

Saved for Sure

Introduction

Salvation is the most important matter for everyone living on the planet. With the way some conduct their lives, you would not know this at all. The reality is we will continue after death, but what will the quality of our lives be? Will we live with God on the side of blessing? Or, will we live on the side of judgment? Many have left these questions to wishful thinking. They do not know for sure, but they certainly hope the outcome will be positive. They are hoping for the benefit of the doubt, they believe the odds are in their favor. However, they really do not know what God is going to do with them when this life is over.

This uncertainty does not cause peace in the soul, but restlessness. We should not have a feeling of uncertainty and restlessness unless there is good reason for it. That reason should only be that we are still lost. God will not rest if we are still in need of salvation. We should not rest until we have been saved by grace. Once saved, we should not have a feeling that we are still in danger of eternal judgment. If we still feel we can be in danger of judgment, maybe we did not understand or believe the gospel. There is great evidence in the scriptures to demonstrate that once a person is saved, they are saved from judgment forever, *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus”* (Rom 8:1). Many go back and forth over the issue of eternal security, but there can never be condemnation for those in Christ for this scripture to remain true. Now, we do not make this statement true, it is true. The power for this scripture being true is not our power, but God’s.

Some feel there are exceptions to eternal security. They feel that the scriptures do speak of examples where one was saved, and can still be in danger of being lost. In my opinion, this feeling first comes from a sense of human reasoning. To them, eternal security doesn’t make good sense. It violates their sense of justice. These suspicions are not overcome easily. This is where the controversy lies. If there is a bias when approaching this issue, we are not prepared to hear from God. This is unfortunate because only God can settle this controversy. Only God can tell us if His salvation is, or is not secure. This issue will not be resolved on the shifting sands of human reason and logic, but God’s own testimony. Once we hear God’s testimony from the word, we must be prepared to abandon our thoughts and adopt His. This demonstrates true humility. Whatever position you hold, it must stand the test of scripture. We must submit our positions to God for His review.

My testimony is that I have examined the evidence and not found one passage of scripture where the believer once saved, can be lost, or is in danger of being lost. I’m sure you may disagree with my findings if you are on the other side. You may be thinking of scriptures that you know which speak of backsliding or some warning of judgment. If there are scriptures leading those rejecting security into that position, then it is certainly valid. We must be persuaded by the scriptures. Although, I do not believe the scriptures teach insecurity of the believer. I must admit, at one time I thought certain passages did teach insecurity. As I moved away from my biases and really examined the passages, I found the evidence for eternal security overwhelming.

Learn to Contend Fairly

Sometimes when fighting for a position, the truth is left behind. I have seen this on both sides. Those who believe in eternal security (once saved always saved) resort to fighting by refusing to look at the passages which may appear to deny security and give explanations which fail to satisfy the context. In the attempt to harmonize the scriptures with their view, they make assumptions which cannot be supported by the context. Their fighting is in ignorance and fear. There is ignorance because they have not taken the time to look at the passages and they fight because they are afraid of what they do not know. Fear, because they strive so hard to harmonize their position that they do not want anything to upset their apple cart. They are afraid to be wrong, or on the wrong side of this issue. They are victims of the same thing they accuse the other side of, using the word to find words they like. When confronted with a difficult passage (a difficult passage is one that does not seem to agree with eternal security), they shuffle their feet and will accept any interpretation which is possible. This looks awfully fishy to the other side.

Those against eternal security have similar issues. There are some differences which should be noted. I truly do not believe those rejecting eternal security know what they are rejecting. I have had many conversations with those on the other side and I really do not think eternal security is understood. One thing to remember, since salvation is by grace, eternal security is of necessity by grace. If grace is not understood, eternal security will not be the only thing not understood, salvation will not be understood. Those rejecting eternal security may find that they are fighting the very doctrines of salvation. For instance, if you think you can lose a salvation which is “*not of works*”, “*by grace*”, “*not of yourselves*” and, “*a free gift*”, on what grounds would you maintain this without violating these passages? Whatever salvation is, it is all of those things, in the beginning and in the end.

A Matter of Salvation

Eternal security is a matter of salvation. In essence, if you are questioning a person’s ultimate salvation, it is a matter of salvation. While we are here on earth and thinking about the issue of eternal security, we may talk about whether or not that person who is saved may stay saved, and where the scriptures speak of this, but it is still an issue of salvation. In the end, after human history is over, there will only be two camps of people: those who are saved and those who are lost. The only question that would have been important is whether or not you were saved or lost in time. If salvation is by grace, not of works and a free gift, it will be this way for all who have rejected or accepted it. None will have earned it in any way. In the end, salvation will be just what the scriptures declare, free to whoever will receive it. When someone questions eternal security, they are really questioning salvation by grace. Think about it, if someone is saved and has fallen out of salvation and are again in a lost state, what works or obedience will they need to be saved again? Notice, it is still a matter of salvation.

For this reason, I will attempt to answer some of the objections which have caused uneasiness for some when approaching this question. The passages can be grouped in many categories, which can save us time. Once key passages are understood, you should begin to see a pattern for similar passages. I will not attempt to answer every objection a pessimistic mind can imagine. I am attempting to provide some answers which the Lord has provided me and given me confidence in His so Great Salvation. The answers will be broken down into the categories which they belong.

Eternal Salvation vs. Physical Deliverance

But he who endures to the end shall be saved (Mat 24:13).

And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved (Mat 10:22).

And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved (Mar 13:13).

Many will say these passages demonstrate that salvation must be maintained to the end before one can truly say they have it. First, these verses do not refer to eternal salvation at all, but physical deliverance. The context must be examined to show which is in view. The word saved in Greek is “sodzo” and has various meanings, two of which are eternal salvation and physical deliverance. I believe a study of the context above will demonstrate these passages above refer to the Lord Jesus Christ physically coming out of heaven to deliver these waiting believers. They are already eternally saved; and now they are being saved from their enemies. The trouble they are in is called “tribulation.” The Lord will rescue them as promised in Mat 24:13:

Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken (Mat 24:29).

Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Mat 24:30).

And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (Mat 24:31).

An important note to consider

If it is true that we must endure to the end to have eternal salvation, this would destroy the nature of salvation by grace. Some do not care about the nature of salvation by grace, but it is the only way anyone can be saved. We cannot have a salvation by grace on the one hand, and have someone enduring to the end to be saved on the other. This would be a glaring contradiction. Now, we don't resolve contradictions by twisting the meaning of passages, we arrive at the meaning from the context. Words may be used in many ways, but their use and meaning will *always* depend on the context. A simple example of this would be if someone took the phrase, “I almost died and went to heaven...” One might assume from the words that I may have had a near death experience, which is very sobering. If we read more of the context, “I almost died and went to heaven when I tasted the gourmet chocolate”. One should not assume I had a near death experience now because the context bears this out. This analogy is simple for sure, but you will see the same thing in scripture. Some have not considered the context and search the bible for phrases or words they think will support their position. They do not consider the context at all, and build a case for their own ideas and opinions by clinging to these verses and phrases which seem

to support their position. Our goal should be to get to the truth and discover just what the biblical writer wrote, and ultimately what God is teaching through that writer. We must go wherever God leads, even if it contradicts supposed truths we hold.

Gift vs. Reward Passages

But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified (1Co 9:27).

Many have viewed this passage from the standpoint of salvation. Since this position is taken, the Apostle is made to discipline his body so that he would not be disqualified for salvation. It is clear from the passage that Paul is concerned about losing something, but that is not salvation, but rewards. Without living a disciplined life, Paul was in danger of losing out on fantastic rewards! This cannot be salvation, since salvation is not of works, not of yourselves, not by works done in righteousness, a free gift given in grace (Eph 2:8, 9; Rom 6:23; Titus 3:5). The only way salvation can be lost is by rejecting God's offer. The context here is that of winning the prize (reward for service).

It is very telling that Paul is speaking of service and his rigorous determination to serve God by preaching the gospel. He makes this statement in 1Co 9:18 *"What is my reward then?..."* Paul further identifies the goal, *"And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown"* (1Co 9:25). Recall that salvation is a free gift, not earned or deserved. Rewards will be given or forfeited based on service. God does know the difference between a reward and a gift; even though some do not believe he does (See Rom 4:4, 5). The apostle John warns, *"Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward"* (2John8). Again, salvation is not a reward, and cannot be gained or lost by works or lack of them. There is a prize for the believer in Christ, but that prize is not salvation. For those who do not see this distinction, they will continue to pursue a salvation which is by their efforts.

A person presenting this verse to support a view where salvation can be lost is in danger of not understanding salvation by grace. This is the same issue Paul dealt with regarding the Jews, *"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God"* (Rom 10:3). If a person does not know the way of salvation, they will distort salvation into a system of works. Not only is the person missing the point of the passage, they may not understand salvation in the first place and may not be saved at all. If a person presents this verse in support of losing salvation, we have an obligation to share with them the way of salvation, which is by grace.

The Colossian Passage

And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister (Col 1:21-23).

The implication in this verse concerns the phrase that God will present you “*holy, and blameless...if indeed you continue in the faith...*” The assumption is this verse seems to be saying that if you do not continue in the faith, you will be lost. Thus salvation is conditioned upon our steadfastness, our not being moved away from the hope of the gospel. If we come to this conclusion, we would not simply be talking about eternal security, but salvation too. This would destroy salvation by grace, which is “*not of yourselves*”. Whatever Paul is referring to here, it does have to do with something we do. We must admit it does seem to imply salvation is conditioned on our continuing in the faith, not simply believing.

In answer to this idea that salvation is by our performance, it would stand in contradiction to many other salvation passages which condition salvation on simply believing in Jesus Christ. I submit that this is not a salvation passage at all. In order to make this a salvation passage, some assumptions had to be made. 1. That being presented holy and blameless is in heaven. 2. That the conditional “if” conditions salvation on our works. 3. That the person who does not persist in the things listed in the passage will not be saved, but will again be lost.

First assumption, the verse does not refer to heaven where we will receive our resurrection bodies. I admit that the language seems to speak of heaven, but we must allow Paul to use words according to his meaning and not ours. Here is a good example of Paul’s use of such words:

...that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world (Php 2:15).

Notice, Paul uses the same language and the meaning is clearly not heaven in a resurrection body. Paul is referring to here and now, in this “*crooked and perverse generation.*”

Second assumption, is making salvation conditional based on our works. The subject is not salvation at all, but it is how those already saved should conduct themselves in this world. Paul notes that they are reconciled to God already, “*And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled*” (Col 1:21). We should notice where they were before being reconciled, alienated and enemies. Now that they are saved, God’s plan for them is to be holy and blameless before Him, in the world. Paul is saying these believers should grow up spiritually and in this way they will have an impact in this wicked world. They were a part of this evil system, but God saved them. Now, they are encouraged to go forward and allow God to walk in them here and now. This is a call to experiential sanctification, not salvation. Again, we must be reminded that salvation is never conditioned on our works, efforts, goodness or obedience, but is by grace, not by works done in righteousness, not of yourselves, and not of works.

Third assumption is the person who does not persist in the things mentioned in the passage will not be saved. This assumption is nowhere in the passage, it is simply assumed. The consequences for not continuing in the faith would be that Paul would not be able to present those believers as mature, witnesses for Christ in this world. It would be that these believers would remain children, “*tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting*” (Eph 4:14). Furthermore, to “*continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel*” does not mean to keep believing in Christ and thus keep yourself saved. The word faith here does not mean simply to believe in Christ. It means to continue to progress in the knowledge given to body of Christ (2Pet 3:18). It is to progress from the milk of the word

to solid food. It is to grow up in your salvation and take your place in the battle as a mature believer here on earth.

Again, instead of looking at this passage as a means to salvation which is a free gift, we can see that the beauty of the exhortation is lost because of false assumptions. For those who do grow up and shine as lights in this world, there are great rewards. Many who do not see the distinction of rewards and gifts trivialize rewards as though they are really nothing. However, rewards are not mentioned here in this passage. God is the one who benefits from believers growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord. He will have witnesses in this crooked and depraved world. God has placed something before us which is fantastic, and some don't see it and never pursue it. This is the hope of the gospel, that we would understand our true position and begin to "*walk worthy of the calling with which you were called*" (Eph 4:1b). The hope of the gospel is the reason why we are saved (Rom 8:24).

Unbeliever? Believer?

For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A DOG RETURNS TO HIS OWN VOMIT," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire" (2Pe 2:20-22).

The Assumptions

First, this passage is touted as one which demonstrates that a person who is saved, a Christian, and then, they turn away and are lost. The language seems to support their assumptions, especially the phrase, "they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ", which seems to imply they are believers. Also the phrase, "*For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness*". For many, this settles it, they were believers and they turned away from God to the world and were "*entangled in them and overcome*", they are certainly lost. Certainly if these assumptions prove to be true, then we have a contradiction in the word of God. Salvation cannot be by grace, not of works and then made to depend on works. Let us take a closer look at these verses, phrase by phrase.

For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

Who are "*they*" in this passage? This is an important question and the whole context will depend on how this question is answered. We have to look back in the context to see. The Apostle Peter begins a new thought in chapter 2, which goes throughout the entire chapter. The first verse sets the tone of just who is in view.

"But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction" (2Pet 2:1).

In looking at this verse, these false teachers and prophets are “*among the people*”, of God. These same ones are the subject throughout the chapter. Peter is warning of their destructive ways. How did they gain positions of leadership in the church? They are wolves in sheep’s clothing. In order for them to gain respect in the Church they must have had to mask their conduct. From verse one then, there is a clear distinction between these people and the people of God.

By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber (2Pe 2:3).

...and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you (2Pe 2:13).

In reading about them in the chapter, it appears they really did not escape the pollutions of the world. They may have escaped the corruptions outwardly, but internally they were not changed. They know about Jesus Christ and the standards of the Church, but they are playing a role of deception. This deception and these false teachers were also spoken of by Jude and the Apostle John. The key for us to note is that the very first verse of second Peter chapter two says they deny the Lord who bought them. Now this doesn’t mean they are saved, it means they are lost. The Lord Jesus Christ was judged for all sins, including theirs and has earned the right to be their savior, but they refuse to believe in him. Just as Paul said to Timothy of Christ “*who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe*” (1Tim 4:10b). Jude says the same thing about these unbelievers.

For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ (Jud 1:4).

Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also (1Jn 2:22-23).

The character of these deceiving unbelievers is certainly known in scripture. God is giving us ample warning to avoid this deception. We must remember that words used are bound by the context. Peter is free to use any word or analogy he feels fits the situation. As to their identity, it is clear they deny the Lord Jesus Christ, therefore we must assign them the place of the unbelieving. Let us go forward and allow Peter to develop his thought.

they are again entangled in them and overcome

If they associate with God’s people and they do not become believers, they will eventually show themselves for what they truly are, unbelievers. What is on the inside will eventually work its way out and they will be seen for what they really are. Their associations with believers can be positive if they do become believers. Throughout the chapter, Peter reveals their true character. They had opportunity to see Christians close up and personal, but they cannot keep their charade of deception going. Eventually they will show their hand. They are wolves in sheep’s clothing and it is Peter’s shepherding care in warning his flock.

the latter end is worse for them than the beginning

It is worse for them because the Holy Spirit has been working to bring them to faith in Christ, and they have resisted His promptings. Now, they are overcome by their behavior which is in what was really in their hearts. Their objective was to deceive God's people, but the hope was that while associating with the people of God, they would be confronted with God. By turning their backs on God's mercy and grace, they are again consumed by their lusts and destructive ways. The situation reminds me of the angel Lucifer. He looked into the face of God and turned away. To reject God is to reject life itself. They associated with the people of God, cleaned up their outward behavior but did not come away saved. It is worse for them because God is going to deal with them harshly. They are attacking the Church and God will not sit by and let them destroy the faith of believers. From the very first verse, God says they will "*bring on themselves swift destruction*" (2Pet2:1b). How can it be worse? Jesus says, "*If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains*" (John 9:41).

For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them

They knew the *way* of righteousness, associated with the people of God even though there was a false motive. They were so close to the way of true righteousness, and yet so far. They turned away from that "holy commandment delivered to them". What commandment is so important that it would have made such a drastic difference for them? There is only one command which can change someone so drastically; it is the command to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Obviously they have obeyed some commands outwardly, but refused to believe in Christ. Nothing anyone could ever do can cause a change in their nature, except believing in the Savior. That is why we are all commanded by God to believe in Jesus Christ, for this is the only way anyone can be saved. These unbelievers have not obeyed this command; they know it but have not obeyed it. They come right to the point of faith; they know the true issues of the gospel but refuse to believe. They know the *way* of righteousness, but they were not righteousness themselves. If they know the only way which leads to life and turn away from it, spurn it, resist and reject it, they will certainly face judgment. They know the way, but continue to lead God's people astray, for this God will deal with them sternly. They were given opportunity to believe, but they refused and turned away from the only way of salvation.

But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A DOG RETURNS TO HIS OWN VOMIT," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire (2Pe 2:20-22).

God is not impressed with or surprised that a dog has repudiated some evil behavior and then adopted it again; or that a sow (pig) was washed (moral reform) and returns to the mud again. The dog is still a dog, and the pig is still a pig. The fact is that God is not pleased with a repudiating dog or a washed pig. It never says that the lamb or the sheep became a dog or pig, but, the dog and pig did profess to being a lamb, and identified themselves with the people of God. Jesus did not tell Peter to feed his dogs, or his pigs, no! But he was commanded to feed his sheep and his lambs (John 21:15-17). God has a plan for His children to be obedient, but the first thing is for them to become his children (John 1:13). God changes them from dogs to lambs. God does it for them, not their attempts at moral reform or cleaning up their lives, or their ceasing from some sins. They are given a new nature, which is created after true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24). Once saved, they can begin the process of growing in grace and knowledge of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

God never uses terms for believers in the bible such as dogs and pigs. These are negative terms throughout the scriptures, “*Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision*” (Php 3:2); “*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 22:15). Believers are called, beloved, sons, saints, dearly loved ones, believers, sheep and lambs. I think everyone can see that the Corinthians had some behavioral issues. Even though Paul admonished them for behaving like unbelievers, he did say of them, “*And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God*” (1Co 6:11). Here you do not find superficial outward cleansing, but cleansing by the work of God the Holy Spirit.

One final thought, if Peter gives these two analogies, they must match what he is trying to say or else why would he give them? If I am teaching a principle, giving examples may help others understand the principle. In fact, some may not understand the principle until they hear an analogy; only then the lights come on. Understanding the principle is what is most important. The principle is that we must be diligent to contend for the faith. Paul warned the Church that after his departure, “*savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock*” (Acts 20:29b). Satan will seek to attack the church from the outside, which is no surprise at all. However, he will also attack the church by placing those under his control in positions of influence in the church!

And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works (2Co 11:14-15).

Hebrews Passages

There are a few passages which some will say demonstrate that after one has experienced salvation, that salvation can be forfeited. We cannot discard the foundation of grace. If salvation is by grace, then God must be consistent, or it is not by grace. Again, there are no contradictions in the word, but there may be in our understanding. Let us approach these verses with the attitude to discover what the writer actually meant.

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. (Heb 10:26-27)

This verse is often used to undermine salvation by grace. Why someone would want to undermine salvation by grace is hard to understand, but this verse is large in their mind. We need to take a look at it more closely. Many questions have been raised about who is addressed here. The context answers for us, they are believers. We cannot assume anything else since the context is only addressing believers. Deliberate or willful sinning after receiving the knowledge of the truth is something that can only be done by a believer. The word Knowledge is "EPIGNOSIS" in Greek, and means a deep knowledge, not just a surface knowledge. Not only that, the previous verse exhorts “*not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some...*” (Heb 10:25a). Not only that, but the writer includes himself by saying, “*if we deliberately keep on sinning...*” Looking further into the context will only yield more evidence that believers are in view.

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth,

First let us see if we can determine what this knowledge of the truth is, then we will see how deliberate sinning fits into the context. What is the truth here? What is this deep knowledge of the truth we received? We must of course take a look at the context to determine what the writer has in mind.

He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy (Heb 10:9-14).

These believers know this to be the truth. They have believed in Christ and fully understand and professed openly that Jesus is the Christ, the Lamb of God. We cannot decide from these verses alone what the writer refers to; we must let the writer's own words weigh heavily on our interpretation.

no sacrifice for sins is left

This next phrase is very important in determining what is being spoken of here. We know that Jesus Christ was judged for the sins of the entire world, EVERY Sin, "*He is the atoning sacrifice (propitiation, satisfaction) for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world*" (1John 2:2). "*who gave himself a ransom for all men*" (1Tim. 2: 6). "*... that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe*" (1Tim 4:10). "*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men*" (Titus 2:11). Also note John 1:29; Heb 2:9; 2Pet 2:1; 2Cor. 5:14, 15. I should not have to remind anyone how important this fact is, but many seem to forget this is the truth. Our salvation rests on the work of Christ. We cannot be saved without believing in Christ which includes an understanding of the work He accomplished on our behalf.

Therefore, we must conclude that all sins were judged in Christ. If they kept willfully sinning, this is not a reference to personal sins because they are all covered under the atonement by Christ. From the testimony of scripture, there is indeed a sacrifice for personal sins. No sacrifice for sins is left means that for this sin, there is no provision remaining. This implies there was at one time sacrifice for sins, but no longer. There is only one thing this could be, it is a reference to these Hebrews, being tempted to go back to the Old Covenant with its rituals and services. That is the only thing this could possibly mean. The only place there remains no sacrifice for sins is under the Old covenant. There once was atonement in those sacrifices, even though God was really not propitiated by them "*For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins*" (Heb 10:4). For the blood of bulls and goats was not God's answer to sin, but only pointed toward the ultimate sacrifice of our Lord.

After knowing this truth, that God "*set aside the first to establish the second*", and that "*The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless, for the law made nothing perfect, and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God*" (Heb 7:18, 19). The willful sin here is that of going back to the synagogue, renouncing their profession and seeking God's favor under the temple services. There is nothing left there, no atonement and no forgiveness of sin. God has settled this matter once for all in Christ. These Jewish Christians know this, but then, why would they go back to the first covenant

when they know what the truth is? They would be caving into the pressure put on them by the Jews, please note:

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions" (Heb 10:32-34).

They were being persecuted for their profession and identification with Jesus Christ. Here in America, we cannot identify with this kind of pressure. In this country, when someone professes Christ they are applauded. These Jewish believers did not have that luxury. They were shunned and shut out from their families and synagogues; they were publicly ridiculed and disgraced openly. They lost their jobs and their property. All this was done to get them to renounce their resolve that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and LORD. The pressure was on, they were turning the screws, emotionally, socially, religiously and economically. This pressure started early, even when our Lord was on earth. Notice this statement by the apostle John, "*His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue*" (John 9:22). We can see pressure applied even when the Lord was still on the earth. Well then, if they sin willfully after knowing the truth, there is nothing left, nothing to go back to and they know it, so what is left?

"but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God." Heb 10:27

A fearful expectation of judgment is the only thing that can be gained by going back to the Old Covenant. They know they are wrong, and they expect God to judge them. Somehow, they are more fearful of man than God. The Jews who rejected Christ and had Him crucified were under a special judgment by God already (Acts 2:40). Identifying with them would only be disastrous for the believer in Christ. God will be certainly displeased with them, and He will let them know about it. Fire is used in scripture to represent judgment. We should note, not every reference to fire in the bible is not referring to the lake of fire. We should understand that fire clearly represents judgment by God, not always ultimate judgment in the lake of fire, note the following verses...

The third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God (Zec 13:9).

But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap (Mal 3:2).

If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned (John 15:6).

They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them (Act 2:3).

On the contrary: If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head (Rom 12:20).

His work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work (1Cor 3:13).

If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames (1Cor 3:15).

We must allow our foundation to guide our thinking here so that we do not come to wrong conclusions. The unbeliever will most certainly be judged in the lake of fire, the scriptures are clear about that. However, the believer is saved eternally "*and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life*" (John 3:18; 5:24; Rom. 8:1). But certainly there is a sense where believers are in fact judged in time and the scriptures are clear about that also. We must conclude that based on the passages that the judgment of the believer is not and cannot be the judgment of the lake of fire, which is reserved for the Devil and his angels and those who reject Christ (Matt 25:41; John 3:36). What happens then, when believers are judged? Can they be returned to a condemned state and suffer the second death in the lake of fire? Please read the next verses carefully.

That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world (1Co 11:30-32).

The answer to what happens when believers are judged, "we are being disciplined". That discipline can come in three ways, for the scripture declares, "*many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep*". Notice each stage of discipline seems to be more severe until you get to "fallen asleep". Sleep here refers to physical death. This is not to say God is just warning us with physical death, He has already administered it to some already! Now, if some in the body of Christ must undergo this severe judgment, many might get the idea that God has cast them off and assigned them a place with the unbeliever- not so! As the verse continues, "***we will not be condemned with the world***".

Judgment for the believer is divine discipline in time. The words fearful and fiery represent the severity of this temporal judgment. Jesus predicted this judgment when he walked the earth especially for those who rejected Him. "*He will destroy those wicked men miserably*" (Matt 21:41) and also, "*He will come and destroy those vine-dressers and give the vineyard to others*" (Luke 20:16). The writer of Hebrews is surely not warning them concerning their salvation, but not to be identified with those who are the enemies of God, thus bringing upon themselves the same temporal judgment they would receive. However, they are saved eternally and they belong to God, either way their salvation is not in question.

Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people. "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Heb 10:28-31

The key points here are that under the Law of Moses they experienced capital punishment which resulted in physical death. Under the testimony of witnesses, many were executed under the Mosaic Law. God is warning of severe consequences to those who go back to the externals of Judaism. Notice it says that they

trample the blood of the covenant which *"sanctified him."* It is true of these believers that they were contemplating a horrible thing, but surely, *"they have been made holy through the body of Jesus Christ once for all"* (Heb 10:10). And *"because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy"* (Heb 10:14). They are eternally secure and that is not in question. Also note it says that the *"Lord will judge his people."* We are also reminded to *"Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons."* (Heb 12:7, 8). We belong to God, He owns us and will not throw us away when we slip and fall. He is a loving Father and will not spoil us by withholding discipline, He will discipline us. Certainly we don't want to be on the side of the punitive discipline, but we want to be suffering for blessing. Some have said to me, "Oh is that all that is going to happen to them, a slap on the wrist?" Well God warns us against this attitude, *"...My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline..."* (Heb 12:5).

So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.

You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him. "But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved. Heb 10:35-39

Here is another key to understanding this passage. What is at stake here? They are admonished not to throw away their confidence as worthless, because they will be *richly rewarded*. All they need to do is persevere, have patience and God will deliver them soon. Rewards are at stake not salvation! Only saved people are even qualified to get rewarded. Salvation is a free gift and is never said to be a reward anywhere in the Bible. However, rewards require faithfulness, perseverance and determination. To shrink back is to forsake the assembling of themselves together and go back to the externals of Judaism. For this they would receive the harshest and severest punishment---physical death with those who crucified the Lord (Acts 2:40). The writer expects that they will continue to believe. This is not reference to believing in Christ, which they already have done. It is a reference to believing in the word of encouragement, that is, depending on God for the preservation of the soul, or physical deliverance from this state of temptation. Again rewards are at stake on the one hand, and divine discipline is on the other. God is not looking for them to go backwards, but forward. *"Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward"* (2John8).

Moving on to Maturity in Hebrews 6

Let us move to another passage in Hebrews which also has a message for us to consider.

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace (Heb 6:4-6).

This passage is regarded as a “difficult text” by many because of the controversy surrounding it and all the different interpretations rendered. Those on the side of eternal security are demanding that it does not contradict the doctrine, but are even themselves not united on its exact meaning. In their attempt to say what they believe the passage cannot mean, they ignore, twist and even deny the very words of the text. This looks awfully fishy to the other camp and in most cases their interpretation is easily brushed aside because of the simple reason of bias. Of course those who do not believe in eternal security are united in saying that it means that a believer can certainly lose the gift of salvation once conferred by God. My reason for writing this is to settle (hopefully) a few important points that deal with the way we approach the text, aiding in coming to a correct interpretation.

Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so (Heb 6:1-3).

This passage starts with “*Therefore*” which would say that it is not the place to start. The writer is not starting an entirely new thought, but making some observations or conclusions based on something said previously. Also, perhaps if we go back some, it may help us determine just who the writer is addressing here.

Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek. We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil (Heb 5:8-14).

The subject of Chapter five dealt with the Priesthood of Jesus Christ in the order of Melchizedek. The writer has much more to tell them on the subject, but his audience was not ready to get into deeper things of God. He says they were “*slow to learn.*” He tells them they should have been teachers by this time, meaning that they have been saved for some time, but have not grown in grace. He chides them because they have not grown at a normal rate and because of that, they probably needed to go back to the basics (milk) all over again. Here we see the importance of growing in grace after salvation. The writer doesn't give any indication that they are unsaved, but that they were willfully immature Christians. He never questions their salvation, but deals with them as believers who do not have the proper perspective in mind. They need to be re-focused on the goal. What is the goal? Spiritual maturity! Mature Christians know how to “*walk even as he walked*” and are trained to discern “*good from evil.*”

Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so (Heb 6:1-3).

Therefore, meaning because of this, or for this reason, let us leave the elementary teaching and move on to maturity is the admonition. This is the subject of the discourse. The writer is stressing the importance of going forward in the Christian life, growing up and getting to maturity. God intends for us to grow up, not repeat spiritual childhood over and over. We are not to continue to stand on the foundation, but build the building of our spiritual life. God has expectations of us, of this we can be sure. That is what the point of this warning will center on. What is at stake here? Growing up in the Christian life, receiving rewards. As we saw from the study of Chapter 10, these Jewish Christians were under pressure to renounce their profession and identify themselves with Judaism. Doing this would be a terrible sin, which would be visited by severe divine discipline. However, their salvation is not in question. Therefore, we can go forward if God permits. In other words, it is possible we can forfeit these surpassing grace blessings. God did not permit the children of Israel to go into the promise land, even after they changed their minds and wanted to go.

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come (Heb 6:4, 5).

This verse begins with “*For it is impossible.*” What is impossible? We will try to answer that question later. Obviously it is addressed to the same believers who have experienced all these things relating to salvation. Without a doubt, this language is reserved for the saved. To deny this is reserved for the saved is to twist the passage from its context. In chapter 5, believers are in view, after this passage, believers are in view. The passage is properly addressed to believers. We need to know now what the writer considers impossible for these believers.

If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame (Heb 6:6).

It is impossible if they fall away. Fall away from what? Salvation? NO! That is not the subject. Maturing is the subject. Since the writer is encouraging them to “leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity,” and move forward in their growth “not laying again the foundation,” we would expect from the context that this is what they would be in danger of falling away from. So, then it is impossible if they fall away from the foundation, the very basics of the gospel. What is the foundation? “*Of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.*” Here is the foundation that if they fall from, it would be impossible for them to grow to maturity. This warning is to these believers at this time, but I believe there are applications we can make to it today. For these believers to fall away from the foundation is not normal apostasy, but they are confronted with going back to the old covenant.

Why would they fall from the foundation?

The book of Hebrews is addressed to Jews. We know that pressure was put on these believers to go back to the worship of the synagogue. The pressure was definitely severe:

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You

sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions (Heb 10:32-34).

The objective for these believers was to grow up, not fall back to something they knew was against everything they stood for and was irrelevant. They not only heard the gospel, professed Christ, but this truth was demonstrated to them, *“God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will”* (Heb 2:4).

There was no question that they had nowhere to go but forward. The persecution was real and they had to really trust God in order to live their lives. These believers were faced with the promise of gaining tremendous spiritual truths, and the possibility of losing out on those blessings and instead receiving severe discipline. God would deal harshly with them, for they were siding with the very generation that crucified Christ. To side with them would mean to receive the same temporal judgment. If they were to fall away from the foundation, they would never make it to maturity, in fact, God would make it impossible. God warns believers that they can go too far, even to the point of no return. He warns:

Do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways. So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest. See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God (Heb 3:8-12).

There can be a point of no return. Just like the situation where God wanted the Israelites to go forward into the Promised Land. When the spies came back, only Joshua and Caleb were sure they could take the land. The others refused to go forward, even though it was God who rescued them from Egypt, demonstrating great signs, wonders and miracles to show that He can handle any situation. They refused to walk with God and take the land by faith. Therefore, God said to them, *“They shall never enter my rest.”* Even though they changed their minds later, it was too late! After being delivered from Egypt, these believers continued to look back instead of going forward.

If we are to grow to maturity, we need to begin with the foundation. Reaching maturity, God will bless us tremendously. This is the stated goal of God for the believer. It is summed up here, *“This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth”* (1 Tim 2:3-4). Two important things are in this verse as God’s desire for man. First, God wants us to be saved. If we are not saved, we haven’t begun the journey. The first thing God does for us is to save us eternally. We cannot know truth or receive anything from God unless we are saved first. Second, God’s will is for us to come to a full knowledge of the truth. After salvation, God desires that we grow up in Christ, learning the mind of Christ. If we will submit to Him and allow Him to transform our minds from the state of darkness, then we can put on the mind of Christ *“until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ”* (Eph 4:13).

What if we don’t reach maturity? We may have fulfilled the desire of God in salvation, but the second, growing to maturity, we may fail. Salvation is one decision of faith and we are saved eternally (Acts 16:31). Growing to maturity requires many decisions of faith to allow God to use us, transform our

thinking from darkness into light. We must daily decide to follow God's will, plan and purpose for our lives. If we fail, we will not receive the rewards planned for us, we will never experience knowing God in the way He desires for us. If we fail to grow, we will be "*children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting*" (Eph 4:14b). We will be subject to divine discipline, which can be severe, even resulting in physical death. We will not be ambassadors, witnesses and lights in this dark world. We will never take our place in the battle and will remain children throughout our Christian experience (Heb 5:11-14).

Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned (Heb 6:7, 8).

Immediately after this so-called difficult passage, we have an analogy to drive home the point. This analogy is designed to help us understand there is blessing in moving forward to maturity. The land represents the believer in time. The land that drinks in the rain refers to the believer learning the word daily and growing up in their salvation. Producing a crop is the production, fruit produced in us by God. Notice the subject here is not salvation, but producing fruit, just as it is in John 15. Salvation is not by fruit bearing, it is a gift, received by faith in Christ. The blessing of God mentioned here is not salvation. Again, this is further confirmation of the subject of these verses, which is a warning of missing out on rewards. I realize some do not understand this concept, to them, salvation is the only blessing in their view. From these and other warnings, post salvation blessing must be great. God is admonishing us to go forward and receive what was promised us. God has made it clear, but some have not understood this blessing is available.

Land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless. This is the believer in time refusing to go forward in the spiritual life, choosing to be ignorant and immature. This believer produces also, however it is not divine fruit, but is works from the sinful nature, pictured here as sticker bushes. As a child I hated running into a sticker bush! God cannot use anything coming from our sinful natures. He could not use anything from our sinful nature when receiving salvation, and He certainly will not use it in our growing to maturity. What will happen to this production? It will be burned. The believer will not be burned, but the production will. The land remains, but does not receive blessing as the land which drinks in the rain. See also 1 Corinthians 3:12-15. In those verses, the believer has the foundation, but builds upon it. If what he has built does not survive, it is burned, but the believer is not lost, he has the foundation!

Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case—things that accompany salvation (Heb 6:9).

The writer is speaking in the way of warning, or stern admonition. Notice, he is confident of "*better things*" for these believers. Notice the better things are not salvation, but things that "*accompany salvation*". Things that go along with salvation are growing in grace and getting to maturity. God did not deliver the children of Israel out of Egypt to bring them to the desert. He delivered them to get into the Promised Land. The writer is confident that these believers will endure the hardship of the desert, and continue in faith to grow in grace to make it to the maturity where there will be great blessing. Since the subject is not salvation, we do not find admonition to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ or any language relating to salvation. We do find language of things have to do with saved people, growing, maturing, producing fruit, which only growing believers can do.

The Romans 11 Passage

In Romans eleven, there is a passage which has been brought to my attention. The language used seems to get the attention of some who believe salvation can be lost.

Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again (Rom 11:20-23).

The question has been raised, what is the meaning of being “cut off”? They will be cut off if “*they do not continue in His goodness.*” We have to determine what is being spoken of here, but if we must continue in His goodness, this seems to imply works are needed for salvation. Since salvation is by grace, not of yourselves, not of works, and not by works done in righteousness, this would contradict the nature of salvation. Let us begin with the understanding of the language used here.

The Olive Tree

We need to discuss just what exactly is this Olive Tree mentioned in Romans 11. The way I see the analogy of the Olive Tree is the visible people of God in the world. The root of the tree is Jesus Christ, who is holy. Israel is said to be the “*natural branches*”, which were broken off because of unbelief. They are the natural branches because of Jesus Christ, who came from Israel. Israel and the hope of believers of all previous ages were built on Christ and the promises that He would one day come. Prior to Israel, the Olive tree was those in the world who believed the promises of the coming Christ, from Adam to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Olive tree is always based on Jesus Christ, either as a promise or Him coming into the world. This is why the natural branches are broken off, “*they were broken off because of unbelief*” (Rom 11:20). You cannot be a part of the Olive tree if you do not believe in the Root. God’s plan changed as “*hardness*” came over Israel, and He turned to the Gentiles.

The Jews were natural branches because their entire culture was based on the coming of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Their scriptures, their promises, their covenants were all based on the Christ. Their holy days, their sanctuary itself and the sanctuary services were all based on Christ. The natural branches are those whose entire culture speaks of Christ. However, “*He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him*” (John 1:11). Therefore, they were broken off.

The Olive Tree is not Israel

When Israel was a nation under God, they were the Olive Tree. However, we cannot exclusively say that the Olive Tree is Israel. For instance, the Gentiles (*wild olive shoot*) are grafted into the Olive Tree. What are they grafted into? Israel? No. The Church is now the Olive Tree. Gentiles are not grafted into Israel at all. We are not under the law and certainly not living in a Jewish manor. Paul confronted Peter concerning this very thing, he told Peter, “*You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?*” (Gal 2:14). Paul also gives us

understanding that in Christ, *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”* (Gal 3:26, see also 1Cor 12:13; Col 3:11). The Church is not Israel and is not under the law at all. The Gentiles must not boast in their position just as the Israel should not have boasted in theirs. If the Gentiles fail to properly represent God in the world, they also can be broken off. Branches are broken off because of unbelief. The visible people in the world can be removed if they are not properly representing God in this world.

Repent/Reward

God always has his visible people in the world. If, through disobedience, they do not properly represent God in this world, God will warn and discipline them. God warned Israel many times in the Old Testament (see Deut 29), and God did administer His discipline to Israel. When God was ready to send His Christ into the world, He sent a herald in the person of John the Baptist. John called the nation to repentance in order that they might receive their Christ. In the same way, individual local Churches are now God’s visible witnesses in the world. However, God reserves the right to discipline as He sees fit. *“For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either”* (Rom 11:21). It is a fundamental role of the Christian Church to represent the Lord Jesus Christ in the world. In fact, the Church is said to be by analogy *“his body”*. Therefore, the warning is carried forward to the Church, the visible witness of God in the world. *“Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off”* (Rom 11:22). To represent the Lord is an awesome responsibility. Just as Israel failed at times, the Church would also find itself under the warning and discipline of God.

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lamp stand from its place (Revelation 2:4, 5).

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Rev 3:19, 20).

There is always great reward for this perseverance to stand for God in the devil’s world. We must keep in mind; we do not earn salvation by our performance. Salvation is a free gift, totally undeserved and given freely, no strings attached. Rewards must be earned, and not everyone will be rewarded. Take a look at the character of these verses which are rewards for enduring, persevering and faithfulness.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God (Rev 2:7).

Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life (Rev 2:10).

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it (Rev 2:17).

And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations— 'HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON; THEY SHALL BE DASHED TO PIECES LIKE THE POTTER'S VESSELS'— as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star (Rev 2:26-28).

He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels (Rev 3:5).

Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name (Rev 3:10-12).

Notice the language used in these passages. The first thing to note is that salvation by grace is not in view. Rewards, crowns, special privileges and blessing are in view for those who overcome, persevere, endure and are faithful on the battle field. Salvation is completely undeserved. By contrast, these rewards are well deserved. To represent our Creator and sustainer in this world is a privilege. We should remember we were lost and God saved us by His grace and has given us the opportunity to serve Him in this world. God has a high standard for those who are on the battlefield. We are called to stand for Christ, to walk even as he walked, to suffer with Christ, to endure hardship, to fight the good fight. The fact we are alive in this world and are saved means God has a purpose for our lives here. We should remember we live daily in enemy territory. The world hates us, and we are not to be surprised because it hated our Lord first. If we are like Him, we can expect the world will hate us too! There are other passages which speak of this same theme we have seen here, I will mention two.

Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you (John 15:2-7).

The subject here is not salvation, but fruit bearing. Salvation is not by fruit bearing, or production of works, it is by grace. Many will misconstrue the verses to apply to salvation, when the lives of saved Christians on the battlefield are in view. The branch, the believer's visible life in the world, can be fruitful, or it may wither. This is based on what we do after salvation. The withered, dried up branch will not receive blessing, but is only good for burning, or judgment. The believer is not burned, but his works will be judged. *"If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire"* (1Cor 3:15). If we were to make the assumption that salvation is dependent on us bearing fruit, this would be to say that salvation is by works. There is only one way of salvation, by grace, not of works. We must settle this matter at some point if we are going to be saved by grace.

What these verses do teach us is that as the branch, the fruit produced in us is not us. As branches, we allow God to use us in this world to produce His fruit. We are the branches, not the fruit. However, the branch must abide in the vine if it will produce fruit, “*for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose*” (Php 2:13). Every one of us who are saved will meet the Lord in judgment. “*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad*” (2Cor 5:10). What is due us? Certainly no one can say that God owes salvation to anyone. We can be rewarded for our cooperation in allowing God to use us in time. We can forfeit that reward if we do not cooperate with God in time. Only those who are saved and have grown in the word will be “*thoroughly equipped for every good work*” (2Tim 3:17).

Your name blotted out...

He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels (Rev 3:5).

This is another difficult text for some since the language of being blotted out raises many questions about security. Why is a believer, if secure, in danger of being blotted out? Whatever being blotted out means, it cannot be good. One odd thing here is that it is the one who “*overcomes*” who is not blotted out. If he overcomes, why is he granted something negative? He is “*clothed in white garments*”, which seem appropriate for the achievement, but why is he told his name will *not* be blotted out? Let us take a closer look.

Can a person be blotted out? Yes! From the context, it appears the believers there were given sufficient warning and if they continued in the path they were traveling, it appears they would have been blotted out. If they repented, changed their course, they could have the assurance they would *never* be blotted out. The question now becomes, what is being blotted out? Is this loss of salvation? I would say it is not, and I will take the time to explain. The term blotted out will always depend on the context as to the meaning. In fact, this is a hard and fast rule of interpretation that words are always bound by their context. Writers have the freedom to use any words they feel describe the point they are trying to make. As we will see, this term “book of life” has different meanings depending on the context. Let us take a look at all of the passages in the bible to discover the meaning of the term. We will draw conclusions from the passages as we go through them.

(Exo 32:32-35) But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written." The LORD replied to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you. However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin." And the LORD struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made.

In this verse we can see that the children of Israel were in danger of being blotted out of the book of life. Moses tried to intercede for them, but God said that everyone who sinned would be the ones to suffer the punishment. What does it mean to be blotted out of the book of life in this passage? It is being punished for their sin. That punishment is for God to end their lives with a plague. He would punish them with death for their rebellion, but do they lose their salvation, or their lives? It is their lives they lose because

they are not fit to represent God any longer in this world. From this passage, we can see these were the professed people of God, and they were definitely *in* the book of life. These believers are being disciplined with the ultimate discipline- death. God is not disciplining the others in the world who are worshipping false idols, but He is disciplining His professed people in the world.

(Psa 69:22-29) May the table set before them become a snare; may it become retribution and a trap. May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever. Pour out your wrath on them; let your fierce anger overtake them. May their place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in their tents. For they persecute those you wound and talk about the pain of those you hurt. Charge them with crime upon crime; do not let them share in your salvation. May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous. I am in pain and distress; may your salvation, O God, protect me.

In this Messianic psalm, we find the term book of life again. Those referred to in this verse are pictured as persecuting the Messiah. Paul quotes from verses 22 and 23 in Romans 11:9, 10 and relates it to unbelieving Israel. For their crime, David asks that their names be blotted out of the book of life. A key phrase is helpful at the end of the text, *“and not be listed with the righteous.”* So, removing them from the book of life would be equivalent to not listing them with the righteous. It appears that the book of life in these verses deal with the living, professed people of God committing horrible sins and God having to discipline them with death. I say the professed people of God since we have been dealing with Israel. We know that Christ *“came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him”* (John 1:11). For this, they would ultimately receive judgment from God in AD 70, when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans (Matt 24:2). We know they were not righteous because of their rejection of Christ, but being removed from the book of life is for them to be punished for their sin and they not listed among the righteous. It is clear that these unbeliever’s names were in the book of life, but it is only because they were the professed people of God.

(Php 4:3) Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

The apostle Paul gives us our next reference to the book of life. Paul is writing to the Philippians and helping to settle disputes among the believers. Paul commended this Church for their devotion and generosity. They also were fearless in standing with Paul even in the face of persecution. However, they were not free from trouble. There were signs of arrogance which needed to be met with humility (Phil 2), and also in our passage there is a disputing between two women. Paul mentions these women in a way which is clear these women are important to the Church. Paul assumes that whatever issues they have with one another can be resolved. He also notes that their names are written in the book of life. Why are their names in this book? Paul says they *“have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel”*. These were certainly the professed people of God in the world, willing to stand up for the cause of the gospel, willing to risk their lives in service to God. Certainly they are in the book of life. Paul does not say they were in any danger of their names being removed. They are not in the book because they are saved, but because they are the professed people of God, standing for truth and righteousness in this world.

(Rev 3:5) He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.

In our passage, we see that the Church of Sardis was one of the worst of the seven. The Lord was ready to come as a thief in judgment to this Church (Rev 3:3). Judgment here does not mean loss of salvation but discipline in time. Christ could remove their lamp stand, which would be to say they would represent Him in the world no longer. He could bring discipline upon them, even resulting in physical death. We know what extent God will discipline the believer and it will never result in condemnation or loss of salvation (1Cor 11:29-32; Rom 8:1). It appears their names must have been in the book of life and they were in danger of having them blotted out. It seems again this is related to judgment for the professed people of God. Not all in Sardis were behaving badly; some were representing the Lord properly (Rev 3:4).

(Rev 13:8) All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.

In this passage, we find something interesting. The names of some were *never* in the book of life. These in the world who worship the beast, their names are not in book and never were. Why are their names not in the book? Well, they are *not* the professed people of God; they are the professed *enemies* of God. From what we have seen, we see why their names are not, or have never been in the book of life. In this period which we call the tribulation, there is a fierce battle raging between God and his people on earth and Satan and his people on the earth. We know how the story ends, and we can clearly see the battle lines are drawn.

(Rev 17:8) The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come.

Again, we see the book of life mentioned with reference to those who are the enemies of God and their association to the beast. If their names have not been written in the book of life, they are professed enemies and do not qualify to have their names in the book. They are not in danger of being blotted out since they were never in. These last verses should dispel some of the theories floating around about the book of life. Some say that everyone's name starts out being in the book of life and they are blotted out if they do not believe in Jesus Christ. Some say the book contains everyone for whom Christ died, but the names are removed when they do not believe. However, these names were never there.

(Rev 20:12) And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.

Now we come to the last judgment. We find that books are opened, including the book of life. We must make a distinction between the use of the book of life here and in the rest of the bible so far. Why? Earlier we have seen that the book refers to the professed people of God. Here, human history is over and those who would be saved have already been saved and are in their resurrection bodies. It does not appear that anyone survives this judgment and they are all thrown into the lake of fire. For those who have believed in Christ, they do not stand a judgment to determine if they will be saved or lost because they are already saved. *"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life"* (John 5:24). Also, we read in Romans, *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"* (Rom 8:1).

The word translated “condemnation” is KRINO in the Greek. This word means judgment, and used in this context means unfavorable judgment or condemnation. Believers in Christ will not stand before a judgment to determine if they will be lost or saved. All of the people at this judgment are lost and going to the lake of fire.

(Rev 20:15) If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Here, I believe the use of the “book of life” must be understood from the context. As I mentioned earlier, the book of life does not refer to the professed people of God. Therefore, if there is a “book of life” mentioned in conjunction with the last judgment, that book must have something to do with salvation. I would conclude that the book refers to those who have been given new life in Christ. We find a repeated phrase, “*The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books*” (Rev 20:12b). Also, again we find another phrase, “*and each person was judged according to what he had done*” (Rev 20:13b). The dead are judged according to their works, and their works must be recorded in the other books. Once the works are judged, they are obviously found wanting and one other book is checked, the book of life. Their names are not found in this book, and they are thrown into the lake of fire. Let me take one more pass at this, they try to prevail in this judgment based on their own merit, but that fails against God’s perfect righteous standard. The book of life is checked, and their names not found in the book means that Christ’s perfect righteousness was rejected by them. There is no other appeal, and they by their rejection of Christ and dependence on their own works seals their fate in the lake of fire forever.

(Rev 21:27) Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

This last verse demonstrates the purity and holiness of the New Jerusalem. Nothing “*shameful or deceitful*” will ever enter into it. The use of the book of life here seems to agree in context with the use of it in the previous two in Revelation twenty. Those whose names are in the Lamb's book of life are those who have imputed the righteousness of Christ. They have the same righteous standard of the Lamb of God. Here those who are in the book of life are not the professed people of God who may or may not have this righteousness, but the actual people of God in the eternal state. What we find in these verses is a rule of interpretation. Words and phrases are bound by their context. We cannot take words or phrases and define them and make the scriptures bend to our definition. We must allow the context to dictate to us the message conveyed. Many have come to conclusions about the book of life based on a definition, without checking to see if the context supports their claims. I have been guilty of this myself and am grateful the word is good and “*useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*” (2Tim 3:16b).

In Conclusion

Are there more passages? Yes, I’m sure there may be more I have not directly addressed. My hope is someone will see an explanation of a passage they believed taught insecurity, and realize it does not. My hope is that someone will come closer to understanding this fantastic salvation by grace which is in the pages of scripture and in the heart of God. My hope is that someone will read the passages and realize the context for the first time. My hope is that someone will read this document and develop confidence in God to the point of placing the entire matter of their soul salvation in the Lord and Savior Jesus’ hands. I

believe the scriptures speak very clearly on this point. I believe God has spoken, for He has not left us to sort it out and come to the conclusion we like best. I cannot cover every passage on this subject and I will certainly add to this discourse any new questions I receive which are not sufficiently addressed. I offer my email address here (charislife@gmail.com), for anyone who may have questions or comments. I know I do not know everything and this is where you can bring your reasoning to light by dialoging with me. If after reading this discourse, you still feel salvation by grace can be lost, I want to hear from you. I want to reason from the scriptures with you. Perhaps you may bring out a point or angle I may have missed.

Salvation by grace with its security rests on some solid principles which *must* be understood. 1. Christ died for *all* our sins. God has a solution to the great problem of sin, it is the cross! These are facts which *must* be believed. Our believing these facts do not make them true, they are true because God imputed all of our sins to Jesus Christ and judged Him. Those sins will never come back to haunt us as we commit them in time. God is absolutely satisfied with the work of Christ in our behalf. 2. Salvation is by grace, completely free from works of any kind on our part. Christ performed all the work necessary to save us. We are saved, not because of our works, but by Christ's perfect works. We receive Christ's righteousness at salvation; we must remember it is Christ's, righteousness, not ours on which our salvation rests. Salvation is not about my performance, but it is all about Christ's performance. 3. We receive salvation by grace through faith. Faith requires that we look *away* from ourselves, not *to* ourselves. Saving faith completely trusts in the Savior to do all the saving. 4. Salvation by grace does not speak of the quality of spiritual life, but spiritual birth. Success in the spiritual life depends on many factors, and those who do grow up in this world spiritually will receive divine rewards. "*Because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free*" (Eph 6:8).

Do not be afraid to put this entire matter of your soul salvation in the hands of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He is worthy of your trust. Simply believe the promises, and after all if you do believe them, you have simply believed God. Is this risky? Yes, the stakes are high. The only risk is that you may not have done all that God requires of you for salvation. There is a gospel (good news) for you. I'm glad there is good news and God is pleased to offer salvation on His terms. While salvation is free to us, it costs God much. It also satisfies requirements of God which must be met in order for there to be reconciliation. In salvation by grace, God maintains his holiness. In salvation by grace, we must listen to God and his terms, not like Cain who brought what he wanted. Salvation by grace will give us peace with God; we will no longer thirst or hunger. Salvation by grace will give us true rest for our souls where there was only restlessness.

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen (Jud 1:24-25).

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