

Believe It!
Salvation: Can I Lose It?

If you Google the phrase “tragic loss” you’d find articles ranging from the destruction caused by the Italian earthquake this past May, to the loss of homes in wild fires, to an article on the theft of Dr. Phil’s 57 Chevy convertible last Sunday evening.

We’d like to think that life is certain and that we can count on some things being constants, but the fact is nothing in this life is guaranteed. In fact, we should expect to experience painful losses. We don’t want them. We don’t look forward to them. They hurt us deeply. But losses are going to happen until Jesus Christ returns and makes all things new.

Is anything permanent? Do we have anything that’s not subject to tragic loss? Ben Franklin wrote in a 1789 letter, “In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.” But are there times when the kingdom of God intersects with this world to change that equation? Are there things that we can be certain of because the eternal God is involved?

We are in a series we’re calling *Believe It*. What we’re trying to answer is: What do we as Christians believe?

Why do we as Christians believe what we believe? And what difference does it make to our everyday lives?

We’re using FCC’s statement of faith as our guide. Our goal has been this: to equip you to be able understand and explain what the Bible teaches in the significant areas of Bible doctrine.

So far we’ve looked at the Bible, God, Jesus Christ, The Holy Spirit, and salvation. Today we’re going to unpack what I believe is one of the most important biblical teachings, the question of eternal security.

Is it possible to be sure of our relationship with God? If it is, what do we base our confidence on? Is it possible to lose our salvation? If it is, that would be the ultimate tragic loss!

Our Statement of Faith reads this way: Every true child of God possesses eternal life and is, therefore, safe and secure for all eternity. Being justified by faith, sanctified by God, and sealed by the Holy Spirit, he cannot lose his salvation. However, a Christian can, through sin, lose his fellowship, joy, power, testimony, reward, and incur the Father’s chastisement. Relationship is eternal, being established by the new birth. Fellowship, however, is dependent upon obedience.

Let's look at the Bible this morning and see what it has to say and also why eternal security becomes so important.

I. Salvation Means Deliverance

Webster defines "salvation" as "preservation or deliverance from harm, ruin, or loss." That's a far cry from "probation" which means "the process or period of testing or observing the character or abilities of a person in a certain role."

Turn to II Timothy chapter 1 page 1167

Last week we took an in depth look at the doctrine of salvation. If you missed last week I'd encourage you to get the CD and listen to it because it's foundational to this week's message. The doctrines of salvation and eternal security go hand in hand.

But what we saw so clearly last week was God's forgiveness can't be earned by anything we do. We are undeserving sinners who can only be forgiven through God's undeserved mercy based on the cross.

For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. (Romans 5:10, 11)

According to the Bible, enemy sinners are made right with God through Christ's death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead.

Now here's a challenge based on the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Read verses 8-10

Here's what the Bible says about believers. He *has* saved us. The word that's used here is the Greek word *sozo*. It comes from the word *sos* which means "safe" or "well."

Without getting too technical, this happens to be an aorist participle. Aorist tense in Greek normally implies a completed action and that's why verse 9 says "has saved."

Galatians 3:13 says, *Christ has redeemed us*. Ephesians 2:8 says, *By grace you have been saved*. Titus 3:5 explains, *according to His mercy He saved us*. John 5:24 says a *believer, has passed from death into life*.

Salvation is an action that happens at a point in time when we put our trust in Jesus Christ and His cross.

Last month a lifeguard at a Portland Oregon pool heard a little girl say, “My sister’s at the bottom.” Immediately he dove into the water found the girl 12 feet down, brought her to the top, and gave her CPR. The headline said, *Wilson Pool lifeguard hailed as 'heroic' after saving 13-year-old girl*.

If he would have looked down in the water and started yelling, “Swim. You can do it,” The headline would have been different.

If he would have brought her up but not given her CPR (she wasn’t breathing at all) the headline wouldn’t have used the word “saved.”

Salvation means deliverance and biblical salvation means complete and total deliverance from the penalty of sin.

I. Salvation Means Deliverance

II. The Motivation For Godliness Is Grace

Early on in my Christian experience I had several people try to convince me that if we’re not careful, we can lose the gift of eternal life. Obviously I wanted to know what the Bible said, so I took my time and tried to carefully understand the scripture.

One of the arguments that I kept hearing and reading revolved around the motivation for godly living. The argument goes like this: If you tell people that their salvation is guaranteed by the cross, then there won’t be anything to motivate them to live in a God-honoring way. They would ask me, “Are you saying that a person who is a child of God can just go out and live as they please? You mean I could go out and murder somebody and still go to heaven?”

I’m not sure why they always pick murder. I don’t know any Christians that have gone out and murdered anybody. But here’s what I came to realize. You can line up all the Christians from the church down the street that teaches that you can lose your salvation. Then you can line up the Christians from this church. And guess what?

I’d go with the commitment and morality of our people any day. We all fail at times. So do they. But we’re not out terrorizing the neighborhood because we believe that our

salvation is secure.

There's something else much more powerful than the threat of judgment that motivates us. What is it?

Turn to Titus chapter 2 page 1170

Here's a quote from the web site, EvangelicalOutreach.org: "Underneath the lie of once saved always saved is Satan's Masterful follow up that is leading millions down the road to hell! As he said to Eve in the Garden concerning the issue of sin. "You shall not surly die!" (Genesis 3:4) Thus he is saying to the vast majority of professing Christians today, giving them; The Gospel of Security in Sin!"

Read verses 11-14

Look what the Bible is saying here. It's not the wrath of God that teaches those who have trusted Christ as Savior, it's the grace of God. It's not the Law of God or the fear of God, although both are healthy to understand, it's the grace of God.

Knowing that Christ died for me and that my sins are forgiven in Christ doesn't make me say, "Why should I live for God, I'm forgiven anyway." It teaches me to peruse righteousness.

In fact, the standards of grace are infinitely higher than the standards of law. God's law said *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. And: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* (Luke 10:27)

That's a pretty tall order isn't it? Love God with everything that's in you and love your neighbor with the same passion and intensity as you already love yourself.

I believe we tend to read those verses and say, "That's nice in theory, but it doesn't work for me so I'm not even going to try."

It's a tall order but if you think about it, it's all on a human level. Love God with what's in you. Love your neighbor with the level of love you have for yourself. That's human love.

Now compare that with Jesus' command under grace... *This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.* (John 15:12)

Try this one: *Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us.* (Ephesians 5:1,2)

Or this one: *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her...*(Ephesians 5:22)

See the difference? See why people who say “too much talk about grace leads to loose living” don’t have the slightest idea what grace really says.

It’s not too much talk about grace that’s the problem, it’s not enough. It’s a misunderstanding of the demands and the power of grace.

When we really get it. When we realize that the lofty standards of grace are on a divine level, it quickly becomes obvious to us that we’re going to need God’s power to carry them out.

Follow this: Whenever there’s a failure in the life of a believer it’s due to dependence on self, instead of God. We are responsible to yield to the control of God.

True righteousness is more than being good. It’s being godly. It’s having a regard for God in everything.

God’s grace is the teacher that shows us God’s standards and God’s grace empowers us to reach for those standards.

I. Salvation Means Deliverance

II. The Motivation For Godliness Is Grace

III. The Answer Is Always The Gospel

When you put people together who are on opposite sides of this issue, usually what happens is they marshal all the verses that seem to prove their point.

There are verses that clearly say that salvation can’t be lost and there are verses that seem to say it can. The real answer to the question isn’t about who can come up with the most verses to prove their point. The real answer lies at the heart of what the Gospel is all about.

If I read a verse that at first glance seems to be teaching something that goes against the overall theme of scripture then I know that I need to take a closer look.

Here's a prime example. **Turn to Galatians chapter 5 page 1144**

Galatians is a passionate letter written by an apostle named Paul to several church congregations in Asia Minor. Paul wrote from Corinth about 52 AD. So this is only 20 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It was only 20 years, but already there was confusion about the most important message in the universe, God's message of salvation.

God's message of salvation is by grace through faith. But since all the original Christians were Jewish people they struggled with what to do with the law of Moses.

When the message of salvation through Jesus Christ broke out and started spreading among non-Jews, some of the stalwarts told the non-Jews that the only way to be saved was to first adopt the Old Testament laws.

The people that lived in Galatia were non-Jews. Paul had preached Jesus Christ plus nothing. Other people came in after him and told the people they needed to be circumcised and keep all the ceremonial laws of God.

Now listen to this. **Read 1-4**

Now follow this. This is a typical comment by a Bible student who believes that you can lose your salvation.

"The deceitful eternal security teachers declare a partial truth about salvation as the whole truth They teach we are saved by grace not by works (Eph. 2:5-9), but they stop there! They never teach that Christians can fall from the grace that saves to the point where Christ is of no value."

The implication is that if you sin as a Christian you fall away from the saving grace of God.

That's a contradiction in terms. Grace is unmerited favor. You can't deserve grace. If you can't deserve it then how could you do something to fall away from it? We'd all be

in trouble if that were true.

The web site *lookinguntojesus.net* says “among the most prevalent of false doctrines today is that once a person is saved, that salvation cannot be lost. Below are listed 36 Bible texts which illustrate that one who has been saved can fall from the grace bestowed by God.” Of course Galatians 5:4 is right there on the list.

Notice the Bible doesn't say “All of you people who sin have fallen from grace.”

It says, “All you people who are trying not to sin are fallen from grace. It's you who are trying to live out a religion of human effort that are fallen from grace.”

See, it doesn't matter what it is that you imagine you have to do to hold onto God's forgiveness; baptism, communion, joining a church, living a certain lifestyle then you've fallen from grace.

Here's the answer to the whole debate. It's summed up in a question and answer in Acts 16. *And he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.”* (Acts 16:30, 31)

The gospel message is we can't do it so God did it for us. We can't pay for sin so God sent His only begotten Son to pay the price for sin in full.

We are totally helpless and totally undeserving.

If I could lose my salvation because I stopped being worthy of it then I would have to have been worthy of it in the first place.

I wasn't worthy before God forgave me. I wasn't worthy the day God forgave me. I won't be worthy for all eternity.

Here's who's worthy in eternity:

You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created. (Revelation 4:11)

You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation. (Revelation 5:9)

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing! (Revelation 5:12)

You can't get any clearer than this: *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.* (Ephesians 2:8, 9)

We don't boast in ourselves because there's nothing to boast about. Paul wrote: *But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.* (Galatians 6:14)

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IV. Our Hope Is The Promises Of God

I have a special place in my heart for new Christians. They're so excited, but they're so vulnerable. A number of years ago we lived in an apartment and there was a woman who lived upstairs who really struggled. She had a number of things going on in her life and she was a member of a religious group that taught you could lose your salvation. She had no assurance of her relationship with God. She was always downtrodden and rejected.

One day we gave her a copy of Dick Seymour's book 'The Gift of God.' It gave a simple, straightforward presentation of the message of salvation by faith alone.

A couple of days later she knocks on our door, and this is no exaggeration, she was glowing. She said, "I finally understand what you've been trying to explain to me. I'm forgiven in Christ. I'm free because of Christ."

I've seen a lot of transformed lives over the years but I don't know that I've ever seen one so dramatic as this woman.

That lasted 2 weeks. The next time we saw her she was depressed and despondent. Worse than before. And I'll never forget what she said. "I went to my prayer group and they told me the whole eternal security thing was a Baptist lie."

What happened? Christ had set her free. She was ecstatic because she could finally know she had eternal life. Her hope was in God and at His right hand are pleasures forever more. Then she had all of her hope taken away. The rug was pulled right out from under her.

We moved shortly after that and lost contact but if I could have had more time I would have pointed her continually back to the promises of God. And I have to believe that the Holy Spirit who was in her would eventually show her what she had in Christ and restore her confidence.

But at that point she was back to looking to herself and when we look to ourselves and we're really honest we get discouraged. The Bible says we're supposed to look to Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.

Listen, if we could lose our salvation by what we do there's not a person sitting in this room who would be saved! If a person thinks that salvation can be lost because of sin and they think they're saved that's the height of arrogance. I'd say to that person, "You don't begin to understand the holiness of God or the deceitfulness of sin."

Here's what really happens. We put our faith in Jesus Christ and we're forgiven. God's Spirit works in our life and promotes growth and maturity. We start getting closer to God. And the closer we get to God the more we're struck with our own unworthiness. Follow this. I want us to look at 3 verses. These are in chronological order. They're all from the hand of the apostle Paul and they're all a comment on how he sees himself before God. Notice what happens the closer he gets to his Lord.

I Corinthians 15 page 1129 Read verse 9

Ephesians 3 page 1147 Read verse 8

I Timothy 1 page 1163 Read verse 15

The closer we get to God, the more our own unworthiness becomes obvious. The more our own unworthiness becomes obvious, the more we realize the wonder of God's grace. The more we realize the wonder of God's grace the tighter we'll cling to the promises of God's forgiveness and the less confidence we'll have in the flesh.

Can we be sure of anything besides death and taxes? Yea, we can be absolutely sure that our sins are forgiven and that we have a relationship with the living God both now

and in eternity and that confidence comes through Jesus Christ.

Does God call us to holy living? Absolutely, the Bible is crystal clear. Does God call us to look at our own lives to determine if we're really saved? Be real careful there or you'll end up like our friend in the apartment complex.

God calls us to believe His great and precious promises. We're so often up and down. God's promises are the one steady constant.

For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us