bearing fruit. Even when Paul was in prison, he was bearing fruit.

For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; (1 Co. 10:1–2)

Learn the Lesson

What Paul does here is to use the Exodus experience as a type to explain our salvation. Coming out of Egypt is coming out of the world, going through the water is baptism, etc. The Exodus is a picture of our salvation.

...and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is

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written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY." Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day... Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. (1 Co. 10:3–8, 11)

These things happened to the ancient Hebrews and written down in the Bible so we would not make the same mistakes. What did they do? They drank from the rock which was Christ, yet they were idolaters and they were immoral. Why are we warned not to be like them? Again, what does it say in Revelation 22:14-15? It says that outside are those who are immoral and those who are idolatrous. They go to hell. That is exactly what the New Testament says.

From One Oppression to Another

How they get this unconditional "once saved, always saved" from the Bible I do not know. I know how they seem to see a need to repudiate the lies of Roman Catholicism, which says someone can work for their salvation and keep people in bondage always thinking they can lose it. I can understand why they were trying to free people from that kind of oppression. But when they go to the opposite extreme and say that there is no choice as to whether we can be saved or not, that is just putting people under **more** oppression.

When people are told they have no free will, that Jesus did not give them back their free will when they were born-again, that this cannot be accepted when He empowers them to make a choice – if you are not one of the Elect you are not going to choose Him – the result is putting people under **more** oppression. More than that, they are leading people under the oppression of sin by denying that we have a free will as regenerate Believers to resist sin that unsaved people do not have.

Jesus does not save us **in** our sins, He saves us **from** our sins. He never came to save us **in** our sins; He came to save us **from** our sins.

When we see people persisting in sin who admit they do it and that it is wrong, things like "I'm going to keep living with this unsaved woman", "I'm going to continue with this

alcohol abuse”, “I’m going to keep living this way but I’ll keep going to church on Sunday” – those people are not saved from their sins, they have been deluded into thinking they have been saved in them. Without holiness, no man shall see God. (Eph. 1:4, 5:27; 1 Pe. 1:15)

But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? (Ja. 2:20)

In Conclusion

Little Donnie’s model airplane remains useless unless he works it out. The life preserver is useless if you do not put it on and swim. Yes, it is a gift. Yes, it is free. Yes, you cannot earn it. Yes, the Lord does something for us we could never do for ourselves. Yes, He chose us. Yes, He showed us His undeserved grace. But He also gave us back the potential to make a choice that we did not have. We were dead, unable to communicate with God, and He quickened us. He put enough light in us, enough of what we lost in the Fall to see Him as the Truth and the Salvation. It is up to us to respond to it. That is the balance.

The idea that we are not born with sin as Pelagius said, that is heresy. Charles Finney even bordered on it, although he admitted we have sin. No, we all have sin and we cannot even choose God because of our sin, but He intervenes in the Person of Jesus and gives us the possibility of making a choice that we never could have made. **We** have to choose. Once we make the choice He also then gives us the ability to live it out, but **we** have to **make** that choice.

We lost our free will because of the Fall of man. Everybody since Adam has lost their free will. Jesus comes to give it back. Calvinism denies this.

With all due respect to my Calvinistic brethren, with all due respect to the Reformed churches and the many wonderful things that Reformed Christians have done and still do, with all due respect to the Pilgrim fathers and the Puritan fathers whom I love, when it comes to eternal security I agree that we are eternally secure in Christ. Just make sure you **stay** in it.

God bless. †††

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