The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

ONCE SAVED ALWAYS SAVED?

It's many a long year since I first encountered the "Once saved always saved" doctrine and at that time it did not appear to me to be a very sensible doctrine, much less a scriptural one. Due to present circumstances I am again having to look at the subject and I find that nothing has changed: i.e. the doctrine still appears to be quite unreasonable, as well as being extremely unscriptural, and one wonders how such a teaching could ever find such widespread acceptance . . . For what they are worth, I offer the following comments.

If the doctrine be true, then our copies of the N.T. could be very much slimmer volumes, for much of the epistles seem to be exhortations to Christans not to fall away from the faith. Such exhortations would seem to be very foolish if such a falling away is not possible. I am, however, informed that the validity of the doctrine of "Once saved always saved" had never been challenged until the coming of one Jacobus Arminius, who taught that salvation was conditional, and that even Christians could be lost.

Jacobus Arminius (1560 - 1609) was a theological professor at Leyden, Holland, who opposed the Calvinistic grip in which Holland was held at the time. His opposition to Calvin's doctrine of predestination, and state control of the church, won him many followers, but after the presentation of his "Remonstrance" (1610) to the General Assembly at Dort, his movement lost impetus. If Arminius taught that salvation was conditional (and not predestined) we can only commend him: and if he taught, in the face of strong opposition from the state church, that Christians could perish from their faith we can, again, only admire him.

It is nonsense, however, to suggest that Arminius was the first to suggest that salvation was conditional, or that he was the first to oppose the "once saved always saved" doctrine. God's word has always plainly stated that salvation was very conditional and has **always** shown clearly the "once saved always saved" doctrine to be foolish and unscriptural. Arminius was obviously merely trying to reinstate N.T. teaching in an environment created by the writings of Calvin.

SHALL NEVER PERISH Etc.

The "once saved always saved" doctrine is based, like many other mistaken ideas in religion, upon a complete misunderstanding of two or three important verses of scripture: one of which is John 10:27,28. **"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, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand."** This statement by Jesus is probably the "flagship" verse in the justification of the doctrine, especially the phrase **"and they shall never perish."** This verse is also used to try to show that those who

fall away could never have been Christ's sheep in the first place, for Jesus "knows" His own sheep. However, as we can see, the verse does refer to those who will "Hear My voice," and who will "Follow Me," and so that would seem to make the promise of eternal life *conditional* upon hearing and following Jesus. And so even the "flagship" verse seems to teach *conditional salvation.*

Another "proof text" for the doctrine is Rom. 8:35-39: viz. "**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword . . . For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Jesus Christ our Lord.**" Who then can separate us from the love of Christ? Only ourselves. Nothing can separate us from God *but ourselves.* If we can't possibly separate ourselves from God's love, why does Jesus exhort us to "**Abide in God's love**" (John 15:9)? In the self same chapter (v10) Jesus says, "**IF ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love.**" This seems to mean that abiding in God's love is *conditional* upon keeping His commandments, and that sounds very like conditional salvation does it not?

Another text often advanced as justification for the "once saved always saved" doctrine is John 5:24: viz. "**Verily, verily I say unto you, he that heareth My word and believeth Him that sent Me hath eternal life, and cometh not into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life.**" Once again we notice that even this verse contains *conditions:* viz."**He that heareth My word and believeth Him that sent Me.**" Clearly only those who fulfil these conditions will have eternal life. ·

Room for one other "Proof text" (although there are others) in 1 John 2:19 viz. "**They went out from us but they were not of us; for if they had been of us they would, no doubt, have continued with us, but they went out that they may be made manifest that they were not all of us.**" This verse is used to "prove" that those who fall away were never Christians in the first place (and we shall mention this subject later) but the *previous verse* tells that John was referring specifically to the *antichrist.* The verse (v18) says, "**Little children, it is the last time and so ye have heard that antichrist shall come; even now there are many antichrists whereby we know it is the last time.**" And so those who were not of the apostles, and went out from the apostles, were *the antichrists,* and so this verse had a limited application and referred to a set number of individuals.

Other "proof texts" (such as 1 John 3:9; 1 Peter 1:5; 1 Cor. 3:15) could also be mentioned, but we must leave space for the very substantial quantity of scripture which refutes this doctrine. Some examples are in the following section.

WHAT SAITH THE SCRIPTURE?

Space is obviously limited but we shall include as many relevant references as possible.

"**Take heed brethren, lest haply there shall be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God.**" (Heb. 3:12). We notice Paul was speaking to his *"brethren"* and seems concerned that some might "fall away."

"**Ye are severed from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law, ye are fallen away from grace**" (Gal.5:4). Paul was again, addressing Christians (in Galatia) and warning them of the possibility that they could fall from grace and be severed from Christ.

"**For, through thy knowledge, he that is weak perisheth, the brother for whose sake Christ died**" (1 Cor. 8:11). Paul is again concerned about a "brother for whose

sake Christ died" being at risk of perishing.

"**Having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith**" (1 Tim. 5:12). It appears possible for Christians to "cast off" their first faith.

"**So, because thou art lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spue thee out of My mouth**" (Rev. 3:16). These words come from the very same lips as "they shall never perish." Yet Jesus warns lukewarm Christians that He will spue them out of His mouth.

"**Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death and hide a multitude of sins**" (James 5:19). Again Paul is speaking of his "brethren" (Christians).

"**Now all these things happened unto them (Israel) for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world have come. Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth beware lest he fall**" (1 Cor. 10:12). The clear teaching is, that Spiritual Israel could suffer the same fate as the Israel of old.

"**Wherefore the rather brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure, for IF ye do these things ye shall never fall**" (2 Peter 1:10). Why the need for diligence? If none shall perish how could the election be unsure?

"**Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw disciples after them. Therefore watch and remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone of you night and day with tears**" (Acts 20:30). Paul is here speaking to elders of the church at Ephesus, and one wonders why Paul was warning everyone night and day with the tears. Why tears if "none shall perish."

Paul warns Timothy to "**war a good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck. Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered to Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme**" (1 Tim.1:19). These two brethren could hardly have made shipwreck of a faith they never had in the first place.

"**For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment given unto them**" (2 Peter 2:20). Obviously Peter is talking about Christians (those who had known the way of righteousness and had escaped the pollutions of the world) who had turned back to the world. He says the latter end of such would be worse than the first. Paul did not know of the doctrine of "once saved always saved" and neither, it seems did Peter.

Peter describes some as . . . "**cursed children which have forsaken the right way and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam**" (2 Peter 2:15). If they *"forsook* the right way" they must have been in the right way to start with. The above constitute only a small proportion of the overwhelming quantity of scripture which clearly show that Christians can fall, and can perish.

THE PARABLES

Those who refuse to be moved from John 10:27 (and "they shall never perish") should consider some of the other things Jesus said, especially in His parables, and then reconsider their understanding of "they shall never perish." For instance, in Matt. 25 (the wise and foolish virgins) all were Christians, but five, by sloth, were quite unprepared for the coming of the Bridegroom and "**the door was shut.**" They cried, "**Lord open to us**" but He answered, "**I know you not**" Jesus ended by saying "**Watch therefore.**" Slightly different from "None shall perish."

Later in the very same chapter Jesus describes the master who distributed the talents to "HIS OWN SERVANTS" and says "Occupy until I come." Upon His return the Master said to the slothful, "Thou wicked and slothful servant" and ordered that he should lose even what little he had. "And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." This ending, envisaged by Jesus, differs somewhat from the doctrine under discussion.

Even before we reach Matt. 25 (in the latter verses of Chapter 24) we find Jesus saying, "Who is that faithful and wise servant whom his Lord has made ruler over His household to give them meat in due season. Blessed is that servant whom His Lord, when He cometh, shall find him so doing. But, and if, that evil servant shall say in his heart, my Lord delayeth His coming, and shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken. The Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for Him and in an hour he is not aware of. And shall cut him asunder and appoint him a portion with the hypocrites." We notice Jesus is referring to his "faithful and wise servants" and what can happen to them.

In the parable of the vine and the branches Jesus said, "Every branch IN ME that beareth not fruit; He TAKETH IT AWAY, and every branch which beareth fruit He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit . . (v6) 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." This warning is for those "in Christ" (IN ME) and Jesus says that even such (those "In Christ") can end up in the fire.

In the parable of the sower, the seed is the Gospel; the sower is the Lord; the soil is the human heart. The stony ground represents those who obeyed the gospel but wilted under difficulty; the seed amongst the thorns represented those who obeyed the gospel but became choked with the cares and pleasures of this life.

In the parable of the tares Jesus said, "As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be at the end of the world. The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity. And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 13:40). We see that "at the end of the world" this purge will take place in "His Kingdom."

Obviously other parables could be mentioned to similar effect, as could the latter portion of Matt. 25 where *the separation is made of the sheep and the goats,* but surely these suffice to demonstrate the fallacy of the idea that "none shall perish."

NEVER CHRISTIANS IN THE FIRST PLACE?

Paul preached the gospel to all and sundry but his epistles were written only for those who had accepted the gospel and had become Christians: i.e. members of the Lord's Church. Likewise Peter's epistles, and indeed all the epistles, were directed *to Christians.* We must assume that Paul and Peter knew exactly who their brethren were (what a Christian was). Paul described the Corinthians as "those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints" (1 Cor. 1:2). The Ephesian Christians he described as "the faithful in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 1:1). The Roman Christians he called "Beloved of God, called to be saints" (Rom 1:7). The Hebrews he called, "Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling" (Heb. 3:1). Does that sound as if he regarded them as Christians? Peter wrote to "the elect according to the foreknowledge of God" (1 Peter 1:2). And "to them that have obtained like precious faith, with us" (2 Peter 1:1).

It was to such "Holy brethren, beloved of God" that Paul and Peter wrote in the terms illustrated in the verses already quoted: i.e. warning them (with tears) of the possibility and the danger of falling away; erring from the truth; forsaking the right

way; departing from the faith, becoming entangled again with the world and overcome, making shipwreck of their faith. All Christians start at the same starting line in the Christian race, but not all will finish. Indeed Paul was amazed at "how soon" some of the Galatian Christians had been seduced away from the pure gospel to other doctrines and Paul could not have suffered such amazement if the Galatians had not been Christians to start with. Paul's world was awash with false teachers and doctrines, and without a printed copy of the N.T., the brethren would be very vulnerable to all kinds of apostacy.

It seems the very height of foolishness, therefore, to claim that those who fell away were never Christians in the first place. How could they **depart** from a faith they never ever had in the first place? How could they **fall** from a position they never ever occupied? How could they **reject** a commitment they had never made? How could they **forsake** the right way, if they were never in the right way? How indeed? No rational person would even attempt to question it. **Demas** was as close a companion to Paul as Luke was (see Col. 4:14; Phm. 24 & 2 Tim. 4:10) yet Paul had sadly to say, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." **Was Demas a Christian before he turned back into the world?** Even the question is foolish.

But surely the best testimony comes from Paul himself. Was Paul one of the Lord's sheep? Was Paul a Christian "in the first place?" Was Paul a member of the Lord's body? Is the Pope a Catholic? Yet Paul was always aware of the fact that, although he preached to others, he himself had the propensity to make shipwreck of his faith and be a castaway. Using the anaolgy of the athlete striving to finish the race and claim the prize, he said, **"But I keep under, my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway"** (1 Cor. 9:7). Paul here clearly acknowledges the possibilty that, although an apostle of God, having actually conversed with Christ, and working for God under divine patronage and protection, it was still very possible for him, by his behaviour, to make shipwreck of his faith and, like Demas, go back into the world. (And if Paul had gone back into the world, no doubt someone would now be foolish enough to say, "Well, he was never a Christian in the first place"). Plainly, Paul had never heard of the "once saved always saved" doctrine, and if he had, would surely have denounced it as a dangerous nonsense, in the event, Paul, at the end of his days could triumphantly say, **"I have kept the faith"** and *BECAUSE he had* kept *the faith* (and had not renounced it) there was laid up for him, a crown of righteousness.

Yes, we must **give diligence** to make our calling and election sure. As Jesus said, **"No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God** (Luke 9:62). Evidently Jesus had never heard of the doctrine either.

EDITOR.

"IN GOD'S SANCTUARY"

In the seventy-third Psalm we find the writer perplexed over a very common problem - Why do the wicked prosper? The age-old puzzle had almost become an obsession with the Psalmist. In verse seventeen we find him saying **"Until I came into the sanctuary of God then I understood their end."** The inspired penman was simply saying, I was confused until God's presence pervaded my life. Then the dilemma was solved. I understood more clearly his purposes. Brethren is it not so with us today?

The word sanctuary means literally: 'A structure made holy by God's presence.' Under the law of Moses both the Tabernacle and the Temple qualified as an early sanctuary (Heb. 8:2; 9:1). But today, as Stephen proclaimed in Acts 7:48, **"God**