

Message #62 of *Scripture Beneath The Surface*

“Once Saved, Always Saved?”

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Hello! Thanks for being with us. Today I'd like to talk to you about the doctrine which is called, "Once saved, always saved." People from many different denominations use this doctrinal term to explain the Biblical concept that our salvation is secure in Jesus, and that when we accept him as Lord and Savior, we do not have to fear that God will ever forsake us. It is a concept which stresses the assuredness of our ultimate protection by God from Satan's attempt to steal us away.

However, let me go on record here. I want to say very plainly that I believe the phrase, "Once saved, always saved," should not be used by Christians. Now, hold on a minute and let me explain. First, I want you to know that I certainly do trust in God's salvation through Jesus Christ, and I am absolutely certain that Jesus Christ will never let me go. My salvation is assured, and I do not have to fear that Jesus will ever let someone take me away from him. Notice that I did not say that I thought my salvation was unsure, or that Jesus Christ would ever allow Satan to take me away from him, but rather, what I said was that the phrase, "Once saved, always saved," should not be used.

Why? Why do I say that the basic doctrine is not really wrong, yet say that the simple phrase of, "Once saved, always saved," should not be used. The reason for this is that what is expressed in the phrase, "Once saved, always saved," is not really Biblically correct because it is not a sufficiently complete Biblical doctrine. The complete Biblical doctrine includes some very important information that is not included in the single phrase, "Once saved, always saved." The Bible does not say that once you have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord, then you will never ever be

in danger of losing your salvation. What it does promise us is that if we make Jesus Christ Lord of our lives, and continue in him until we die, than we will be raised from the dead and will live with him forever.

However, the Bible very clearly indicates that there will be many people who claim to be saved, but that will not be given eternal life in heaven. This is clearly expressed in Matthew 7:22-23 where it says, “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? And in your name have cast out devils? And in your name have done many wonderful works? 23 And then I will profess to them, I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity.”

Notice that in these two verses Jesus is referring to people who claim to be saved, yet they were never known by our Lord. These are people who never were saved. My question to those who use the phrase, “Once saved, always saved,” is, “What do you think your statement of, 'Once saved, always saved,' will do for the person who claims to be a Christian but was never really known by the Lord?” I will answer that question for you. If you say, “When you are once saved, you will always be saved,” the person who has never truly given his life over to Jesus Christ will be given a false assurance of their salvation. They will assume heaven is assured, just as they have assumed they are saved. You will not be reassuring them of their salvation, but will be giving them a false assurance which will eventually seal their destruction.

Romans 14:1-10, are scriptures that point out that there will be varying degrees of understanding in God's people. By this we can be certain that no single person will have all the right answers when it comes to scripture. But, although we must teach others what we believe, this doesn't mean that we teach other people half truths, by giving short contracted phrases which are inadequate to explain a whole doctrinal concept. When we use short phrases to replace doctrinal concepts, we are increasing the chance for Satan to twist the meaning of the scriptures and thereby deceive many.

Now, this does not mean that you should not share your convictions with others. I'm only saying that when we do share our convictions, we should endeavor to make the word of God which we speak as clear and concise as possible in order that others will not be confused by it. 1 Corinthians 13:33 tells us that God is not the author of confusion. If we bring confusion to others rather than clarity, we are actually helping Satan to deceive. Our purpose in spreading the gospel is to do away with confusion, and to bring as much understanding as possible.

The deception in the world is extremely great, and not just in the wicked people of the world. God's people have gone a long way from the true word of the Bible. Until God rises up and restores the fulness of his truth to the earth, it's our business to give people as much of an understanding of the scriptures as we can while holding confusion at a minimum. Yes, we can only give others what they can handle, such as in line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little. And, we must also pray that the Holy Spirit will allow their ears to be opened. But one of the most surefire ways of destroying truth is to use the technique which

Satan uses and give people less than the whole truth. A half truth is not truth, but a lie. Faith is built upon knowing the word of God, not on knowing just the half of it.

Of course, we must keep these concepts in mind concerning the doctrine of, “Once saved, always saved,” and try to find a better way of explaining our assurance of salvation which we have through Jesus Christ. And, quite possibly, the best way to understand this doctrine more completely is to take a closer look at the definition of that word, “saved.”

Many people voice pros and cons concerning this doctrine, but they all use the term, saved, in the context they are thinking of, while not realizing that others may not be thinking of the word, saved, in that same context. When we use the word, saved, it can mean different things, depending on the viewpoint of the person. If you, yourself, use the term saved, you may be thinking of the bondage of deception which you have just escaped. From this angle you would be thinking of it in terms of what has just taken place. However, another person may use the term, saved, in the sense of his future reward. From this angle he would be thinking of that salvation which will occur on the day Jesus Christ returns in the clouds of glory.

If we look back in the Old Testament, we will notice that God gave Abraham the promise, which Abraham received by faith. I believe without a doubt that Abraham was saved because he believed God. Scripture tells us in Hebrews 6:13 that God swore to Abraham and made a promise to him. But, in verse 15, we see that Abraham did not receive that promise until he had endured patiently. From this we see that there is a requirement of enduring patiently, and continuing until such time as we die or Jesus comes again for us. Luke 21:19 tells us that it is by our patience, meaning our continuance in the gospel, that we are saved. To be saved without having to be concerned about continuing in the gospel would be to disregard several portions of scripture.

So, whether a person is saved or not depends on the definition of the word. Is the person saying he has received the gift of eternal life, or is he saying that he has received the promise of eternal life? I, personally, have no doubt that the promise God has given me through Jesus Christ is mine. And, I have no doubt that I will obtain that promise if I continue in him. But scripture certainly does give clear direction that we must continue, and that by our patience, by our continuing to trust in the promises of Jesus Christ even in the face of Satan's doubts, we will inherit eternal life. Hebrews 6:6, clearly indicates the possibility of a person knowing Jesus Christ in a personal way and then falling away. Jesus' parable of the sowing of seed also gives indication that there will be people who gladly receive the word of God and will grow for a short time, but then become disillusioned and give up. This parable plainly indicates that the seed sprouted into life for a short time. If we apply this principle, which Christ Jesus intended us to apply, we would see that a person can receive the word of God joyfully, can sprout up into new life, but then die out later when faced with trials, tribulation, or the evil influence from others who are not of the same seed. The real key here is that people can become disillusioned when faith is substituted for lies. This means the lies of Satan take away the certainty of God's word.

In a recent e-mail, a person made a beautiful statement to me which said, "I pray every day that Christ will keep me on course." It is my conviction that every sincere prayer like this will be heard by God, and anyone who prays this prayer sincerely will certainly never be lost. It is something we can depend on most assuredly. Yet, there are others who do not have such firm convictions even though they recognize that the word of God is true. They would truly like to go to heaven, but have no heart for living their lives in obedience to the word of God. They do not separate themselves from the fellowship of their past unsaved friends, and soon find that their new love for the Lord has been eroded by the company they keep. Many love the word of God for the promise it gives, but care little to apply the word of God to their lives. These people may enter into the narrow path, but because they do not continue to pray and seek understanding, they become disillusioned. Eventually, they become confused, lose their clear spiritual eyesight, and become convinced that Jesus wasn't all that great after all. Then, Satan is finally able to insert enough doubt to cause that person to give up. In short, they fall off of the narrow path and into the darkness of the spiritual abyss.

Now, according to most people who use the phraseology, "Once saved, always saved," this falling away from the narrow path into destruction can only happen to people who were never saved in the first place. For to admit that the person had been on the narrow path as a Christian, or to admit that the person had sprouted as seed from the word of God, would be to deny their concept of, "Once saved, always saved." So, the question arises, "was the person actually saved for a short time, or was the person only claiming to be saved, but not really saved?"

We know that there is definite Biblical support for the assurance of an eternal salvation. However, we also know that there is definite Biblical support for the concept of maintaining our course until such time as we die or Christ returns for us. Salvation is assured for those who allow the trials and tribulations to test their faith, and stay true to God because their hearts are truly set for him. When it comes to the bottom line of whether we are, "once saved, always saved," or not, the real answer is whether or not your heart is really a heart after God. Certainly the word of God is life. If a person receives the word of God, they receive life. It is certain that the word of God causes life, and that the promises of eternal life can be retained by all those who truly desire Jesus. But just as the seed which is planted in stony ground lives for a short time and then dies, there are people who live for a short time in Christ, but then die. The real question is not whether you are once saved, always saved, or not, but whether or not you have a true heart for God to the extent you really do love the things of God instead of the things of the world. Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. However, Abraham also obeyed God for the rest of his life, and therefore he obtained the promises then, and not while he was yet alive on this earth, as we read in Hebrews 6:15.

Each person can have that assurance of salvation in their heart. Those who only assume they have eternal life, but don't, are those who place little value on living the life of Christ. They like part of God's word, but not all of God's word. These people will live for Jesus as long as they only have to be obedient to some of the word, but will quit if they are pressed to actually come out from among the wicked of the world and be separate. And, let me suggest something to you

here. If the final promise of eternal life was obtained by every initial acceptance of the word of God, then there would be no need for the additional promise of Revelation 3:5, for those who overcome. Revelation 3:5 tells us that those who overcome will not have their name blotted out of the Book of Life. But those who do not overcome will have their name blotted out. Now, you may see this differently than I do, but personally, I feel that a name cannot be blotted out of the Book of Life if it had never been written there in the first place. And if it had been written there in the first place, then it could only have been written there if that person had actually had a true salvation experience. I do not believe a false claim to Christianity would be sufficient reason for God to have your name written in the Book of Life.

In the end, the real doctrinal message of Christ is that if you except him with your whole heart, and pray and seek him, and apply the word to your life, then he will certainly keep you, and no man, even Satan, will be able to pluck you out of his hand. This promise is our assurance of eternal life with Jesus Christ. But, the obtaining of the promise, just like for Abraham, is after we endure. For those who truly love Jesus with a true heart, it's a done deal from the very start. For those whose hearts are only partially toward him, it's like a person who buys a car on time, but after awhile stops making the payments. As the car can be lost this way, so can the person be lost when they stop making the payments.

When you buy a car on time, it is your car, no doubt about it. But when you are no longer making the payments, it will not be your for very long. Most people don't stop making the payments, and the thought of the car being taken away from them some day doesn't even enter their mind. It is only those who don't have the best intent of making those payments who stand the greatest chance of losing the car. And when it happens, they will probably just shrug it off and go on their merry way, and never change their manner of living. It's the same for permanent Christians and temporary Christians. God's promises are yea and amen. But he never forces men to serve him. God allows us to break the contract any time we wish. However, if we want the contract to continue forever, he will never let anyone else break it. It is ours for the taking. Even though the covenant of God is offered to everyone, God only enforces it when we want it. Otherwise, we would no longer have the power of choice.

I guess the real problem with a "once saved, always saved," statement is that people will interpret the statement from their own viewpoint and their own definitions. That's why it is so important to speak what we believe explicitly instead of speaking a form of Biblical shorthand. Biblical shorthand might be defined as using a single word or short phrase in referring to a point of doctrine or spiritual concept instead of explaining fully. This Biblical shorthand language pattern is used by all of us to one extent or another. But, when we use verbal shorthand, others don't get the complete picture, and misunderstandings occur. Because of this, God has taught me over the years to be very wordy. I tend to spell things out with detailed explanation rather than just saying a clipped sentence. That way, people don't get the wrong impression; at least not as easily. It takes a lot of effort to spell things out plainly, but it does away with a lot of confusion. And when it comes to the word of God, confusion is the last thing we want.

There are many doctrines in Christianity today which are stated in condensed form. Usually this is not advantageous, and usually it creates confusion. I still find myself using some of these condensed doctrinal statements every once in a while. But, it is a good idea to say things in depth whenever you can. No, not every situation allows it, either because of time consideration or because the attention span of the listener may be short. However, when a condensed doctrinal statement like, "Once saved, always saved," is used over and over, even when there is adequate time to explain the doctrine more thoroughly, it begins to take on a meaning of its own, rather than representing clearly what the Bible is really saying about it. Quick statements, used repeatedly, do not bring understanding. And, this really destroys Christian communication.

I guess the bottom line for me, concerning whether we are, "Once saved, always saved," is that the question is actually moot; meaning that it isn't really a question that, if answered, would mean anything. The real question is not whether we are, "Once saved, always saved," but whether or not we have accepted Jesus Christ as LORD. The word Lord means master. If Jesus is your Lord, than you have made him your master. If he is your master, than you delight in serving him. If you haven't made Jesus Christ your Lord, then you haven't received a promise of eternal life with him. And, if this is so, then no matter whether you make a half hearted attempt at being a Christian, or just plain reject Jesus openly, you're still going to go to hell. Hebrews 5:9 points to this by telling us that Jesus is the author of eternal salvation only for those who obey him.

The question as to whether or not a person is truly in line for eternal salvation should not be answered with a one liner statement of, "Once saved, always saved." A more realistic approach would be to explain that salvation requires a true belief in God, and in Jesus Christ as the Son of God who died for all those who will believe in him. And, just as father Abraham endured until the end, we also will have to endure until such time as we die or Christ returns for us. At that time, those who have patiently endured will receive that which is promised, and that promise is assured by the word of God. For as it says in Hebrews 3:5, "the Lord will never leave you nor forsake you." If your heart truly accepts the word of God, then you have the promise of eternal life. And if you really do love the Lord with all your heart, all your soul, and with all your strength, than he, Jesus Christ, will never leave you nor forsake you, and no one will be able to take you away from him. If you truly make him your's, then he will truly make you his.