

The Fallacy of the “Once saved, always saved” Argument

The prophet Ezekiel speaks to this issue. “When the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: In his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die. . . . When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die” (Ezekiel 18:24, 26).

The inspired prophet’s teaching is virtually repeated several chapters later. “When I [the Lord] shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and committeth iniquity, all his righteousnesses shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it” (Ezekiel 33:13). So then, he continues, “When the righteous turneth from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, he shall even die thereby” (verse 18). It is hard to understand these texts in any other way than the clear reading of Scripture indicates. Likewise, we may go to the New Testament to see what the Lord Jesus Christ has to say on the topic.

When in Jerusalem one time during the feast of the dedication (Hanukkah), Jesus “walked in the Temple in Solomon’s porch. Then came the Jews round about Him, and said unto Him, How long dost Thou make us to doubt? If Thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not, because ye are not of My sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, Which gave them to Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My hand. I and My Father are One” (John 10:27–30).

And what was the result of Jesus’ answer? “Then the Jews took up stones to stone Him” (verse 31). We have set this dialogue in its full context to aid in forming our answer to the argument of “Once saved, always saved.” In sum, Jesus stated plainly that no man is able to pluck one of His sheep out of His hand (verse 28), and also that no man is able to pluck them out of His Father’s hand. We have no quarrel with His plain statement.

But now comes a huge “if.” These verses lend no support to the fatal presumption that once a man is saved it is impossible for him to be lost. There is nothing to prevent the sheep from wandering away from the Shepherd’s care *if they choose to do so*. In this sense, no man needs to pluck them out of Christ’s or the Father’s hand because they already have made the choice to “pluck themselves out.” Thus, only by taking the words of Jesus out of their context is it possible to make them appear to sustain such a conclusion.

The presumption that one cannot fall from grace is seen to be fallacious in another key statement that Jesus made: “If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned” (John 15:6). This statement occurs in the famous passage of Jesus as the True Vine. It could scarcely be clearer that this passage hinges on the question of whether the “branches” are willing to abide (continue) in Him. To abide in Christ means that my soul must be in daily, constant communion with Jesus Christ and must invite Him to live *His life in me*. (See Galatians 2:20.) Each branch must bear its own fruits. Again, a person’s free will is either to choose to stick by the Vine or to disconnect from Him. The metaphor is thus quite similar to the Shepherd and the sheep.

We contend that one's destiny hinges on choices made, not just once and for all time on the day of our conversion, but on every single day thereafter. One day may find us securely in the hand of Jesus, but the next may find us jumping out of that nail-scarred hand. We are never "locked in" permanently, for God created us free moral agents, and He grants us the sacred right to either exercise faith in Christ day by day or to choose not to do so day by day. All the while, His Holy Spirit is constantly wooing us while at the same time the deceiver is seeking to undo us. In a very real sense, the great controversy between the powers of Heaven and Hell is waged over the submission of the human agent to one power or the other. Though battles are won and lost every single day throughout the Christian's lifetime, the war is not over until one of three things happens: (1) our probation closes, (2) death overtakes us, or (3) Jesus returns while we are still alive.

The problem with the fallacy of "once saved, always saved" error is that the sin of presumption rests upon the fatal supposition that something is true without Biblical proof. The incongruous notion of "backsliders in Heaven" would amount to exceptionally cruel and unusual punishment for such persons to be forced against their will to live forever in the presence of Jesus when they have made a clear choice to reject the extraordinarily generous offer to abide in Him. The plain reading of Scripture teaches, rather, that until our individual probation closes and we are either sealed for eternal life or marked for eternal separation from God, we may *choose daily* to accept His offer of salvation. Not knowing when my probation will close or death will overtake me, I want to choose Jesus *today*. There are no tomorrows promised me. "*Now* is the accepted time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). Each and every day of my life, I must *choose* whether to abide in Him, until He comes to take me home. Glory, hallelujah; even so, come, Lord Jesus!

—Jerry A. Stevens, July 8, 2015