

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“. . . Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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IN HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE

Part 2 - How To Stay Saved

by Ted J. Clarke

INTRODUCTION

Last month's article discussed "How to be Saved." This month we consider "How to Stay Saved." In both articles we contend that God's grace has done for us what we could never do, providing salvation through Christ's blood on the cross (Romans 5:1-2; Ephesians 2:8-10). Churches of Christ are in general agreement with other religious groups that profess Christianity on that point. However, these religious groups take issue with us when we contend also that God has given each person a responsibility to do certain things in order to receive and keep salvation. In reality, one who opposes the necessity of obedience in order to be saved is opposing God and His Word. If Jesus said in Mark 16:16, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," and He did, then one who says a person does not have to be baptized to be saved is in opposition to Christ. Further, if Hebrews 5:9 says, "he [Jesus] became the author of eternal salvation unto all that obey him," and it does, then those who say one does not have to obey Christ in order to be saved are denying the Word of God.

In this article we will prove that one who becomes a **Christian must continue to obey God's will in order to stay in a state of salvation**. We invite you to examine with us what the Bible teaches about the statement often made that: "Once saved, always saved." Can this claim be sustained by the Scriptures? If you think this statement is true, please continue your study with us.

CONTINUING FORGIVENESS OF SINS

Sam Morris, Baptist preacher in Stamford, TX wrote an tract

entitled, "Do A Christian's Sins Damn His Souls"? Here is a quote from that tract: "We take the position that a Christian's sins do not damn his soul. The way a Christian lives, what he says, his character, his conduct, or his attitude toward other people have nothing whatever to do with the salvation of his soul . . . And all the sins he may commit from murder to idolatry will not make his soul in any more danger." Mr. Morris may have been trying to exalt Christ by making faith alone in Him as the only essential in salvation, but he has actually perverted what it means to have faith in Christ by putting such an unscriptural meaning on faith. In the Bible **saving faith is always a faith which obeys, not faith alone**. Luke 6:46 notes that Jesus said, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" James 2:24 also claims, "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." I'm not certain that any of our readers hold to Morris' erroneous doctrine that Christians cannot be lost, but let us investigate what the Scriptures teach.

It is clear that our sins **do** separate us from God (cf. Isaiah 59:1-2). We showed in last month's article what one must do to become a Christian and receive forgiveness of past sins, but let us here consider what happens when Christians sin. A sincere question might be, "Do Christians sin?" The apostle John was writing to Christians when he stated, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us . . . If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (1 John 1:8, 10). That is very clear, is it not? Christians sin, including apostles, for you note

that John includes himself in the personal pronouns "we" and "us." Since "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), how does a Christian receive forgiveness and avoid eternal separation from God? Do we have to do anything? The apostle John answers, "Yes!"

Christians **can** receive continuing forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ, **but such forgiveness is conditional**. Being cleansed from sins we commit as Christians is conditioned upon one's walk in life. John says to Christians, *If we say that we have fellowship with him [God], and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin*" (1 John 1:7). Walking in the light means that one's normal course of life is dedicated to trying to do God's will in all things; but, according to this verse, it is possible for one whose normal walk is in the light to occasionally sin. Walking in the light is not a matter of perfection, for John has said that all Christians sin and that we lie if we say we do not sin. If doing God's will is the normal course of our lives as Christians, we are headed in the right **direction** even if we do not attain **perfection** (sinlessness). The implication is that one who is once saved as a Christian, cannot go back to walking in the darkness of making sin his/her normal way of life and expect to have Christ's blood cleanse them from that way of life. This harmonizes with Second Peter 2: 20-22, which also shows Christians can be lost after having been saved.

John requires another condition for being forgiven, "**If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness**" (1 John 1:9). The little word "if" (Continued on page 2)

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expresses a condition. One must "confess [his/her] sins" in order to be forgiven and cleansed. What "if" one does **not** do so? Will you say that God will forgive sins that Christians will not confess when His Word makes confession a condition of forgiveness? Some have the audacity to add to or subtract from God's Word, but they will pay a heavy penalty for it (cf. Revelation 22:18-19). These matters alone are enough to prove that one who becomes a true New Testament Christian can so sin as to be finally lost, if he/she is unwilling to meet the conditions God sets for continuing cleansing.

BIBLICAL PROOF THAT "ONCE SAVED" DOES NOT MEAN "ALWAYS SAVED"

Despite Mr. Morris' claims that "a Christian's sins do not damn his soul," there is proof in Scripture that the opposite is true, that a Christian can commit sin which, if not forgiven, will condemn his/her soul. In Acts 8: 5-24 there is absolute proof that a Christian can so sin as to be lost. Philip, the evangelist (cf. Acts 6:5, 21:8), had gone to Samaria and "preached Christ unto them" (8:5). Among those who heard Philip and saw

the miracles he performed was man named Simon, who practiced sorcery and had deceived the people of Samaria into thinking that he had "the great power of God" (verses 6-11). "But when they [Samaritans] believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done" (verses 12-13). Luke, who wrote the book of Acts as well as his gospel account, clearly states, "Simon himself believed [and] was baptized." Jesus had said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). It will do no good to say Simon was never truly saved, for the inspired writer Luke said, "Simon himself believed **also**" (Acts 8:13). What does the "also" mean, if it does not mean that Simon believed just like the other Samaritans? One cannot call into question the genuineness of Simon's faith without "also" calling into question the faith of the other Samaritans! Scripture says Simon was a believer as much as any other Samaritan who believed and was baptized.

The account continues by telling of the coming of the apostles Peter and John, who came to Samaria to impart miraculous spiritual gifts to the Samaritan believers (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:4-12). While Philip could perform miracles, because he had received that power from the apostles laying hands on him (Acts 6:5-6), he could not pass on that power to another. Only the apostles could do this (Acts 8:14-17). "And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:18-19). The apostle Peter's response shows the serious nature of Simon's sin and what he was to do about it, but Peter never stated or implied that Simon was never saved to begin with. Peter said, "Thy money perish with thee,

because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou has neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right with God" (verses 20-21). Luke recorded that Simon was saved, but he also records Simon's fall from God's grace by his sinful greed. At the point of Simon's sin his heart was not right with God. When Peter said to Simon, a Christian, "Thy money **perish** with thee," he taught clearly that a Christian can so sin as to be lost!

The sincerity of Simon's faith is seen in his reply to Peter's teaching as to what he had to do to be forgiven of this sin. Peter told Simon, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me" (verses 22-24). Peter did not tell Simon that he had never been saved, but that his lust for power had moved him to commit sin, the likes of which would cause him to "perish" if he did not repent and pray for God to forgive him. Simon was not told that his belief in Christ and his baptism were not genuine. He was treated as a Christian who sinned and would be lost if he did not repent and pray for forgiveness. This is precisely in line with what we previously learned from First John 1:7-10. God will forgive the sins of a Christian through the blood of Christ, **if** we confess them. Such a confession, according to Acts 8: 22, includes repentance and prayer to God as conditions Christians must meet in order to receive continuing forgiveness and to stay in a saved condition. If you deny this, please answer this question, "Would Simon have remained in a saved condition if he had refused to do what Peter told him to do?" You know he would have been lost. This account of Simon in Acts 8: 5-24 proves that "once saved" does **not** mean "always saved." The impossibility

(Continued on page 3)

of falling from God's saving grace is not taught in the Bible (cf. Galatians 5:4). How thankful we can be that even though we sin as Christians, our loving and gracious God has made a way for us to receive forgiveness, **if** we comply with the conditions He sets forth.

WORSHIP AND SERVICE TO GOD AND MAN

The first converts to Christianity "*continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers*" (Acts 2: 42). Would they have needed to do this? Once they were saved, was there anything they needed to do to **stay** saved? We have already shown that staying saved required doing what God said in order to receive continuing forgiveness of sins, but what about worshipping God and serving our fellow man? Is that essential in order to remain saved? Indeed it is!

First, God seeks our worship and this must be done "*in spirit and in truth*" (John 4: 23-24). Worship to God must come from our hearts (spirit) and be according to the truth of God's Word (Matthew 15:8-9). This assembling together as the Lord's church to worship on the Lord's Day, the first day of every week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2), is a matter we are warned not to "forsake" (Hebrews 10:25). These assemblies consist of the Lord's Supper, preaching, prayer, singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, and contributing financially to promote the Lord's work (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23-34; 16:1-2; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16 et al.).

Second, God's grace through Christ requires that we live moral lives in harmony with the teaching of God's Word. Paul said, "*denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world*" (Titus 2:11-12). The apostle Paul also gave several lists of common sins from which Christians must abstain (Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-

21 et al.). Paul said, "*they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God*" (Galatians 5:21; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10). The apostle also noted that while some of the Corinthian Christians had formerly practiced some of these sins [*"and such were some of you*" (1 Corinthians 6:11)], they could no longer do so, for those who do are considered "unrighteous" and they "*shall not inherit the kingdom of God*" (verse 9). Paul's letters to Christians and churches frequently warn them not to participate in sexual sins and other lusts of the flesh (Ephesians 5:1-5; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8). Remember that Paul is writing to Christians, telling them to abstain from these sins, and he says, "*For this ye know, that no [such person engaging in these sins] . . . hath any inheritance in the kingdom of God and Christ*" (Ephesians 5:5). As an additional warning Paul told the Ephesian Christians, "*Let no man deceive you with vain words; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience*" (verse 6). Do not let anyone teach you that Christians cannot so sin as to be finally lost! That is the Devil's lie (cf. Genesis 3:4).

Third, Jesus taught that we must love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:39). The last six of the Ten Commandments, dealing with Israel's relationships with others, are repeated in substance in the New Testament (Ephesians 6:2-3; 1 John 3:15; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 4:25, 28; 5:2,5; Colossians 3:5). See also Romans 13:8-10. We owe it to our fellow man to teach him the truth of the gospel of Christ (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16), and if we do not do it we will be lost (cf. Ezekiel 3:17-21; 33:7-9). Jesus also taught that our final salvation will be affected by our willingness to forgive others (Matthew 6:14-15) and our willingness to assist those in need (Matthew 25: 31-46). The clear teaching of the New Testament is that if those claiming to be children of God do not nurture a loving relationship with and serve our fellow man, we will be lost

eternally.

Fourth, the Scriptures teach that the way one performs in his/her role affects one's salvation. Anyone who has the responsibility of providing for one's family and does not do so is said to have "*denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel*" (1 Timothy 5:8). Wives, husbands, and children are given specific instructions as to their respective roles in the family (Ephesians 5:21-6:4). In a somewhat shorter version of Paul's teaching on this subject to another church, he warns, "*But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons*" (Colossians 3:25). These things **are written to Christians.**

CONCLUSION

As we noted in the beginning of this article, all Christians sin, some more than others and some of us in different ways than others, but we all sin (1 John 1:8, 10). If we do not receive forgiveness for sins we commit as Christians, we will be lost, for sin brings spiritual death (Romans 3:23; 6:23). However, we have seen in this study that while it is **possible** for a Christian to so sin as to be lost eternally, such a fate is not **necessary**.

The manner in which we can be cleansed of sins we commit (even though we are Christians) is to, "confess our sins" (1 John 1:9), and "repent" of such sins, meaning that we have a change of mind about committing those sins and change our lives accordingly to do what God's Word teaches (Acts 8:22). Repentance means either that we will quit doing what God has prohibited, or we will begin doing the good things God has commanded. Then, we will "pray to God" that our sins "may be forgiven" (Acts 8:22). Oh, what a loving God and great Savior we have! We can live in true hope of eternal life, both in becoming a Christian by being saved, and staying saved by living as Christians are taught in God's Word. Please contact us if we can assist you to have this **hope of eternal life.**



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Our Hope Is In Christ

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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