

ETERNAL SALVATION

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The Biblical Purpose for
Salvation

ETERNAL SALVATION

By David L. Miner

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ETERNAL SALVATION

This is ON THE SURFACE a review of the classic argument over what is known as Eternal Security, or the Perseverance of the Saints, *but it is so much more!* And it covers many other issues related to this topic. In addition, what I believe is a new perspective is presented, suggesting that both of the typical views are incomplete. A large amount of Scripture is presented here, with a careful scrutiny of these passages as to what they actually say before we launch into interpreting what they mean. This is contrary to the habit of many who reference a Scripture passage and then immediately launch into interpreting what it means before carefully examining what it says FIRST.

To establish what God is saying in any particular passage, it is essential to first SEE WHAT GOD IS SAYING before we establish what you or what I THINK IT MEANS.

This article is an attempt by the author to present the REAL issue, the argument behind the argument. This article is an attempt to present the theology of ETERNAL SALVATION as it is described and presented in Scripture.

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All Scripture is inspired, and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and for training in righteousness; see II Timothy. In pursuit of this, the author quotes extensively from the *New International Version* of the Bible. This is not an attempt to endorse one version over another, but an attempt to use a modern translation that is understandable to most people who speak English. Where the author deems it important, he also quotes from the *Authorized Version*, what many people call the *King James Version*. It is the author's contention that both versions are inspired by the Holy Spirit, and both versions say the same thing. It is also the author's contention that one version uses a dialect of English that is 400 years old, and is difficult for some people, especially those without any church background, to easily understand. In truth, it is often difficult for church people to understand, resulting in a number of doctrinal differences and unnecessary arguments among Christianity. Examples of some of these unnecessary doctrinal differences are included throughout this article.

In writing this article, I experienced an awesome work of God where he opened my eyes and touched my heart and deepened my walk with him in ways he had never done in the past. God became more real to me, and Jesus my Brother became closer to me than ever before.

I trust he does this to you, too.

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Preface

There are thousands, maybe millions, all around. No one has ever counted all the Saints who lived throughout history, but they are gathered here at this moment. And every eye is on God. Standing in front of God is his Son, Jesus. Standing next to Jesus is one man. We will call him David. David has died and wants to go to heaven.

God has just asked THE QUESTION: Why should I let you into my heaven?

Before the man can respond, Jesus stepped forward to answer.

"Father, this man was a sinner. But years ago he turned to me in faith and asked that my death on the Cross be applied to his sins. He asked for forgiveness and to be adopted into our family. You granted this, and David is an adopted brother. I ask that you not look at his life and instead see my life, death, and resurrection; that you not see his sin, and instead see my righteousness."

God paused, and looked from Jesus to David and back to Jesus. The silence echoed loudly for what seemed like an eternity. Then God leaned forward with a stern look clouding his face.

"We did this adoption thing almost 20 years ago, Jesus. And you know I always honor your plea for adoption. He has been your brother and my adopted son for a long time. But this is not about adoption. David turned his back on you, on us, years ago. Since then, he has been following the Adversary and not you. He has influenced many people to leave our leading, to ignore the Scripture, and to do what feels good instead of what is right. Further, he was logged onto that Internet porn site for half an hour before his heart gave out. Since he was watching it alone, there was no one there to help him, and he died with all those pictures still on the screen. His family discovered him with that movie still playing. The whole experience has damaged his wife's spiritual life severely. And we were making great headway with his son and his daughter, until he died in the midst of his sins. They may never turn to you as a result.

"He died in sin. He reeks with sin. Tell me again why I should let him into my heaven."

Jesus took a step closer to David, and placed an arm around his shoulders. David has not said a word yet; Jesus has done all the talking, and David was

wise enough to let him intercede. There was no mistaking the love in Christ's eyes, or in his voice, as he responded to his Father.

"Father, you are a holy God. And we," Jesus waved his arms around to indicate all the Saints watching and listening, "are a holy people. We all know that you cannot and will not allow sin to enter your heaven. And we all know that the penalty for sin is spiritual death, an eternity in hell separated from you. But I ask that you remember that I paid his penalty a long time ago. I ask that you allow my adopted brother, your adopted son, into heaven in spite of his current sins."

SO WHAT DOES GOD DO?

God might say, "You are a believer who died with unrepented and unforgiven sin in your life. But you were adopted into the Family a long time ago. Because of what my Son did on the Cross, your sins are ALL forgiven, even the current unrepented sins. I will allow you to enter heaven for an eternity just because you accepted my Son by faith years ago."

Or God might say, "Sorry. You repented a long time ago, and your sins were forgiven then. But it is your current sin that is clinging to you. It is your current sin that requires your repentance. And it is your current sin that needs current forgiveness, which you have not requested. Because of your refusal to repent of them, it is your current sin that is keeping you from heaven. Depart from me for I knew you a long time ago, but not now."

WHAT DOES GOD DO?

Eternal Salvation

I have been asked about my views on Eternal Security ("once saved, always saved") more times over the past six months than I have over the entire previous 42 years since I have been a Christian. And I find myself asking: Why is this such an issue? Why are believers still arguing about a question that has been unresolved for centuries? Why are mature and intelligent Christians wasting so much time discussing such a complex and argumentative theology when there are so many people around us who need to know Jesus?

In my early years as a believer, during the 1970s, I was told this was an important issue, a doctrine that would affect my walk with God every day until I get to heaven, an argument that if left unresolved would engender doubt in me about the character and nature of God until I die.

So I studied several books dedicated to the argument. I read dozens of articles and listened to dozens of sermons and teachings that attempted to settle the question once and for all. I even participated in a debate on the issue that ended up splitting a church.

And over those forty-two years of debating this issue, I have learned two very important facts. First, Scripture is unclear on this issue. Second, the stronger the feelings on the issue, the less emotional or spiritual maturity is usually manifest in any discussion of it.

The fact that Scripture is unclear on this issue is self-evident. Intelligent and otherwise knowledgeable believers fall on both sides of the debate. Seriously, Wesley, Kinney, and Wuest are, in my eyes, every bit as knowledgeable about Scripture and every bit as credible in their walks with God as Calvin, McGee, and Scofield. Yet on this issue, the lines are clearly drawn and the sides are clearly chosen.

So, is Jesus diminished in any way by the fact that this issue is unresolved 2,000 years after he walked this world? Is the Gospel impaired in any way because this question is still unanswered? Has the Holy Spirit been limited in any way from drawing unbelievers to the Cross or from drawing believers to the righteousness of Jesus?

Yes? Then show me how. No? Then drop the argument and go share the Word of God with someone who needs it.

But, you say. "The Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth." [John 16:13, KJV] And this must be true, since it is declared in Scripture. But if this is true, we MUST conclude that the Holy Spirit has lied to one side of this issue. Or, if the Holy Spirit didn't lie, then we

MUST conclude that the saints and believers on one side of this issue are clearly incapable of following the Spirit's leading and of adequately discerning spiritual truth.

So let's stop pussy-footing around and call it like it is. No matter how you look at this argument, you MUST conclude that God has led the two sides to opposite conclusions, or else God has led one side to the correct view and the other side has too much sin in their collective lives, are too limited in their intellects to understand what they are seeing and reading, or are too immature in their collective spiritual walks to discern God's will.

After all, both sides cannot be right!

On the other hand, both sides CAN be wrong! And this, I believe, is the case.

Please understand what I am saying! I do not believe it is important to God that we EVER resolve this argument, that we EVER come to a definitive and binding answer to this debate. If this were important to God to finally and permanently resolve this single and important doctrine, then he could have done so in Scripture a long time ago.

BUT HE DID NOT!

God has spoken so clearly on so many issues in Scripture that it is evident he can do so on this issue!

- Jesus said, "You must be born again." Jesus did not say, "You must have some sort of spiritual experience."
- Jesus said, "I am the way." Jesus did not say, "I am one of the ways."
- Jesus said, "I have overcome the world." Jesus did not say, "I hope to someday be a dominant force in the world."
- Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments." Jesus did not say, "If you love me, do your best to follow what you think I meant."

God is perfectly capable of being absolutely clear on any issue he chooses. He could have directed any one of the New Testament writers to clearly state something like, *"Once one has become a believer through faith in Jesus, has been baptized by the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ, and has established his eternal destiny in heaven with Jesus, it is impossible for that believer to ever go any place but heaven after death, no matter how one lives or how badly one disobeys my teachings."* In fact, God could have inspired each and every New Testament writer to pen those words.

BUT HE DID NOT!

If God thought this was an essential issue for mankind to understand, making it clear would have taken seconds!

But God chose to NOT have all the New Testament writers pen those words. In fact, God saw to it that NOT ONE New Testament writer made any statement even close to that claim.

Instead, God saw fit to have different writers make statements that seem to contradict on this issue. In fact, he had some New Testament writers pen statements that seem to be in disagreement with other passages they themselves have written.

So what do I take from all this?

I think it is time for the Body of Christ to grow up. I think it is time we stop arguing like third graders over an issue that God left intentionally obtuse. I think it is time that our spiritual leaders stopped claiming they have discerned the truth and others who disagree have not. I think it is time that our spiritual leaders took their own egos off the thrones of their respective ministries and admit that they aren't totally certain of the answer to a question that God saw fit to leave unclear.

Or else publicly pick one of the following options and then move on.

1. I have discerned the truth of this issue, and all those who disagree lack the intellectual capacity or spiritual discernment to understand the Word of God.
2. God has led both sides to different conclusions, and consequently is responsible for leading one side into error.
3. God has lied to one side.
4. God is incapable of communicating the truth clearly on this particular doctrine.
5. God has chosen to leave this particular doctrine unclear in Scripture, allowing believers to study this doctrine and make logical conclusions that may or may not resemble the truth on this doctrine.
6. I don't know the truth on this issue yet, but I will continue to study this doctrine until I do.
7. Both sides are wrong.

Over forty-two years of ministry, I have worked with thousands of individuals and couples, most of them believers. NOT ONCE have I dealt with an unbeliever who demanded to know if they could lose it after they got it. NOT ONCE have I dealt with a believer whose spiritual maturity was stifled because they were concerned over whether or not they could lose their salvation. And NOT ONCE have I discovered a Scripture passage that implied or stated that one cannot enter heaven unless one believes one way or the other on this issue.

I have known a number of believers, new and mature, who had fallen into sin, and in each one of those situations the believer never asked if they had lost their salvation. He

or she never asked if salvation, once lost, could be re-gained. They had each one instead expressed the desire to repent, and to love and serve and worship Jesus again.

And no matter what your position is on this issue, I submit that your response to these people who have strayed from God would have been pretty much the same as mine was when they answered questions similar to the following:

- Do you miss the love and joy and peace that you had when you were walking with Jesus?
- Do you want that love and joy and peace back in your life?
- Are you willing to give up and turn from those behaviors and attitudes that took you away from God's presence?
- Can we pray right now to ask God's forgiveness for those actions and attitudes, and to ask Jesus to take control of your heart and cleanse it and to continue to make you into the type of person he wants you to be?

While I have never dealt with a believer whose spiritual life was in any way impaired by the lack of an answer for this question, I have, on the other hand, dealt with many believers whose spiritual growth was impaired because they would not stop *debating* this issue.

I have known believers to show more zeal over this doctrine and its debate than they showed over sharing the Gospel. I have known believers that spent more time and effort over resolving the "can you - can't you" question than they spent on being rooted and grounded in their love for God and commitment to following Christ. Believers like this really need to take some time and seek God's heart; not for an answer on this issue, but for a more solid and fruitful and mature walk with God.

For those believers who consider it an important use of their time to spend hours and hours studying and debating this issue, I would suggest that you take a second look at the three-fold ministry of the Holy Spirit, as described by Jesus and recorded in the Gospel of John.

And when he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin, righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the Prince of this world now stands condemned. [John 16:8-11, NIV]

The Holy Spirit when he comes has three specific and declared purposes, or ministries. One, he will draw unbelievers to the Cross because they do not know Jesus. Two, he will direct believers to the righteousness of Jesus because he no longer walks this world as an example of how to live. And three, he will act to support our efforts to resist Satan

by reminding him that Jesus has already won the battle, thereby immediately sending Satan on his way for us.

One: to know Jesus. Two: to know Jesus better. And three: to know that, and to act as if, Jesus has already won.

I cautiously urge you to consider the possibility that any time spent on activities outside of those three purposes, or ministries, do not experience the support and the power and the participation of the Holy Spirit. I submit that any time spent on activities outside of those three purposes, or ministries, require a direct calling of God on your life, or else those activities appear to be in direct controversion of the clear Word of God.

Evangelism, discipleship, and spiritual warfare seem to be the three categories of effort in which we can expect assistance from the Holy Spirit. Arguing about difficult and obtuse concepts is not an action based in love, nor does it fall into one of the three categories. As such, I question if the Holy Spirit is involved in these actions.

THOU SHALT HAVE A CLEAR AND DISTINCT ANSWER FOR EVERY SPIRITUAL QUESTION YOU CAN IMAGINE is not the 11th Commandment! Yet for some ungodly reason, men demand it from themselves and from each other.

So, I do not believe it is important to spend time attempting to resolve what God has chosen to leave unclear and obtuse. Regardless, this is important to some.

Scripture and What It Actually Says

In light of the above, we need to review actual Scripture passages and try to understand what they say. What are some of the passages that both sides use and debate to prove or disprove their respective doctrines?

The first thing we discover is the fact that there is a LONG list of Bible verses that must be used to prove either point of view. Since God decided to not make this debate easy, we must trace a logical thread through a long series of verses in order to develop this proof properly. Obviously, it is not an easy thing to prove a position that God has chosen to leave obtuse.

But, seriously, what is life without a challenge?

Specifically, what I am saying is if you want to “*prove*” the doctrine of Eternal Security, you must develop a line of thinking and then support that line of thinking with a large selection of verses, or fragments of verses, that seem to support that line of thinking.

This is also true, albeit to a somewhat lesser degree, if you are trying to “*prove*” the alternative doctrine that one can become a true believer, establish one's citizenship in heaven, and then in some way pursue a course of action that removes one's citizenship in heaven and redirect one's eternal destination to hell.

But it is human logic supported by verses and fragments of verses that constitute either position, that present either argument.

And I confess that every time I see a doctrine, especially a controversial doctrine, which is composed of human logic followed by Scripture verses and fragments of Scripture verses as supporting evidence for that doctrine, I cannot help but remember Paul's words in his first letter to the Church at Corinth. There Paul was speaking about divisions in the church based on a discussion of several things valued by some of the people, but not valued by God.

For the wisdom of the world is foolishness in God's sight. [1 Corinthians 3:18-19, NIV]

Further...

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. [Colossians 2:8, NIV]

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Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of this world, and not after Christ.

[Colossians 2:8, KJV]

And I need to point out two facts in support of my belief that the *King James Authorized Version* says almost exactly the same thing, from Genesis to Revelation, as the *New International Version*.

First, the phrase translated as "*spoil you*" in the KJV is potentially misleading. The Greek here, in the Greek manuscript from which the KJV was translated, does not describe the situation where a proud daddy spoils his darling little girl. This is a military term and it deals with the spoils of war, where one of the spoils is the capture and enslavement of the defeated people.

Second, the phrase rendered into "*the world*" as used in both translations refers to organized mankind, be it a formal or informal structure. The same Greek word is used elsewhere in the New Testament to describe tribes and nations. I believe here this passage can also apply to doctrinal groupings, especially to one that is splitting almost all Christianity into two groups of doctrinal beliefs.

I believe this passage cautions believers against being caught up in what might be a titillating and challenging argument over matters that should have been resolved when they learned the basics of Christianity. And what does Paul consider to be the basics of Christianity? Let's look to the writer of Hebrews for this answer.

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. [Hebrews 6:1-2, NIV]

I think the Doctrine of Eternal Security qualifies as the basics in Paul's eyes.

Some additional passages directly address the *idea* of a doctrine built on human logic and using Scripture verses or Scripture verse fragments as support.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. [Isaiah 55:8-9, KJV]

Warn them before God against quarreling about words: it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. [II Timothy 2:14, NIV]

Scripture and What It Actually Says

Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. [II Timothy 2:23, NIV]

Brothers and sisters, if you have to use a dozen Scripture verses or fragments of verses scattered all over the Bible to prove a simple concept that God should have made clear (and did, in your view) more than 2,000 years ago, especially when half of Christianity has a different view of those same verses and fragments, then methinks you are quarreling about words.

Virtually all discussions on Eternal Security, both pro and con, start with human logic. It is common for many questions to be asked that, when viewed with human logic, lead to a pre-determined answer. Questions like, *"If you argue with your earthly father and then stomp out of the room, does that mean you are no longer his son?"* are quite common in discussions concerning Eternal Security.

And they are also totally irrelevant.

God is not an earthly father. He is to us and does for us things that are impossible for an earthly father. Parallelism is a very limited tool when comparing earthly things with heavenly things, or temporal things to eternal things. And parallelism usually makes for bad doctrine.

But even the pre-determined answer above is inaccurate and incomplete. Earthly fathers disown offspring all the time. All contact with the family members is cut off. Family heritage is often re-written and the disowned member is seldom if ever mentioned again. And family inheritances are re-directed; assets moved around; wills changed.

Or try this one: *"The Prodigal Son squandered his life and inheritance. Then he went back home and discovered he was still considered a son of his father."*

There is no question about the fact that the Prodigal Son was treated as family on his return. But this misses the reality of that parable by a long shot.

What would have happened if the Prodigal Son had died in that pig sty and never returned home?

I will state the obvious. He would have been buried in the equivalent of Boot Hill where other indigent people were buried, and probably with no identifying marker. Or, if he lived in a small enough town, the pig owner that he was serving would have hauled his body outside of town and dumped it. There would have been no evidence that he even had a family somewhere. And there would definitely NOT have been an inheritance.

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Both of these arguments, and many others like them, might be great examples of repentance. And they might be great examples of grace and mercy. But they are NOT great examples of Eternal Security. In fact, they are better illustrations of the position that someone can lose their salvation and go to hell.

There is simply no biblical example, literal or figurative, of anyone accepting Jesus by faith and joining the body of Christ and gaining a place in heaven, and then turning away and rejecting Jesus and living in sin, yet followed by an eternity in heaven.

The very idea of this is totally absent from Scripture.

But it is always easy to use logic to build a doctrine, and then use Scripture to support that view. In fact, most cults start out with this same technique.

For example, take the "fact" that God has feathers. Then support this "fact" with the claim that Scripture is full of references to God's wings. Then take a few verses or portions of verses (the shorter the reference the better, making it easier to take out of context and "bend" the intended meaning!) and prove your new doctrine.

...the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. [Psalms 36:7, KJV]

Yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge... [Psalms 57:1, KJV]

I will trust in the cover of thy wings. [Psalms 61:4, KJV]

He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust. [Psalms 91:4, KJV]

And now that we have proven that God has feathers, just imagine where we could take this new doctrine! The Bird God of an ancient tribe near the Philippines might turn out to be the God of the Bible!

When we are forced to use a line of reasoning to establish something as fact, and then use a series of verses or snippets of verses to prove that fact, we are usually facing a doctrine that is easily challenged. And worse, easily led astray.

But before we begin examining Scripture for the truth in this argument, let us take a short review of history concerning the doctrine. What did our Early Church leaders believe about what we now call Eternal Security?

The early church developed a clear dualism on this issue, but in a peculiar fashion. It seems that there was a difference between those believers who had been baptized and those who had not. Once baptized, believers were seen as more accountable than believers who had not been baptized yet. This doctrine was refined over the years to allow pre-baptized falling away to be countered by confession and repentance, but post-

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baptism falling away was discouraged with the warning: "Let none of you be found a deserter!" Hermes and Tertullian allowed for post-baptismal repentance only once; a second time falling away and the former believer faced hell with all the other sinners. Cyprian and other Early Church leaders allowed no post-baptism at all - you fall away from Christ and you fall into hell.

Augustine had the loudest and most restrictive voice, and he endorsed an early version of Eternal Security. But he was in such a minority that the Council at Trent stated Augustine's position cautiously, and worded it obscurely. Of course, politicians usually ride the fence...

Even worse was the **result** of this fence-riding. For hundreds of years there was a trend, an unofficial church doctrine, for believers to delay baptism in case they fell away in later years. Naturally, they wanted to keep their options open, especially their option of repentance and regaining their eternity in heaven.

More recently, Steele and Thomas, in their book "*The 5 Points of Calvinism*," restated the traditional Calvinist view of Eternal Security, but with the disclaimer that this security does not apply to all who profess faith in Christ; only to those given by God the "gift of true faith." All other believers will fall away and go to hell.

So this question has remained "answered" but unresolved for 2,000 years.

Is the answer really in Scripture? Has God given us enough truth in this matter to declare one side or the other as "right?"

The biblical author that has probably written the most, and even the most detail, on this doctrine is the writer of Hebrews. Yet the Book of Hebrews is a particularly difficult problem. So let's look at Hebrews first, especially at two primary passages.

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, if they shall fall away, to renew them again to repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. [Hebrews 6:4-6, KJV]

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. [Hebrews 6:4-6, NIV]

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Most in the "never lose it" crowd view this passage as a description of someone who is *ALMOST* saved, but stops just short of actual salvation. Each of the pieces, or phrases, of these verses is said to describe an unbeliever who merely dips a toe into the spring but never really jumps into the water. And since there is no salvation, there is no *loss* of salvation.

The opposing side says something along the lines of "*Horse feathers! How can one partake of the Holy Spirit and remain an unbeliever? How can one taste the powers of the world to come without becoming part of the world to come? How can one crucify the Son of God afresh without having crucified him the first time?*" This side would claim that one can take any phrase in this passage by itself and explain it away as not requiring salvation to meet the conditions of the specific words. But this side would also claim that, taken as a whole, *taken as the writer wrote it*, this passage is the longest and most detailed description of an unbeliever becoming a believer in all of Scripture, and then that believer losing his eternal salvation and going to hell.

I would suggest the "get it and lose it" crowd won the battle over this passage, but in doing so lost the war. By that I mean that I know of no passage in Scripture that suggests one can receive any part of the Holy Spirit unless one is a believer. And I know of no passage in Scripture that suggests a believer can receive only a part of the Holy Spirit without receiving all of the Holy Spirit. I would suggest that Hebrews 6:4-6 describes a true believer in and follower of Jesus Christ.

The claim that this passage is "the longest and most detailed description of an unbeliever becoming a believer in all of Scripture, and then that believer losing his eternal salvation and going to hell" rings true to me. *But that makes this the scariest passage in all of Scripture.* You see, the very passage that seems to claim a believer can lose his salvation clearly states "...it is impossible ... to renew them again to repentance."

To use this passage to establish as FACT that a believer cannot lose his salvation requires that a long and detailed passage must be explained piece by piece, phrase by phrase, in such a way that seems contrary to the clear wording and intent.

But to use this passage to establish as FACT that a believer can lose his salvation requires that we accept the painful reality that a fallen believer is permanently and irreversibly destined for hell.

BUMMER!

Perhaps it is better to believe that one can never lose one's salvation than it is to believe that one can lose one's salvation but never have the option again! Or at least more comforting!

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Let's review the other troublesome passage penned by this same writer and see if we can gain any flexibility in what has suddenly become a very scary issue.

For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and a fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. [Hebrews 10:26-27, KJV]

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. [Hebrews 10:26-27, NIV]

And both translations use the word *knowledge*, which is rendered from the Greek word *epignosis*. If we consult *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* and *Vine's Expositive Dictionary of New Testament Words*, we find this word means "knowledge proven true by personal experience." In other words, the people spoken of in this passage gained knowledge proven true by personal experience, rather than heard certain words and intellectually granted them the status of truth without truly placing their faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as Savior.

These people were true believers, according to the author of Hebrews.

Again, the "can't lose it" group claims that the people spoken of in this passage gained an intellectual collection of facts without committing their hearts, thereby never really experienced salvation.

And, again, the "get it and lose it" side says, *"Nonsense! The Greek makes it clear that these people experienced the truth of salvation. And when they fell away they also experienced the truth of hell."*

And, still again, the scary truth of it is that the believers who fell away, according to this passage, no longer have Christ's sacrifice for their sins to call upon. If they call upon God after falling away, their next supernatural experience is judgment and fire.

BIGGER BUMMER!

So it would seem that, at least within the book of Hebrews, the "can't lose it" argument can be maintained only by taking words or phrases out of context and construing them to mean something other than they would mean in other Scriptures. It would seem that the writer of Hebrews believed and taught that one can experience true salvation, and then turn around and fall away, thereby experiencing hell.

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On the other hand, those passages which teach that a believer can lose his salvation, giving a point to the "get it and lose it" side, also teach that he cannot get salvation back after losing it. EVER.

Lest we conclude that the writer of Hebrews stuck this doctrine only in two places, we must review the entire book to see the constant warnings for believers to remain faithful.

"...lest they be judged to have failed..."

"...that no one fail by disobedience..."

"...since they crucify the Son of God on their own account..."

"...bearing thorns..."

"...worthless..."

"...near to being cursed..."

"...burned..."

The writer of Hebrews was NOT encouraging believers to persevere. The writer was issuing warnings, *many strong warnings*, against falling away.

Clearly, we need to get away from the book of Hebrews, where we cannot seem to find the emotional comfort demanded by so many believers today.

So let's take a break here from all the warnings and look at some assurances. Or what seem to be assurances at first glance. After all, we only need to worry about losing our salvation if we sin after being saved. Right?

No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. [1 John 3:9, NIV]

Whosoever is born of God doth not sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. [1 John 3:9, KJV]

I can't tell you how much better that makes us feel! In fact, this passage is offered frequently by the "never lose it" proponents as a clear Scriptural assurance that we will never have to worry about losing our salvation because God makes it impossible for the believer to sin in the first place.

And yet...

...but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. [1 John 1:7-8, NIV]

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But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. [1 John 1:7-8, KJV]

The first part of this passage sounds great. The verb translated into "cleanseth" is written in the original Greek in the present tense, suggesting that we are cleansed right then, at that time, immediately upon sinning. But then, when we think about it, we ask ourselves, "*Why do we need cleansing, immediate or otherwise, when we can't sin?*" And that question lasts just until we read the very next verse, where we are told that we sin and cannot honestly deny it.

So we are faced with two dilemmas. First, that John tells us that believers sin and cannot deny it. And then tells us two chapters later that we cannot sin.

Obviously, the passage in chapter one is used to "prove" that believers can lose their salvation. And, just as obviously, the passage in chapter three is used to "prove" that believers cannot lose their salvation. And in this case, both sides want us to take the words at face value with no "explaining away" of any phrases.

The second dilemma is more subtle, and often ignored in the verbal storm that has just been created. It is quite simply, *what amount or degree or severity of sin is required for the believer to lose his salvation?* A split-second of lust? A white lie? Robbing a bank versus a liquor store versus a neighbor's garage? A lifetime of drug abuse?

This is another question that seems to have no answer in Scripture.

The typical person claiming that a believer can lose his salvation and go to hell usually implies that one sin is as good as any other sin for sending a believer to hell. I have been told more than once that a believer can spend the night with a prostitute, die in bed with her, and still go to heaven. And I have often been told by the other side that if a believer lusts for a woman as he crosses the street, and gets run over by a car before confessing that sin and seeking forgiveness, that the believer will die and go to hell. Of course, this person also claims that having lost his salvation, that same man, if he can make it across the street alive, has the option to confess the sin and seek forgiveness and be accepted back into the Kingdom of Heaven immediately. This is, of course, good news if the man makes it across the street and then dies of a heart attack.

So, are we now left with bad humor and a sense that we CAN lose our salvation? And if we do, it is a permanent loss?

I trust not. Let's look at some more Scripture.

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In I Corinthians chapter 11, Paul addresses the issue of what we now call the Lord's Supper, or Communion. In the middle of chapter 10, Paul discusses some of the theology behind Communion. Here, in chapter 11, Paul deals with some of the more practical matters. And he deals with these matters quite harshly.

Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. [I Corinthians 11:17, KJV]

In the following directions I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. [I Corinthians 11:17, NIV]

This is possibly the most clear and aggressive slap in the face that Paul gives any church in any of his letters. And this is on top of the condemnation Paul already heaped on this same body of believers in chapters four and five. But more on that later...

Paul here is almost saying that it would be better if these people didn't even have church services and everyone instead stayed home to watch football! (*I know, I know, they didn't have televisions back then...*)

And what could engender such strong rebuke from the Apostle? Apparently some people in the church at Corinth were engaging in sinful activities during the week and then sharing in Communion in their services on Sunday, but without confessing their sins and dealing with them before God. Paul here shares a new insight not stated anywhere else in Scripture: *People were sick and dying for sharing in Communion without first dealing with their sin in a biblical manner.*

At issue for our purposes is the eternal destination of those believers who died in their unconfessed sins.

For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. [I Corinthians 11:29, KJV]

For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. [I Corinthians 11:29, NIV]

Or perhaps more clearly translated,

For anyone who eats and drinks without discriminating and recognizing with due appreciation that [it is Christ's] body, eats and drinks a sentence (a verdict of judgment) upon himself. [I Corinthians 11:29, Amplified Bible]

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It is clear from this entire chapter that anyone who partakes in the Lord's Supper has a powerful and compelling responsibility to take inventory of his spiritual life first, and if any sin exists which has not been dealt with properly (through confession to Jesus and asking for forgiveness in a fresh and new experience), then that person had better take care of business before he shares in Communion or else he faces the judgment and condemnation of God. And maybe even physical death!

But what exactly is Paul warning against?

To help us answer that question, perhaps we should go back two verses earlier:

Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.

[I Corinthians 11:27, KJV]

Therefore, whoever eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.

[I Corinthians 11:27, NIV]

Paul seems to be reminding us that Communion is all about the body of Jesus being broken, and the blood of Jesus being spilled, as a terrible but magnificent sacrifice so our sins can be forgiven. This forgiveness is so easily experienced by the believer that it appears to be a special and especially grievous insult to Jesus to share Communion, a celebration of that sacrifice, without first seeking that forgiveness which that sacrifice provided.

Clearly, one cannot celebrate with love and worship the excruciating death of Jesus with unconfessed and unforgiven sin in one's life. This would be hollow and empty and hypocritical, and the consequences are severe. How severe? Paul says some are sick and some have even died because of it.

And if some of these believers have died from this problem of unconfessed and unforgiven sin, where will they spend eternity?

No matter which side of the debate you choose, there are two different answers right here in these verses. It is almost as if Paul does this on purpose.

The first answer seems to be quite clear. Paul says in verse 29 that if one partakes in Communion unworthily (with unconfessed and unforgiven sin in one's life), one "*eateth and drinketh damnation to himself.*"

The Greek word translated into "damnation" is *krima*. From *Strong's Concordance* and *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, we get the following definition of

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krima: the effect or result of a court decision against someone where they are judged and condemned. It is derived from the Greek word *krino*, which is used whenever a New Testament writer addresses a situation where God judges and decides on a sentence of hell.

The "get it and lose it" crowd claims this is so clearly a damnation to hell that no amount of dancing can avoid it.

But the second answer seems to dance effectively. In verse 32, Paul gives the result of those who do not deal with their sin effectively before they share the Lord's Supper: they "*are chastened by the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.*" [1 Corinthians 11:32, NIV]

Here, the Eternal Security advocate would suggest that being chastened (other versions use "*disciplined*") is part of God training up a child, and does not entail and even avoids being "*condemned with the world,*" which pretty much both sides of the argument agree indicates being condemned to hell with an unsaved world.

So Paul seems to say that if you are unworthy when you partake of Communion, you eat and drink damnation to hell. Then he goes on to say that if you are unworthy when you partake of Communion, then God will judge you by chastening or punishing you, and in undergoing that discipline you would avoid damnation to hell.

So how about it? Was Paul confused? Are you confused? Is there more to this passage? Is there anything so clear in this passage that you can declare the truth to the exclusion of all other opinions? Are you ready to claim that anyone who disagrees with you simply has deficient intellectual and spiritual discernment to understand the clear Word of God?

Or can we say that God has chosen to leave this issue unclear and obtuse?

Not ready to declare just yet? Then let's go on to additional verses to see if we can gain some more clarification. Or more confusion...

Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless, and leads to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth. But avoid empty and worldly chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and thus they upset the faith of some. Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having

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this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness."

[II Timothy 2:14-19, NASB]

Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.

Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

[II Timothy 2:14-19, KJV]

This is an interesting passage, with several messages. First, Paul warns against rumors, debates, and false teachings all in one passage. But the reason he warns against them is because these actions can lead to the spiritual ruin of many. Teach, and show yourself approved as a good workman, but teach the truth and don't cause or spread the spiritual chaos and spiritual ruin that results from rumors, useless debates, and false teaching.

In the next few verses, Paul explains that in a large household, there are pitchers, vases, and other dishes that are noble, and some that are not noble. He exhorts us to pursue noble purposes, which will make us effective and useful for God's work.

Then Paul goes on to list some examples of unrighteous behaviors to avoid and some examples of righteous behaviors to pursue, *"if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the Devil, having been held captive by him to do his will."* [II Timothy 2:25-26]

What we have here is a long series of different but related issues. In verse 14, Paul starts with a warning against needless debates and arguments in the local church. Paul says that these discussions are at best, useless, and at worse they upset the faith of some, even leading to their ruin. And, by implication, "useless" is not noble and should not be pursued.

But as Paul warns against silly and useless arguments, he exhorts the believers to a series of positive actions to pursue, and a series of negative actions to avoid. Why? Because these unproductive (remember that Paul started out this series of verses taking about being a workman who is not ashamed by what he accomplished, so these

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unproductive discussions are the polar opposite of what leads a workman to be unashamed...) debates have a destructive impact on many, with the result being an infection of sin in the local church. *Paul is giving his prescription of antibiotics to fight the infection resulting from these debates.*

And why is Paul giving Timothy this prescription? Because Timothy's church has some believers who had been snared by Satan, and there might be even more believers snared if this infection is not treated effectively.

Please look closely at verses 25 and 26. The believers to which Paul is attempting to help Timothy minister have already been ensnared by Satan, and are held captive while Satan has bent them to his will. These are believers who are doing the will of Satan, and Paul is praying that they will see how they allowed themselves to be snared, and that God will grant them repentance so they can escape from Satan's snare.

So now the question relative to our discussion: *What would have happened to these believers if they died while still ensnared by Satan and doing his will?*

The Greek word for "snare" in the manuscript used by the King James translation team was *pagis* [pay-jees]. According to *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* and *Vine's Expository Dictionary*, we can take the definition of *pagis* to be "allurements and enticements to evil by which the Devil fastens and restrains one by a noose."

In other words, when we are ensnared by Satan, we are stuck there. We can't escape Satan's grip through struggle and strength, but only by our repentance and God's power on our behalf. We are talking spiritual warfare here, where self-discipline is guaranteed to lose, and God's power is guaranteed to win.

So what happens when we die while Satan is still leading us around by the noose of sin wrapped around our throats, forcing us to do his bidding?

You say that God has sealed us in the Holy Spirit as a stamp of ownership [Ephesians 1:13], and I agree. But being sealed guarantees God has declared a down payment on his ownership. Does being sealed by the Holy Spirit guarantee that we have no more part in this? Does being sealed eliminate our free will? The question is whether or not a believer can betray his owner, submit to Satan's allurements, become ensnared, and be forced to obey Satan. And once you answer that question, you are faced with the next question: will God supernaturally cut the rope, free us, and take us to heaven should we die while still ensnared?

I submit that Paul indicates in II Timothy 2:14-26 that repentance on our part is required before God cuts that rope and frees us from Satan's noose.

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Please note what Paul states just two verses prior to this passage:

If we disown him, he will also disown us. [II Timothy 2:12, NIV]

And YES that is a scary thing!

Maybe that is why the New Testament writers spend so much time and cover so many pages with warnings against falling away. And maybe that is why God makes repentance so simple.

Oh, well... Maybe things will look better with another Scripture passage. Ya think?

Let's try one with which we are all most likely familiar, Romans 3:23; but let's look at the entire sentence Paul wrote; that single phrase being only the middle phrase, the central theme, of a larger paragraph.

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. [Romans 3:21-26, KJV]

But now a righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished -- he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. [Romans 3:21-26, NIV]

Paul, in the first three chapters of Romans, deals with, in excruciating detail, the Jewish concept of righteousness. Righteousness, under the laws and rules revealed through Moses, required sacrifice for sins. Actually, it required several sacrifices each year to cover the current and ongoing sins committed since the last sacrifice. And then, in verse 21, "the righteousness of God without the law" is introduced. This *righteousness*

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without the law is a new concept, but also is a person: the person of Jesus. The CONCEPT of “righteousness without the law” offers freedom, but also allows for license. Further, it offers no clear path to God or eternity in heaven. The PERSON of “righteousness without the law” offers a path to God and an eternity in heaven through repentance, forgiveness, and a godly life.

And it is through this PERSON of righteousness without the law that God now has a sacrifice which doesn't require regular repetition. This is what we call redemption, and it is only possible through the sacrificial payment by this PERSON, this “Righteousness without the Law,” this Jesus, this Son of God.

And, as you must know, redemption relates to our discussion of Eternal Security.

Redemption, simply put, means “to deliver by paying a price,” according to Scofield. It actually involves two sides of one coin: to deliver to others, or to purchase for yourself. There are three Greek words which our New Testament writers used that are all translated into the same English word “redemption.” But each of these three Greek words carry nuances and inflections that are somewhat important to our discussion.

The first Greek word is *agorazo* and it means “to purchase in the marketplace.” Any person or thing that is redeemed “in the marketplace” can be re-sold back into the marketplace, to be redeemed again. This type of redemption occurs many times over and over because that which is redeemed [*agorazo*] is never actually removed from the marketplace; it is always for sale again at the right price. In short, there is no personal commitment in the purchaser of that which is redeemed by *agorazo*. Anyone who is redeemed through *agorazo* is purchased and has an owner, but the ownership is not permanent because the redeemed is still available in the marketplace.

The second Greek word is *exagorazo* and it indicates an act “to purchase out of the marketplace.” Those who are redeemed in this manner never need to be redeemed again because they are no longer in the marketplace; they are owned and will never be put up for sale again because the owner refuses to sell again. There is a personal commitment to that which is purchased by *exagorazo* because the item is purchased with the intent to keep it and not resell it. Anyone who is redeemed through *exagorazo* is purchased and has an owner, and this is permanent. The person thus redeemed is no longer in the marketplace and will never have another owner.

The third Greek word is *lutroo* and it means “to loose; to purchase and set free.” In other words, the person who experiences this type of redemption is bought and then just plain turned loose, set free without an owner. Anyone who is redeemed through *lutroo* has been purchased, removed from the marketplace, and then set free. The redeemed has no owner or master.

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And the Greek word *apolutroo*, which Paul uses in this passage, adds emphasis. It is like Paul is saying, "he is free with no owner forever!"

What Paul is telling us in verses 21 through 25 is clear:

- we are all sinners
- we are all purchased by Jesus
- we are all justified by Jesus
- we are all set free with no owner
- we are all free forever

This obviously poses a problem for some people. We usually hear the "never lose it" crowd claim that Jesus, through his blood sacrifice, has redeemed all believers. And these same people usually claim that "we are bought with a price paid by Jesus, so Jesus owns us now." This is usually claimed as an emphasis in the argument that we belong to Jesus and he will never let us go, a foundational belief of that side of the argument.

And this would be wonderful, if it were true.

The truth is the FACT that Jesus has redeemed us, that Jesus has paid a price for us, and that *Jesus has set us free*. Our redemption has taken us out of the marketplace and freed us forever from anyone's ownership.

Specifically, we have been freed forever from Satan's control. Once Jesus redeemed us, we were set free and no longer owned by the ruler of this world.

But this is a two-edged sword!

Satan no longer owns us like he did before we received salvation through faith in Jesus. That means that any time we give into sin in any way, we have done so by choice, by our own free will. We can blame no one else. We can blame no set of circumstances. We chose to sin, and are the only ones we can blame!

But, as I said, this freedom is a two-edged sword. On the one hand, we are free from Satan and no longer required to obey him merely because he is the prince of this world. On the other hand, the only way we can experience this freedom, the only way we can resist Satan's power, is to voluntarily (our choice because we are truly free!) give up our freedom and pledge ourselves to Jesus. We got free initially by making that pledge to Jesus. But we are still free, and need to continually renew that pledge to him. When we pledge our hearts and lives to Jesus, when we give up our freedom and place our faith in the Son of the most High God, we can make use of all the power of the heavenly places. [see Ephesians 1:20-23]

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When faced with all that Satan can throw at us, we find ourselves in a fearful battle. As one set free by Jesus Christ's sacrifice, we must hold the course, we must maintain our fellowship, we must again and again give up that freedom and pledge to pursue Christ, if we are to have access to the tools necessary to resist Satan. These tools are made available to us through our relationship with Jesus. When that relationship is impaired by sin and rebellion in our lives, we cannot access the tools required to resist Satan. We are exposed to Satan's tricks and deceptions, and only the tools offered to us while in fellowship with Christ can allow us to resist Satan. It is only through the power of Christ and the resources available to us through him that we can escape "*the snare of the Devil*" and avoid being "*held captive by him to do his will.*" Believer and unbeliever face that terrible possibility. But only believers have access to the power to get free and remain free from Satan.

When we cannot, or choose to not, resist Satan, we become the spoils of war [see Matthew 12:29 and Colossians 2:8], taken captive by Satan and turned by him, forced to do his will. When this happens, we assist Satan in the destruction of other believers who are watching us and influenced by us.

Let me make this issue of freedom clear.

In sports, one can be a free agent. As such, he is his own boss. He is beholden to no one. He can name his own terms, demand certain benefits, talk to any team.

The only thing a free agent cannot do is PLAY BALL!

If he wants to play ball, he must join a team; he must choose sides. *He must give up his freedom if he wants to play ball.*

When we place our faith in Jesus, he pays the price for our freedom and HE SETS US FREE. We have chosen sides initially, resulting in Jesus paying the price for us, but we must choose sides CONSTANTLY. Every day, every hour, every minute, we must choose a side. We cannot remain a free agent on our own or we will be crushed in the spiritual war being waged all around us. We MUST choose Jesus, pick his team and follow his playbook, or we will become spoils of war, captured and enslaved by Satan. It is only through the discipline and training, the tools and techniques, the power and authority available through Jesus that we have any hope of spiritual survival.

And when we choose his team and remain on it, Jesus guarantees us that our team will win! No matter what the score looks like to us at any moment during the game, our team will win at the end of the game!

We MUST be on Christ's team, fully committed, fully participating, when the game ends. Only Christ's team gets on the bus to heaven when the game is over!

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Before we get tired of the sports analogy, we should move on.

But maybe we should continue in this theme of freedom in Christ and remain in Romans for a bit. And while we are here, why don't we take on predestination: the concept that stands against any spiritual freedom that I have suggested is given us in the third chapter of Romans.

Predestination is the belief that God sets out for us our path through life, including whether or not we place our faith in Jesus and join the Family of God. In a secular sense, this is called fate; in a spiritual sense, this is called predestination. Some people even take this to such an extreme that they are convinced God picks for us the clothes we put on in the morning, and the path we drive to work each day, along with what we say and think all day long.

Obviously, if this belief is taught in Scripture, then the question of believers falling away is answered: God would use his sovereign power to MAKE SURE no believer ever falls away: no options, no free will; nothing but what God programs in us. This is one aspect of what has become known as Calvinism.

The people who believe in this manner of predestination claim that everything happens for a reason. These are the people who constantly tell themselves and others, "God put you there for a reason." or "God put you through that to teach you something." Some of these people may not consciously believe in predestination, and they may even claim to disbelieve in that doctrine, but they are what I call "Christian Fatalists;" they practice the doctrine of predestination whether they claim to believe in it or not.

And there are two passages, both written by Paul, to which these people always turn for proof of their belief. Let's go to one of them, right here in Romans. Pay attention, people, because this is important!

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?

[Romans 8:28-31, NIV]

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the

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firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?

[Romans 8:28-31, KJV]

These verses are classic in the discussion of predestination. The first and the fourth verses are referenced in their own right, as powerful promises of God. But verses 29 and 30 are included when one wants to prove that God set apart before the world was created certain things to happen (some say *everything* that happens), and that God will force those things to happen. It is often suggested that the very character and nature of God demands that these things occur just as God ordained, or the integrity of God is destroyed. Ummm, strong words!

Regardless of what people believe about the meaning of predestination, there is no doubt that Paul uses the word, both here and elsewhere. So what does the word actually mean?

According to the Greek manuscript used by the King James translation team, the word Paul uses here is *proorizo* (pro-or-id-zo). Between *Strong's Concordance* and *Vine's Expository Dictionary*, we find that this word means "to limit in advance; to determine beforehand." Vine's even goes further, and links this to foreknowledge. Yes, it seems pretty clear that *proorizo* means to decide beforehand and make it happen.

Predestination is a real and valid biblical concept.

The people who subscribe to predestination would say that God sets apart for himself certain individuals, and he makes sure these individuals profess complete faith in Jesus, experience salvation, and ultimately end up in heaven. They believe this is guaranteed by God's sovereign grace, and made to happen by God's sovereign power.

But is this really what is being predestined? Is this really what Scripture teaches here? Let's look more closely at verse 29.

For whom he did foreknow [Gr. *proginosko*] he also did predestinate [Gr. *proorizo*] TO GO TO HEAVEN.

Whoa! Wait a minute! Is that what Paul said? Look again...

For whom he did foreknow [Gr. *proginosko*] he also did predestinate [Gr. *proorizo*] TO BE CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF HIS SON.

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Paul does not say in Romans 8 that God decides in advance who will go to heaven and who will go to hell, and then sets about guaranteeing the results of his decisions.

Paul says:

THOSE PEOPLE WHO GOD KNEW IN ADVANCE WOULD TURN TO JESUS IN FAITH, THOSE PEOPLE WERE PREDESTINED TO BE CONFORMED TO THE CHARACTER AND NATURE OF JESUS THAT HE DISPLAYED WHEN HE WALKED THIS EARTH. IF THEY TURN TO HIM IN FAITH, THEY SHOULD BE LIKE HIM IN LIFE.

In other words, God predestined that BELIEVERS be conformed to the image of Christ! God clearly wants all believers to reflect Jesus to a lost and dying world.

God didn't predestine WHO would go to heaven. He predestined WHAT believers should look like in order to effectively manifest his Son so that they might attract many unbelievers to Jesus and to the Cross.

Look at the other predestination passage that so many people point to in discussions about this.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

[Ephesians 1:3-6, KJV]

*Paul DID NOT say, "...having predestined us unto the adoption of children."
Paul said, "...having predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto himself."*

Here, Scripture does not say that God has predestined WHO would become children, but HOW we would become Children of God – by placing our faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as payment for our sins, so that "we should be holy and blameless before him."

In other words, God set into motion before the foundations of the world the PROCESS of reconciling sinners to him, and that PROCESS was sinners placing their faith in the life, death, and resurrection of his Son, Jesus.

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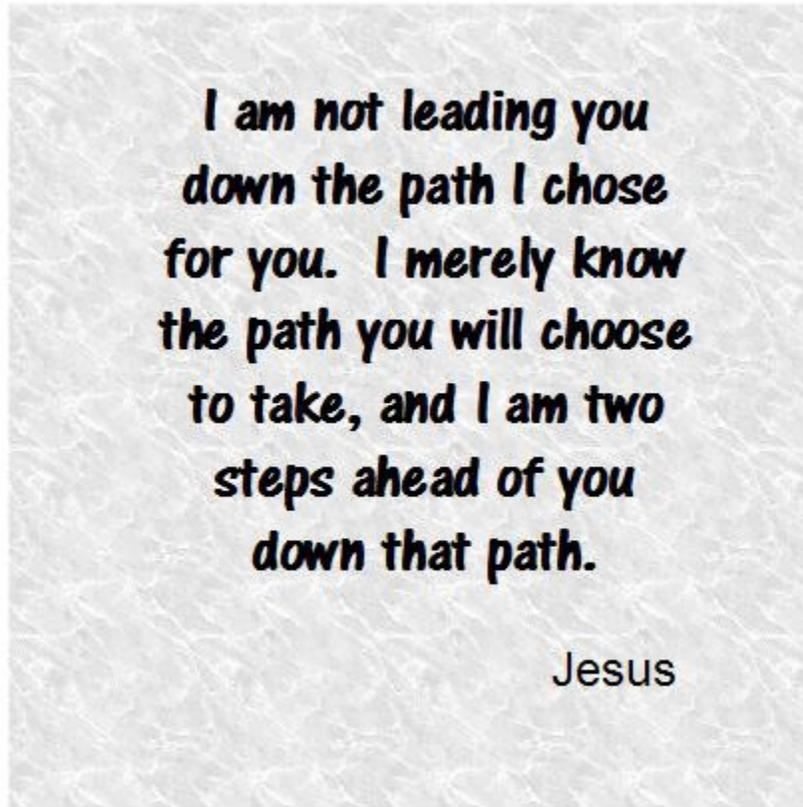
God knew in advance [Gr. *proginosko*] who would place their faith in Jesus, so he predestined [Gr. *proorizo*] a second process: for all believers to be conformed by the Holy Spirit into the likeness of his Son so we can draw more sinners to God.

Paul explained in Ephesians how God predestined the process for UNBELIEVERS to become adopted as children; that is, by placing their faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

And he explained in Romans how God predestined the goal for BELIEVERS to become conformed to the life and likeness of Jesus so we can more effectively draw more unbelievers to the Cross.

But Paul never claimed that God predestined some people to go to heaven and some people to go to hell.

God predestined the process of HOW unbelievers could become believers. And then God predestined believers to remain here on earth after salvation to become more like Jesus so that we can play a role in drawing unbelievers into the Family of God. And he did all this to the praise of his grace and his glory.



We get input from several sources that affect that path. God gave us the Bible with tons of general input and lots of specific input. God gave us the Holy Spirit with all the detailed input we could ever ask. And God gave us family and friends and other Believers and spiritual leaders, all with valuable input into how we should live and walk. But the path is always our choice, and always with rewards and with consequences.

So let's try a few more verses. Maybe we can get a picture of God's grace that makes this issue a little easier to deal with.

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever.

[Jude 24-25, KJV]

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,

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majesty, power, and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore!

[Jude 24-25, NIV]

This one is easy, and I don't think I like that. Jude says that God is "able to keep you from falling." Jude DOES NOT say that God WILL keep you from falling. And Jude is nowhere close to saying that "God won't let you fall no matter what you do or how long you do it." Since God is able, there must be some reason for him to do it, or some condition required first, or else he will always do it no matter what. And Jude would have said this clearly.

A similar passage is written by the writer of Hebrews.

Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

[Hebrews 7:25, KJV]

Therefore He is able to save to the uttermost (completely, perfectly, finally, and for all time and eternity) those who come to God through him, since he is always living to make petition to God and intercede with Him and intervene for them.

[Hebrews 7:25, AMP]

This passage states what Jude claims, and yet goes much further. The writer of Hebrews injects the concept of "uttermost" so we can see the extent to which God saves us, and I included the *Amplified Version* so we can better see what he meant. He also uses the concept of intercession, an action that Jesus constantly performs for all believers.

And in this passage again, we see that God is ABLE, but not that he has accomplished, or will accomplish, it for all believers under all circumstances. You say, "Yes, *but it is guaranteed because Jesus is interceding for all believers at all times.*" You are sort of correct, my friend, but I must point out that you apparently don't know what intercedes means.

All the New Testament writers use the same Greek word *entunchano* translated here as "intercession." And *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* tells us that *entunchano* means "primarily to fall in with, meet with in order to converse; to make petition; plead with a person."

The writer is saying here that Jesus is always meeting with God, pleading in favor of believers. He DOES NOT say that God gives in and grants what Jesus is requesting, and does it every time for each and every believer no matter how many times that believer needs the intercession, or why he needs intercession one more time.

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But you might say, *"What father would deny the requests a son asks of him?"* My response to that would be, *"What planet did you grow up on? Fathers deny sons all the time every day in every culture and in every nation all over this world."*

But another would say, *"God the Father would always grant what his only Son asks."* And I would reply with, *"If you are right, then our discussion is over. But we can only assume or hope that you are right, because Scripture never once says that."* Further, if it were true, then why would Jesus need to intercede at all? It would be an automatic response on the part of God: *"That believer came to me through faith in my Son, so that believer gets forgiven, and entrance to heaven is granted."* There would need to be no exchange between Jesus and his Father at all!

Please allow me to take a moment to clarify some issues surrounding intercession. It will be okay; both sides will get half credit on this one.

Jesus performs intercession under two totally different circumstances: first, for our initial salvation; second, for all sins committed after initial salvation.

First, Jesus intercedes concerning initial salvation. We are all sinners and deserving of eternal separation from God, but Jesus died and rose again so he could change that. If we turn to Jesus in faith, believing that his life, death, and resurrection paid the penalty for our sins, then Jesus goes before the Father and intercedes for us, asking that God adopt us into the Family. And God says, "YES!" If we turn from our sinful life, truly confess our sins, sincerely repent of them, and follow Jesus, God says YES every time!

Second, once we are saved and members of the Family, we enjoy fellowship with Jesus and his Father. And when we choose to sin and then repent of that sin, Jesus goes back before the Father and asks that God forgive us because we really are members of the Family, even though we did not act like it. And God says, "YES!"

Each and every one of us will face God in one way or another, sooner or later. And Scripture tells us that when unbelievers die and face God, he will say, "I never knew you; depart from me." And that unbeliever gets a one-way ticket to a well-lit but hot eternity; redeemable immediately. But when a *believer* dies and faces God, Jesus steps in and says, "Father, we both know this person deserves an eternity in hell. But he has turned to me, placed his faith in me, and I have promised him that he will spend an eternity with me in heaven." And God, EVERY TIME, welcomes that person into his heaven.

THAT is intercession, and both types are a guaranteed work.

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But this second type of intercession needs more explanation. In this circumstance Jesus intercedes for us, and THIS intercession requires Jesus to plead for us all the time, constantly, until we die.

I injected this potentially unnecessary comment at this time because we need to clearly understand what is involved here. There is no question that God can forgive sin so sinners can be saved. And there is no question that God can forgive sin in a believer's life that is committed sometime subsequent to salvation.

This is the two-sided heart of intercession. As indicated above and repeated here for clarification, intercession comes in two flavors: one being a simple situation and the other being a little more complex. The first type concerns initial salvation. Jesus asks that God see his sacrifice on the Cross instead of the unbeliever's life. That is a guarantee - God will respect his Son's request and induct the unbeliever into the Family of God, reserving a place in heaven. And the second type of intercession occurs when the believer sins and then repents, asking forgiveness for that sin. Again, Jesus intercedes for the believer and we receive forgiveness again.

But there is another situation, which requires intercession from Jesus for the believer who dies while living in sin. Does this third intercession have the same guaranteed 100% success rate? Do all believers who die while living in sin automatically receive a "Get Out Of Hell Free" card? Are they held accountable for staying the course or for failing to do so?

The question is if God WILL forgive that believer of unconfessed sins. And if God DOES forgive unconfessed sins, are there any conditions or steps required of the believer before that forgiveness is applied?

Let me clarify this.

We accept by faith that Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sins. Now we are saved and destined to spend eternity in heaven. Then, sometime in the future, we turn away from God and voluntarily listen to the lies of Satan. Satan CANNOT snatch us away from God, but he can entice us with lies and we can listen to and believe his lies, and it is ALWAYS our choice to listen. In this way we are snared and trapped. And as long as we believe those lies, there is no way we can break free from Satan's power.

This is why Paul prayed that God would "grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth," which would then counteract the power of lies and allow the believer to approach God and repent, and once again enjoy his fellowship. And it is this prayer that Jesus offers to and requests of God in his petitions to his Father on our behalf.

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You see, Satan has absolutely no power over ANY believer. *At all! EVER!* Go back to the 16th Chapter of John, where Jesus explains the three-fold ministry of the Holy Spirit. *But Satan CAN LIE*, and the believer can *choose* to believe his lies. The result of believing those lies is that we depend on something, ANYTHING, other than Christ for the penalty for our sins, and we attempt to live under our own power rather than the power of the Holy Spirit. And Jesus is constantly engaged in intercession asking that God bring out a repentant spirit in the misled believer: repentant, because we should follow Jesus and his Truth, rather than Satan and his lies. *IF* we allow that repentant spirit to be raised up within us by God, *then* we can repent of the sin of believing the wrong one and we can turn away from Satan. But we cannot turn away from Satan, we CANNOT escape his traps and snares, as long as we believe him. So Jesus is always interceding for us, asking God to help us see the Truth and to help us repent for believing a lie.

But if we die before we confess our sins and repent, what happens then? Jesus will still intercede on our behalf, but what will be the result?

The success of this third type of intercession is what we have been discussing. It is the very center of the debate over Eternal Security.

I think we need some more Scripture here.

I am the true vine, and my father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears fruit, while every branch that does not bear fruit he prunes, so that it will be even more fruitful. [John 15:1-2, NIV]

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. [John 15:1-2, KJV]

I suspect that Jesus here is contrasting himself with the Jewish nation. Israel, in the Old Testament, is presented as the vine planted by God in several passages and in several ways. But Israel had a habit of falling away. And at least a few of those times, God judged Israel and pronounced judgment against it.

Jesus wanted, I believe, to show himself to be the true vine, the vine planted by God that can never fall away. As such, any and all branches on this vine will see constant fellowship and eternal life with God.

But in this passage, Jesus seems to suggest that there is no free lunch. We MUST: 1) abide in him, ***and*** 2) bear fruit. Anyone who does not abide in him ***and*** bear fruit will be cut off by God; removed from the vine and thrown away.

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And to underscore this, Jesus says it again.

If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

[John 15:6, KJV]

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, NIV]

Some people might say, "Ahah! These branches are cut off, but they are only *LIKE* a branch that is burned. It doesn't say that they are actually burned." Others might say, "Jesus says the branch is withered, indicating that it could not be grafted back into the vine, nor planted and used to produce another vine. This branch is cut off and rendered useless, and then is burned so it is out of the way."

Another passage that is commonly referenced in discussions of this issue is earlier in this same Gospel of John.

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.

[John 10:27-30, NIV]

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them to me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one.

[John 10:27-30, KJV]

These verses are probably the most standard fare in this discussion, offered as proof of Eternal Security; often offered as FINAL proof. Here, a little analysis will go a long way toward discerning what Jesus said, and what he DID NOT say.

As pretty much everyone agrees, Jesus here is using sheep to represent believers who belong to him, who have experienced salvation. Clearly Jesus has given these people eternal life, from the point of salvation and on into the eternal future.

But Jesus adds the statement, "neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand," and also, "out of my Father's hand." So there you have it - powerful proof that no one can pluck eternity in heaven away from any believer. Obviously, and clearly, we are safe in

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Christ's hands, as safe as in the Father's hands. We can never fall out and fall away during the tumultuous times we know as life and heaven knows as spiritual warfare.

But what does "pluck" mean? The Greek word used in the manuscript used by the King James translation team is *harpazo* [har-pad-zo]. In *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* and *Vine's Expository Dictionary* we find that *harpazo* means "to seize or take by force." It is a military word and suggests that Jesus will not, CANNOT, lose any believer as a casualty in this war between Satan and God. You and I don't have to worry about any forces beyond our control jerking us away from Jesus against our will.

We can see that absolutely NO ONE can "spoil" us, can capture us, can take us away from Jesus against our will. But this word *harpazo* does not in any way include the concept that we can never sneak away from Jesus, that we can never escape and join the other side intentionally and willfully. It would seem that this passage does not guarantee that we will remain in Christ's hands no matter what we do or how we live.

Jesus promised that we can NEVER be captured away from him. But Jesus did not claim that we no longer have a say in the matter. People turn traitor in every war, and escape to join the other side; apparently this is also true in this war.

It would seem that we CAN'T lose it but we CAN give it away!

Allow me for a moment to do something I have avoided up to this point. I am going to list some passages from a series of verses that I have received from a very wise and mature believer. This man is firmly in the Eternal Security camp, and he gave me this list as further proof of his position. I am going to give only a portion of his list and ask the reader to look them up. But I will address them without placing their content in this text:

John 3:18; John 5:24; John 6:37; Romans 6:23; II Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 1:13; Ephesians 4:20; Philippians 1:6

These are all excellent passages that relate directly or indirectly to our discussion. But with all due respect to my friend, not one of these passages support Eternal Security. I have had each one of them, plus a whole lot more, given to me over the years as clear "proof" of Eternal Security.

But they all have the same problem -- they have nothing to do with Eternal Security.

They do, however, all prove "**eternal salvation**" - the FACT that salvation is offered by God to everyone who responds in faith to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God, and this salvation is intended to last from the moment of spiritual birth into all eternity with no end.

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The salvation that God offers is eternal. But that fact has nothing to do with whether or not I can give it away, or whether or not I can receive it, live by it for a while, and then reject it by surrendering my will to Satan to do his bidding.

ETERNAL SALVATION IS NOT THE SAME AS ETERNAL SECURITY!

After all this writing, I think it is about time for some definitions. By now, you probably don't need any, but I think it is important that we are all on the same page.

Salvation: the result of accepting by faith the FACT that:

Jesus is the Christ, that

Jesus is the only begotten Son of the Father God in heaven, that

Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sins, that

Jesus rose from the dead to offer believers eternal life, and that

Jesus now sits in heaven at the right hand of God the Father, always making intercession in one form or another for believers.

The result of salvation, and part of it, is the baptism by the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ, which is the Church, and which made us part of the Bride of Christ, and gained us an eternal place in heaven with Jesus forever.

Redemption: an act by Jesus to purchase individuals out of Satan's marketplace and away from ownership by him; the price for which was paid by Jesus through his death, and the result of which was our release out of ownership by anyone and into freedom of personal choice.

Eternal Salvation: the process of spiritual regeneration and transformation that is intended by God to start at spiritual birth and to last forever

Eternal Security: the belief that, once one experiences salvation and is destined for an eternity in heaven, one cannot lose that salvation under any circumstance; not by accident, not by personal choice, and not against one's will through spiritual warfare; sometimes called "the Perseverance of the Saints"

Please Note Again: Eternal Salvation is not the same as Eternal Security.

In all of this discussion, one thing we have not touched on is the PURPOSE of our salvation. By that I mean, **WHY** are people saved?

The unthinking, knee-jerk response to that question (you are right - it was a trick question...) is so believers can spend an eternity in heaven with God. Obviously, there is no doubt that an eternity in heaven with God does result from our salvation experience. This is one of the many issues made absolutely clear in Scripture - we

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don't need to debate this. But I would submit this is the RESULT of salvation and not the PURPOSE of it. An eternity in heaven with Jesus is clearly a wonderful benefit of God's salvation, even a reward in some way, but I do not believe it is the purpose of salvation.

If this were the purpose of salvation, then God would have taken us home to heaven as soon as we were saved, claiming, "Mission Accomplished!"

I believe the purpose of salvation is to affect and infect the world of unbelievers, and it is the believer's privilege to be Ambassadors of Christ in this world.

When we receive salvation, Jesus hands us a reservation in heaven and an assignment for the time we remain on this earth: We are to be his hands and feet and his heart to a world that so desperately needs to meet Jesus.

Our changed lives, powered by the Holy Spirit, draw unbelievers to the Cross, and ultimately to heaven.

THIS, brothers and sisters, is the very reason we were not taken home to heaven at the moment we were saved: to help others SEE Jesus, TRUST Jesus, and GO HOME WITH Jesus is the highest and greatest purpose in all of Creation.

This is why Scripture places such a heavy emphasis on how believers live, on what we do, and on how we treat others!

We are Ambassadors of Christ, and we represent Jesus every day in every way. We are given all the tools we will ever need or want [see Ephesians 1:3] along with all the power and authority in the created universe [Matthew 28:18-20].

This is why Paul prayed the following:

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

[Ephesians 1:17-19, NIV]

We, you and I, believers all over the world, have an impact on how many people will go to heaven!

And that impact is the result of HOW WE LIVE!

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And how we live is a function of how much we fulfill Paul's prayer for the Ephesians.

If our lives reflect the power and love and grace of our Father in heaven, then people are drawn to Jesus and to the Cross. But if our lives reflect the selfishness and pride and lust of almost all the people of this world, then what attraction is there to Jesus and the Cross?

People would see no difference between what Jesus offers and what the world offers.

It is ESSENTIAL that people see a difference between what Jesus offers and what the world offers! And they see that difference by how we who are Ambassadors of Christ live our lives.

And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's Ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God.

[II Corinthians 5:19-20, NIV]

And how do we communicate this message of reconciliation? Paul tells us in the very next verse.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[II Corinthians 5:21, NIV]

This is why God predestined each and every believer to be the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. As we saw before, God didn't predestine WHO would go to heaven, but HOW we would go to heaven. And along with using the death of Christ to get us into heaven, God chose to have us reflect the life of Christ while we wait for the bus!

To put it another way, God predestined the PROCESS of salvation, and then he predestined the PURPOSE of salvation.

And it is the life of Christ in us that gives the QUALITY OF LIFE that attracts others to Jesus.

Most of Paul's letters are filled with exhortations to live in a Christ-like manner, or else warnings as to what would happen to us if we don't live like that.

WHY?

Because these exhortations and warnings are NOT to help US STAY headed toward heaven. They are so we can help OTHERS GET headed toward heaven.

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Yes, God is concerned with our ultimate arrival in heaven. But he is EVEN MORE concerned with the impact we have on those around us. This is why Scripture is so full of exhortations on how to live and warnings against how NOT to live.

God wants to take ALL of us, every man and woman who ever lived, to heaven!

He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

[II Peter 3:9, NIV]

God wants every man, woman, and child on the planet to spend an eternity in heaven with him. The most memorized Scripture passage in history makes that abundantly clear: John 3:16.

And the second most memorized Scripture passage in history, the Great Commission, tells us how God intends to accomplish this desire: Go and make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them. See Matthew 28:19-20.

Yes, God loves us all. Yes, God wants to take us all to heaven for an eternity. But how many people actually make it to heaven depends, in part, on those of us who are involved in discipleship. And for every disciple that is Soil Type Four [see the *Parable of the Soils* in Chapter Four of Mark], we can expect 30, 60, and even 100 additional people to spend an eternity in heaven with us.

We have the privilege and joy and honor of helping others become reconciled to God; of helping others in their own personal processes of becoming adopted as Children of God; of taking as many as possible with us when we go to heaven.

CONCLUSION

So what is the answer? Which side is correct?

How should I know? I said at the start of this that God left this issue unclear and obtuse.

But I CAN tell you how I see this doctrine. (You just *KNEW* I was going to do it, didn't you?)

God set out before he created the heavens and the earth with a Plan. He laid out the CONDITIONS of heaven (righteousness), the PROCESS to get there (salvation), and the PURPOSE of salvation (reconciliation).

And he divided history into different stages, which he used to implement his Final Plan for salvation incrementally. By that I mean, God revealed his Plan piece by piece during each stage of history, with each stage bringing us closer to the full revelation of God's Final Plan of Salvation.

Over three thousand years of history [HISTORY is HIS STORY] much of this plan was reduced to writing, which we know as the Word of God, or the Bible. And in the Bible, God laid out those Conditions, that developing Process, and that predestined Purpose he planned all along. And all Scripture was written with an eye toward the Purpose of salvation. To accomplish that purpose more effectively, God made certain that some concepts were presented incompletely at first, and some were a little murky, a little unclear. This was partially accomplished by revealing a little at the start, and more and more over time, and it was partially accomplished by writing things down in such a way that it made certain doctrines difficult to fully explore and fully explain.

Why did God make certain parts of his Final Plan difficult to understand? So that we would be drawn to dig more deeply into the theology of salvation, and understand it better. God knew that the better and more thoroughly believers understood salvation and its purpose, the more people would be in heaven with God for all eternity. And God wants A LOT of people in heaven with him for eternity!

So God made our initial salvation easy. And Paul made it simple. And mankind made it complicated!

We are fickle; we change our minds; we cannot commit. So our course to heaven is not straight, but filled with zigs and zags and turnabouts and circles.

Conclusion

So God had to compensate for BELIEVERS. Not because God misjudged things, or was taken by surprise, but because he wanted to show his grace and love, and allowed mankind to prove for him that even grace and love was not enough for mankind.

Those who refused to believe in God were predictable; they were facing away from God and were walking away from God. It was BELIEVERS that were unpredictable! They could be, and often were, facing in any direction at any time. Believers came in many flavors: luke-warm, on-again-off-again, backsliders, legalistic and rigid, and, of course, sincere followers.

This diversity of flavors disturbed many. Some began to doubt the very validity of salvation. "If it doesn't work long-term, it doesn't work," became the slogan of many doubters. God's Final Plan was being questioned by many, even as it spread like wildfire all over the world. So some believers with marketing skills made a suggestion: *"Make it impossible to lose and people will stop asking disturbing questions and then participate in even greater numbers."*

Enter Eternal Security. Most of our early Church Fathers didn't believe in this new doctrine. Those who did, couldn't agree on the doctrine, and our current church leaders are just as bad. But this new doctrine had a certain logic and a certain elegance to it that seemed to clarify certain issues and cloud certain questions. This seemed to be more acceptable. For some, that is!

God made our initial salvation easy. He gave us a permanent and perfect sacrifice to pay the penalty of, or atone for, our STATE of sinfulness as well as our ongoing and current ACTS of sinfulness. Then he gave us the faith to believe in that payment. Then he gave us his Holy Spirit to infuse the power and the discernment to live like Jesus while we are waiting to go to heaven.

It was mankind that messed things up: we exercised our free will, but in a weak and selfish manner. Because of this, some believers voluntarily "looked twice" at Satan, became ensnared in his traps, got themselves captured, became his spoils of war, and were turned to do his will. Maybe this lasted a few seconds; maybe this lasted a few years. But for most believers, it happened way too often. Yet God is still gracious and loving, and he allows us to repent, turn from those actions and attitudes that separate us from God, ask forgiveness, and then God welcomes us back into his fellowship.

For those of us who are stupidly and selfishly following our sinful desires, God planned before the foundations of the earth, and implemented with the death and resurrection of Jesus, his procedure for forgiveness on an almost automatic basis - "If we confess our

Conclusion

sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all our unrighteousness."

God is just that awesome! As many times as we need it, and as often as we need it, we can repent and ask forgiveness and we are instantly back in his presence, enjoying fellowship with him.

And God is just that consistent! As often as we sin, he requires us to confess, repent, and seek his forgiveness. He applied Christ's righteousness to our lives at our initial salvation, and we tainted that righteousness with our sin. And then God applies that righteousness again and again, as often as needed, when we ask him to.

While we are alive, we must show our repentance in order to experience fellowship with God. And that fellowship with God is always available to the believer who has dealt with his sins properly.

In fact, God is so good and so gracious that we only see a small part of it even while we experience all of it. He is gracious when we are sinners, allowing us to experience his love and forgiveness, resulting in our salvation. He is gracious while we live as Christians, making allowances for our unstable relationship with God through Christ's intercession. And he is even MORE gracious with us after death, allowing us to go to his heaven when we die no matter how badly we failed while we lived.

If we die during that time of sin and rebellion, God knows if we have actually turned away because of our weakness and stupidity and inability to stay the course for very long, or if we have shown a real commitment to the Adversary. We might live in sin because of our sinful desires, or we might live in sin because we have decided to follow Satan. God knows the difference, and he listens to Christ's intercession on our part. God lovingly welcomes us back if we repent before we die, or he listens to his Son, Jesus our Advocate, with grace in his heart should we die without repenting and asking forgiveness. But God knows the depths of our hearts and acts accordingly.

On the other hand, for those who have made what they intend to be a final commitment to go their own way, or to follow Satan (*they are in reality the same decision!*), and they die in that situation, well, "it is impossible to renew them again to repentance."

So which is it? Is the person standing in front of you a believer who is ensnared and currently serving Satan, incapable of being brought to repentance, and destined for hell? Or is that person a believer currently stuck in his selfishness and stupidity?

YOU DON'T KNOW!

Conclusion

You have no way of knowing. This is why Scripture in several places tells us to not judge [Gr-*krino*] if a person is going to hell or heaven just based on outward actions and perceived attitudes. We have neither the right nor the discernment to tell the difference. [see Matthew 7:1-2 and Romans 2:1, among other passages using Gr-*krino*.]

So why would God grant us such slack? Because God wants to fellowship with us for the rest of eternity.

If we as believers live in our sins, God grants us the opportunity to seek his forgiveness, time and time again. If we as believers die in our sins, God discerns if we would have repented had we lived long enough to do so. If God discerns we would have repented, Jesus pleads for us and God allows for Christ's righteousness to be applied to our lives one last time.

Remember that Greek word *proginosko* translated into the word foreknowledge? If God decides we would NOT have repented, Jesus still pleads for us but God says, "Jesus, your sacrifice was once applied to his life, and then many more times after that. But now he has committed his heart, exercised his will, and turned his life over to follow Satan. Your death on the cross, your sacrifice for his sins, no longer applies. And you cannot die again, you cannot be crucified again, so your righteousness cannot be applied again to this man again. I no longer know him."

Please understand this concept.

In researching and studying these issues, I have had an awesome experience with God. He has opened my eyes to see salvation from his perspective like I have never seen it before. And it has been incredible!

I have been a conservative Christian, fully surrendered and forgiven, and fully in touch with my humanity - my "sinful nature" - since June 9, 1972. I was sitting alone in my room at Azusa Pacific College at the start of a summer concert tour with a well-known Contemporary Christian music group (I had lied my way in!) when God invaded time and space and made my salvation a supernatural but very real experience.

Since that time I have been thrilled as God opened my heart and mind, deepened my understanding, and enriched my walk with him in wonderful and awesome ways. I have also watched as God allowed me to stumble, and even to fall, more than my share of times. And, of course, God kept me from stumbling so many times it is impossible for me to know, much less to count.

Yet each time I stumbled, I returned to him because he pursued me, calling me to him. And I experienced anew the love and beauty and fulfillment of his forgiveness, and I would marvel at how shallow and stupid I was and how infinite and loving he is.

Conclusion

Yet, in spite of more than 42 years of living and walking and experiencing the Creator of the Universe, during my time of writing this article, I have seen God open my eyes to comprehend his perspective on my sin and my salvation more than I could have ever expected. This has resulted in a closer and more consistent walk with God than I have ever known.

And all because I wanted to see if the Bible said I could lose it!

For some of you, this may be old news. For some of you, these thoughts have never entered your minds. For me, this has been so incredible that I can't keep my mouth shut. Or my pen still, as the case may be.

So here goes...

It was God. He was there when nothing else was: no stars, no planets, no people. Just God.

Somehow, Jesus and his Holy Spirit were there with him, because the Creation story in Genesis seems to indicate this is true. But don't ask me to explain it because I cannot.

But God was there. I don't know if he wanted it, or willed it, or had some other unknown motivation totally outside the experience and understanding of mankind. But God decided to create a universe consisting, in part, of stars, the heavens, the earth, and people.

And in there somewhere, God decided to create certain laws. He created physical laws to govern the physical universe. And he created spiritual laws to govern the spiritual universe.

God was perfect. By definition, everything God was and everything God did was perfect. Seriously, why would God do anything inconsistent with his character and nature? No matter what we think about it, "his house, his rules" applies here more than at any other time in history. So God was perfect. In fact, he was so perfect (*assuming that "perfect" can be "so"*) that even the average and mediocre were absent from him. Nothing less than perfect could exist in his presence.

Yet God was also a realist. He had already seen (many, many years into the future) our world with its horrors. So God created a specific set of spiritual laws, along with many others, that demanded a penalty (death) and a payment (blood sacrifice) for the mere presence of sin. It was only through a blood sacrifice that God could forgive sin, and remove any sin and imperfection from mankind so he could have fellowship with us.

Conclusion

And God created heaven as a place of perfection where no sin could exist and no sin needed forgiveness, where he could spend the rest of eternity WITH US apart from sin.

Only then did God create mankind. He created a male and a female version, so that he could reflect his own image in them. It took BOTH male and female before God could be satisfied that his image was all it could be through mankind. It was male and female that was the image of God, and not male OR female alone. No, Adam was not the image of God.

God created mankind so he could enjoy them, have fellowship with them, LOVE them. And God was a Being in Fellowship (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as described in Scripture), so he created mankind as a being in fellowship (Adam and Eve, also as described in Scripture).

However, there is a problem with wanting fellowship - fellowship requires that all who was involved WANT to be involved in that fellowship. Mankind was given free will so we could WANT to have fellowship with God, WANT to love God.

And from the start, mankind expressed our free will often. We proved just how fickle a created, limited, natural being we really were. We rebelled.

But God knew before all these things happened, before he even created anything, that mankind would be fickle, would rebel, would seek fellowship with anything other than God at the slightest opportunity. This is why God created a whole list of spiritual laws, beginning with forgiveness and the requirement of a blood sacrifice as payment for sins.

It was almost as if God KNEW the first spiritual law that would be needed would involve sin and require forgiveness.

Ya think?

Over the centuries and millennia, God revealed more and more of his spiritual laws to mankind. And most of all, God developed and expanded his spiritual laws relative to forgiveness because those seemed to be the laws most needed by us.

Yet all these blood sacrifices required by God's laws became cumbersome. Not that mankind didn't need forgiveness any more! But year after year, these sacrifices sure used up a lot of cattle and sheep!

And God was prepared. He predestined, planned from the beginning, a process or path for his followers. For a couple thousand years he hinted at it. And when he judged the time was right, God put in place his Perfect Sacrifice.

Conclusion

This Perfect Sacrifice didn't require repetition. No annual sacrifices; no annual sacrifices combined with feasts to make them more agreeable to those required to make sacrifice; no more sacrifices at all. EVER!

So God made allowances for mankind's continued sinful actions with a once in a lifetime sacrifice. This way, God could have uninterrupted fellowship with mankind. Right?

WRONG!

Mankind still interrupted fellowship with God with sin. Mankind still rejected a warm and loving relationship with the Creator of the Universe and turned towards all sorts of lesser and imperfect and sinful actions and attitudes.

Even with a predestined Plan and a Process ordained from the beginning and finally implemented at the right time, mankind couldn't follow it very long.

A permanent sacrifice did not equal a permanent fellowship.

Yet sin required sacrifice; transgression required payment. And God MUST reject imperfection of any type, especially willful sinfulness that has not been confessed and forgiven, while knowing that very rejection will reduce the number of people with whom he can fellowship and the amount of time he can fellowship with them.

If we have unconfessed sin in our lives, we cannot come into the presence of God. And if we cannot even get near him, we certainly cannot have fellowship with him.

But unconfessed and unforgiven sin destroys our fellowship with God. And if he can't fellowship with unconfessed and unforgiven sin, he certainly can't take it to heaven with him for an eternity.

Hence the constant need for intercession by Jesus, pleading our cases before a holy God, and asking for leniency. We could die at any moment, having unconfessed and unforgiven sins in our lives. And God, in his infinite knowledge and wisdom, can discern if we are merely being stupid and following our selfish desires for a time, or if we have intentionally and sincerely thrown away our salvation and chosen to pursue and follow Satan, the prince of this world.

God created a perfect world with nothing but unadulterated and unmitigated good in it. He desired to have fellowship with someone other than himself, so he created mankind for that purpose. And he gave mankind free will, the ability to choose, so mankind could WANT fellowship with God, and CHOOSE to experience it.

GOD GAVE MANKIND FREE WILL SO WE COULD CHOOSE TO LOVE HIM!

And mankind chose something else.

- God was loving and wanted fellowship
- God was holy, having no imperfection and allowing no imperfection.
- God was just, requiring a blood sacrifice to cover and hide mankind's sins.
- God was gracious, providing a Perfect Sacrifice to remove our sins once and for all, without which he could have no long-term fellowship with mankind.
- God was gracious, providing for us the faith necessary to accept that Perfect Sacrifice, experience that forgiveness, and enjoy that fellowship with God.
- God was gracious, providing a permanent, full-time Advocate for mankind, always interceding and petitioning God on our behalf to apply his forgiveness to us.
- God was gracious, providing an on-going, automatic process wherein we can confess our sins and repent of them, and they are removed from us, so that we are cleansed and made holy, fit once again for fellowship with a perfect and holy and awesome God.

GET THE IDEA THAT GOD WAS GRACIOUS?

We *deserved* nothing. We only exist because God wanted fellowship with us. The rest of his grace we COULDN'T deserve but HAD to receive in order for us to fellowship with a perfect God. All this was because God loved mankind. And his love was so huge, so supernatural, so powerful, so awesome, that it justified, even compensated, for its cost. This love cost him more than we could ever understand.

It didn't just cost God his Son. We could understand that. People who have children could understand at least a little of the pain involved in sacrificing a child.

But that was no where NEAR the full story. Jesus was part of the creation of the universe, and he died for what he created. Jesus was perfect, and he died for imperfect mankind, who had proven to be so imperfect so often. Jesus was sinless and without rebellion, and he died for a very sinful and rebellious people.

Think of falling into a cesspool, and feeling so filthy because of it. Similar but not even close to how filthy a perfect Jesus felt when he became sin for us.

Jesus, undeserving of death, died for mankind, undeserving of life.

Just so God could have fellowship with us for a little while here on earth, and then forever with him in heaven.

GOD REALLY WANTED FELLOWSHIP WITH MANKIND!

Conclusion

And we did nothing to deserve his love. All we needed to do to continue experiencing his love was WANT that love, SEEK that love, ABIDE in that love.

And we couldn't even do that.

We pursued almost anything, almost EVERYTHING, except that love and fellowship. Even the few of us who pursued that love, strayed from it all too frequently.

Every human being who grasps this concept, who understands even a small part of all this, which we so glibly call salvation, each one of us should fall on our knees in tears, in agony over the FACT that we don't deserve it, and in celebration that it is ours at no cost and at no effort.

But YOUR salvation and MY salvation IS NOT the whole picture.

God loves the whole world, each person in it, to that same extravagant, supernatural, unlimited extent. Yes, God loves those of us who have turned to Jesus in faith and have received forgiveness for our sins and experienced fellowship with a perfect and holy God.

But God loves everyone else just as much. He wants everyone to be adopted as sons and daughters into his Family. He wants everyone to desire fellowship with him, and he wants fellowship with everyone.

So God PREDESTINED every member of his family, a sort of unofficial requirement of each and every person adopted into his Family, to become Christ-like and manifest his godly character and nature.

Why?

So you and I and all those adopted into God's Family can play a role in bringing others into the Family.

God wants eternal fellowship with EVERYONE and he has granted us the AWESOME task and privilege of bringing others home with us.

Yes, God loves us. Yes, God wants fellowship with us. Yes, God has predestined one and only one path toward forgiveness and righteousness. Yes, God has predestined all believers to be confirmed to the likeness of that Perfect Sacrifice, Jesus. And YES, God wants us to come home to him for all eternity.

But God DEMANDS that we abide in him, walk with him, submit to him.

Why? Because when God sees one believer fall away, he knows of the 30 or 60 or 100 sinners who WOULD HAVE become believers had we not fallen away!

It is time believers UNDERSTAND that the harvest is reduced every time we fall, be it for seconds or for years. When we turn from God, someone out there who could have been drawn to the Cross by our life and testimony WAS NOT drawn to the Cross.

THIS IS WHY SCRIPTURE SPENDS SO MANY VERSES WARNING US TO NOT FALL AWAY! Not because I might miss out on an eternity in heaven, but because I AND THE HUNDREDS OF OTHERS God wanted to use me with might miss out on an eternity in heaven!

If God was concerned about each individual believer making it to heaven, then Eternal Security might make sense, by human logic.

But since God is ALSO concerned for the dozens and possibly hundreds of sinners coming to the Cross because of the life and testimony of each believer, then it makes MORE sense to slap us in the face with constant warnings about falling away!

When I choose sin and rebellion, when I choose to break my fellowship with God, I cause more damage to the Family of God than I could EVER imagine!

I may be the only Bible someone near me reads. Just how messed up is my translation?

This is why God has left the doctrine of Eternal Security unclear. God wants believers to have enough assurance to rest in his love and be confident in our eternity, but he also wants to slap us with enough warnings to keep us focused on the race toward heaven.

Complacency never won a race, nor did it ever win a soul.

Love God! Serve God! Worship God! And many around you will follow your example, whether or not you know it.

And God will get so much more joy out of having that many more people to fellowship with for all eternity!

This is the PURPOSE and RESULT of Eternal Salvation.

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