

# ONCE SAVED, ALWAYS SAVED? <sup>1</sup>

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For this reason, it is extremely necessary that we continue to give attention to what we have heard, so that we never drift away (Heb. 2: 1. *My translation*).

## WE NEED HONESTY!

A rich & famous American family commissioned a well-known author to write their history, but they insisted he should soft-pedal on the case of one particular family skeleton they wanted firmly locked in a cupboard out of public sight .

You see, the late Uncle William was a real 'black sheep', an embarrassment to their good name. Uncle William's life of crime ended with his execution in the electric chair in the 1920's.

"Don't come straight out and write *that*", the biographer was instructed, 'just skirt around it.' So, this is what the biographer wrote in their official family story:

"Uncle William occupied a chair of distinction in applied electronics in one of our leading government institutions. He was held to the post by the closest of ties, and his untimely death came as a real shock."

Some folks can't handle the truth! Today, I want to ask a serious, searching question. And unlike that family, I have no interest in watering down, dressing up, soft-peddling, or sugar-coating the question that has exercised earnest Christians for centuries: Once saved, are we always saved? OSAS for short.

Let me put that question this way: As one who has heard the Gospel of Christ, and trusted in his all-sufficiency, as one who has trusted that Christ died for your sins, and that God raised him from the dead for your justification, are you, am I, thereby automatically guaranteed eternal security with no possibility of being lost to the Kingdom of God at the last? I admit this a disturbing question for any believer who takes their faith and love for Christ seriously!

Now, it has to said, there are millions of Christians around the world who take solace in the teaching, that once saved, you are always saved. They have been taught, it has to be said, by very godly and intelligent Biblical scholars that, because God chose and predestined Christians to salvation before we were born, that therefore, anybody God calls to Himself must, indeed will be saved regardless of how they walk in the meantime.

For them the Christian is one who has been predetermined, predestined to be saved. Saved now means eternally safe! Once you are in God's grace you are always in grace, for grace is unmerited favour. You didn't earn your salvation in the first place, therefore you can't unmerit it either. Once you step onto the salvation escalator you will be carried to the top and step straight through the golden gates of glory! "Once saved, you are always saved!" Is this true?

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<sup>1</sup> This is a message I preached at the Mardon Road Church of Christ (Life Only in Christ) in Hamilton, New Zealand on Sunday 30th June, 2019.

## YOU CAN'T HAVE BOTH!

While writing his book *Once Saved, Always Saved?* David Pawson, well-known international writer and speaker was taking the train to visit his publisher. <sup>2</sup> At Clapham Junction a certain man boarded his carriage and sat down at the far end. This man stared at Pawson for some minutes before walking down the aisle and taking a seat facing him. The conversation went like this:

"I think I recognise you. Are you a preacher?"

"Yes. Where would you have seen me?"

"Fifteen years ago, someone brought me to Guildford to hear a preacher and I think it was you."

"It almost certainly was. Are you a Christian?"

"Yes. [pause] Can I ask you something?"

"I can't guarantee an answer, but what's the question?"

"Well, it's like this --- I've left my wife and I'm now living with another woman."

"Why did you leave your wife?"

"Because I met this other woman and fell in love with her."

"So what do you want to know?"

"If I get properly divorced and marry this other woman, would that put it right in God's sight?"

"No, I'm afraid it wouldn't."

"Then what would?"

"Leaving this woman and returning to your wife."

"I thought you'd say that."

"I believe it's what Jesus would say if you asked him."

This produced a silence between the men. By now the train was slowing down for Waterloo and Pawson realised he probably only had a minute or two more with the man. Pawson wanted to kindle that fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom, so he reopened the conversation with,

"You have a difficult choice to make."

"What's that, then?"

"You can either live with this woman for the rest of this life or with Jesus for all the next, but you can't have both."

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<sup>2</sup> Taken from the Prologue in David Pawson's book, *Once Saved, Always Saved? A Study in Perseverance and Inheritance*. Hodder & Stroughton, Gt Britain, 1966. I have had the great privilege of listening to David preach on a couple of occasions, and have benefited greatly from my two private conversations with him.

The man's eyes filled with tears and he jumped onto the platform and disappeared into the crowd. Pawson testifies he felt a little of what Jesus must have felt when the rich young ruler left him. Pawson prayed the man would never be able to forget what he told him until he had repented.

So, was Pawson right in what he said? Did he tell the man the truth or did he just frighten him with a lie? As Pawson writes, [What he really wanted was an assurance that his sin would not affect his salvation. This I could not give him.](#)<sup>3</sup>

Yes, there are multitudes who sit in churches this very morning who are taking their salvation for granted all the while living a double life and flirting with self-indulgence and wilful disobedience.

They will tell you. "I came to Christ at a Billy Graham Crusade 30 years ago, 'got saved' and I am on my way to heaven", yet their behaviour shows no concern for the people of God, for the things of God.

They will tell you. "I made my decision for Christ and I prayed the sinner's prayer and I was baptised many years ago, so yes, praise God I am saved". And yet today, right now, they give no evidence that they are walking with God, no evidence they have a real relationship with the Lord.

They will tell you. there is no possibility of final disqualification by falling off the "salvation escalator" once you have stepped on it. Underneath are God's everlasting arms. God is faithful. He cannot fail in His purposes. And didn't Jesus himself assure us that no one is able to snatch His sheep from his hand? Yes, they will assure you, no matter what our lifestyle post conversion, we cannot fall off the "salvation escalator" and will inevitably arrive at heaven's gates of gold! [Once saved, we are always saved!](#) I ask again, is this so?

## THE RIVER OF GRACE

Let's put our question to the writers of the NT. Let's start with [Hebrews](#). "Sir, we need to know. Is it possible to enter a saving relationship with God through Christ, yet to finally be lost? Is it possible once we are swimming in God's great big river of grace to get swept out to the sea of destruction? ["Once saved, always saved"?](#)" The pastor to the Hebrews answers --- [For this reason we must pay much greater attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it](#) (Heb. 2: 1 NASB).<sup>4</sup>

That's pretty clear, isn't it? Those who [have heard](#) the Gospel-word may imperceptibly [drift away](#).

There are some who argue he is talking to people who are not, or never were, Christian believers. But that is special pleading, for observe: This pastor includes *himself* in the warning! He says [we](#) must pay close attention, for [how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation \(v. 3\)?](#) He directs his warning *to himself* as well as to his readers!

We know he is writing to *Christian believers* for he calls them, ["holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling"](#) for whom Jesus is ["the Apostle and High Priest of our confession"](#) (Heb. 3:1,6). He *is* talking to Christians. And he is admonishing and including himself!

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p2

<sup>4</sup> You will note the last two words *from it* are in italics, which means the translators have inserted words not in the original Greek MSS. They are trying to be helpful and supply what they think is the intention, but in this case the extra words are not necessary, and in fact, detract from what is being said.

So, the warning is not given to those who have failed to *arrive* at a proper relationship with God through Christ, but to believers who are in danger of *departing* from their present relationship through neglect. For him, the danger of slipping away from **the things which we have heard** (the Gospel), is very real.

This warning is not given to pretend believers! *Christian*, don't drift away from your salvation!

It's easy, isn't it, to get a little slack in our walk with the Lord. The pressures of daily living crowd in.

It's easy, isn't it, to stay away from worshipping regularly with God's people? Other things call.

It's easy isn't it, to watch questionable movies, to compromise by saying what's wrong with pornography and erotica if I use it to spice up my marriage?

It's easy isn't it, to compromise a little on giving our offerings to the Lord's work? I have bills to pay this week. If there's anything left over after I've paid my bills then I'll flip the Lord a little tip.

It's easy isn't it, to neglect our daily reading of the Bible and to not pray? I have so much to do.

It's easy to drift along, and if not corrected, to drift away. And notice this. He's not talking about wilfully rejecting salvation. No, he says all that's necessary to drift away is to neglect the word we have heard. Drifting and neglecting imply carelessness. If you are a drifting Christian you need this word.

We in this church all know how Peter loves his boating and his fishing. Well, Pete told me about some fishermen mates of his who went deep sea fishing off the New Zealand coast and how they committed the unpardonable sin where boating is concerned. One of them pulled up the anchor before they had started the engine. You know what happened, don't you? The engine wouldn't start and they drifted in the Southern Ocean for days and almost perished before rescue came. Being adrift is serious stuff! In your relationship with Christ, every day, make sure the engine is running before you pull up anchor to face your daily responsibilities.

So, the writer to the Hebrew Christians does not think that "saved" automatically means forever "safe". Indeed, he goes on in 3:14, **For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.** There is a condition attached to our salvation security!

This advice of course, perfectly reflects the words of our Lord Jesus himself, **If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed (John 8: 31).** There is a proviso in our standing! We are responsible to hold on and to continue on **steadfast unto the end.**

#### LET'S ASK PAUL.

But, let's ask another NT writer. Let's ask the apostle Paul himself, "Paul, once saved, are we always saved?" Well says Paul, Christ has reconciled us to God by his death on the cross. And says Paul, he has done this **to present you holy and unblameable and irreproachable before God --- if ye continue in the faith grounded and established, without shifting from the hope promised by the Gospel which you heard ... (Col. 1: 21-23).** Paul agrees with the pastor to the Hebrews, and with Jesus ... ultimate salvation depends on our faithful continuance in the Gospel teaching of Jesus!

## **ADOKIMOS**

This is why the apostle Paul was not afraid to question the standing of the Corinthian believers. He is concerned for them and tells them they are to; **Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realise that Jesus Christ is in you? --- unless, indeed, you fail to meet the test [unless you are **adokimos**, are reprobate, are rejects, are disqualified!] [(2 Cor. 13:5).**

Nor does Paul seem to take his own future salvation for granted. He feared that if he did not stick close to his Lord and Saviour that he might himself be “disqualified” (**adokimos**) [(I Cor. 9:27). He wrote;

**Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified (**adokimos**) (I Cor. 9: 25-27).**

The apostle clearly is anxious to discipline himself, to control carefully the way he lives lest after having preached the Gospel to others, he himself should be **adokimos**, “disqualified” or “rejected”.

Now, many contend that Paul’s fear is not that he might lose his salvation, but rather that he might find himself disqualified from service as an apostle and, that he might miss out on the full reward that faithful work for Christ promises.

Whilst I understand the reasons for saying that, I disagree! If you look at the *immediate context* (I Cor. 9: 23-10:14) you will observe he appeals to what happened to the children of Israel when they perished in the wilderness as a warning lest a similar fate befall them. <sup>5</sup>

The children of Israel had all been “baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea”, they had all eaten the same spiritual food and drunk the same spiritual drink, but they disqualified themselves from entering into the Promised Land by their persistent rebellion.

So, after frankly admitting his deep concern lest he himself should become **adokimos** Paul immediately cites instances of disqualification amongst the Israelites. Those disobedient Israelites didn’t just lost the reward of entering the Promised Land; they perished in the wilderness!

Indeed, the NT says failure to remain loyal to Christ and the New Covenant will be met with severer punishment than those OT people!

They will not just lose a few rewards for service. They will disqualify themselves from the Kingdom!

So, it’s worthy of note that Paul is afraid he himself might yet become **adokimos**, rejected. He uses the same adjective (**adokimos**) in his warning to the Corinthian Christians when he tells them they are to;

**Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realise that Jesus Christ is in you? --- unless, indeed, you fail to meet the test (are **adokimoi**) (2 Cor. 13:5)!**

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<sup>5</sup> In fact, three different NT writers use the tragic failure of the Children of Israel to enter the Land as an example that we Christian believers in the New Covenant are to heed (I Cor. 10: 1; Heb. 4: 1-11; Jude 5).

Now, some scholars are still not satisfied that Paul is concerned that he and his converts might be facing a real possibility of finally being disqualified from entering eternal life. So let me adduce something more.

Every other time Paul uses the word **adokimos** the context concerns a lost, unsaved, rejected and reprobate state;

1. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them over to a debased [**adokimos ... depraved, disqualified, rejected**] mind (Rom. 1:28). Here the **adokimos** class of people are those who have rejected God and who are lost and destined for eternal destruction.
2. As Janes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these people, of corrupt mind [**adokimos ... rejected, disqualified, depraved**] and counterfeit faith, also oppose the truth (2 Tim. 3: 8). Again, to be **adokimos** is to belong to a class of folks who are in opposition to God and who are outside the faith.
3. They profess to know God, but they deny Him by their actions. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit [**adokimos ... rejected, disqualified**] for any good work (Titus 1:16). Note again: To be **adokimos** is to be in that group of unbelievers who deny God and who are detestable to Him.

Every time Paul mentions people who are **adokimos** he is talking about folks in a state of unbelief, those who are not "in Christ" --- the lost. So, when Paul fears he himself and the Corinthian Christians might finally be **adokimos** he is not saying he is frightened he will lose only his heavenly rewards for service, he is declaring his genuine fear that if he does not remain in fellowship with Christ, that he will end up without Christ, disqualified, lost finally from the Kingdom ... **adokimos** .

The apostle declares that **Christ does not dwell in any who are **adokimos, disqualified, rejected!****

Now that holy fear is a far cry from the *blase*, complacent and careless attitude some display as they drift along with the popular currents of this world! That holy fear is a very different attitude to the lives of professing Christians who show no concern about walking daily with the Lord.

## THE OUT-RESURRECTION OUT FROM AMONG THE DEAD

Paul was no drifter in his walk with the Lord. His goal was;

To know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead (Phil 3:10-11).

At first glance this statement might appear to contradict some of Paul's other statements where he says that the entire human race is going to be resurrected from the dead (e.g Acts 24:15).<sup>6</sup> So why does Paul say his goal is to **attain** to what is going to happen to him and indeed everybody, anyway?

The solution to his apparent confusion lies in the unusual way he expresses himself in the Greek. Paul actually uses the word **out** twice in the one sentence. Translating it literally, Paul actually says,

If somehow, I might attain to the **out-resurrection out** from among the dead.

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<sup>6</sup> Some ancient texts read, **There will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous**, as though there is only one general resurrection of all, but other textual variants read, **There will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the righteous and of the unrighteous**, meaning there will be two resurrections..

The NT teaches there are *two future resurrections*. The first resurrection is for the righteous (the saved, God's people from the OT & the NT). This first resurrection precedes the general resurrection of the wicked (the unsaved). So, Paul says he wants to attain to the first resurrection, an **earlier out-resurrection of a particular group. He wants to be in that first group** which is raised **before the general resurrection** of all the dead.

The details of these two resurrections are given in **Revelation 20: 5-6** where they are separated by a thousand years, what is called the Millennium; **Blessed and holy are those who have a part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them ...** It is this *first resurrection* of the righteous dead, that saved, that Paul is desperately striving to take part in.

What may we then conclude? This --- Paul does not think he will automatically have a part in the first resurrection of the saved, just by drifting along. He knows he must meet certain criteria to qualify for the *first resurrection*. He wants to **attain** to it. And he says the way to **attain** to the first **out-resurrection out from the dead** is by identifying himself with Christ's sufferings. He is prepared to stay faithful to Jesus, even if it means being rejected by society.

Paul did not take his future salvation for granted! Paul did not believe that once saved he was guaranteed eternal security, and that he would automatically without effort on his part, participate in the first resurrection. Until the end of his life, he must run the race of obedient faithfulness.

This is why Paul goes on to explain in the verses that immediately follow,

**Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own [by] forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus (Phi. 3: 12-15).**

Paul knows that although he is now in a saving relationship with Christ he must continue in the way. He knows that to have started is no guarantee he will finish. He is not just mindlessly standing on the "salvation escalator" thinking he will automatically arrive on the top floor!

Paul would have abhorred this idea that saving faith is the act of a moment at conversion. Praying the "sinner's prayer" in one grand moment of decision for Christ does not usher one into a state of unconditional security.

If anybody had good reason to believe that a miraculous conversion experience was enough to guarantee eternal security, it would have been Paul. Riding to Damascus on his high horse on the way to persecute and arrest Christians, Paul is suddenly bucked from his steed. A light from heaven, brighter than the sun blinds him. The voice of the risen Christ calls to him, "**Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?**" Paul asks, "**And who are you, lord?**" "**I am Jesus whom you are persecuting**".

He spends the next 3 days in blindness. Paul is baptised, receives the anointing power of the holy Spirit and goes out and changes the world in the Name of Jesus Christ.

You don't get a more dramatic conversion than Paul's! But he did not rely on his past dramatic conversion experience. He said, "**The life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God**" (Gal. 2:20). And

after enduring to the end, and with his neck about to be stretched out on the martyr's chopping block, he testified, "I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4: 7). Paul was no drifter in the Faith.

Saving faith in the NT is not the *act* of one moment no matter how sincere, but is the *attitude* of a life. The Gospel is **the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes [goes on believing] ... for it is written: The righteous shall [continue to] live by faith (Rom. 1: 16-18).** <sup>7</sup>

The initial decision of repentance and faith towards God in Christ must be perpetually implemented throughout the believer's life ... the Bible says, although he was a Son, Jesus himself learned obedience by the things he suffered, and having been so perfected, he has become **the author of eternal salvation unto all those who are obeying him (Heb. 5: 9).** <sup>8</sup>

The Bible guarantees eternal salvation only to the ones who are listening to Jesus!

### THE FAITHLESS SERVANT PERISHES!

This dreadful possibility of the servant of the Lord being finally rejected by the Lord is the very possibility that Jesus Himself warned about in the parable of the servant who grows careless as he waits for the return of his lord,

**The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and put him with the unfaithful (Lk 12: 46).**

Jesus' parable is not hypothetical! Jesus' parable teaches the universal truth that;

one who has been a true servant and disciple of Christ,

one who has been entrusted with service and serious responsibilities,

one who has been known by Christ his lord and master, may ultimately, through carelessness and presumption, prove unfaithful and will finally inherit everlasting shame and ruin **with the unfaithful.**

Jesus' parable of the careless servant concerns the one who becomes **adokimos ...** reprobate, rejected, disqualified and who fails the test. **Once saved, always saved?** Hardly. Jesus did not believe it!

### JESUS IS THE SAVIOUR FROM SIN!

Let me close by taking you back to our story of **David Pawson** telling that man he had a serious choice to make. Remember Pawson told that man who was living with a woman who was not his wife, "You can either live with this woman for the rest of this life or with Jesus for all the next, but you can't have both."

That same choice faces us all. Now of course, I'm not just referring to the matter Pawson was addressing, the question of living with someone who is not your husband or your wife, critical as that question is in today's loose society. But the point is this: Jesus Christ came to **save his people from**

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<sup>7</sup> *Pisteuonti* is a present active participle meaning, **The righteous shall continue to live by faith.**

<sup>8</sup> Again, *upakouousin* is a present active participle and literally translated means that, Jesus is the Saviour only of those who are actively obeying him.

**their sins.** You and I will either have Christ and His life, or we will live for self and sin. We can't have Christ and known, wilful persistent sin.

And I have to admit that we preachers and pastors have muddied the waters here. We preachers have said, "You have accepted Christ as your Saviour, but have you really made him the Lord of your life?"

Such appeals imply that accepting Christ as Saviour and then making him your Lord are two different and entirely separate acts.

No they are not! On the contrary, the NT makes it abundantly clear that no one can accept Jesus as Saviour without accepting him as Lord of his or life. **If Jesus is not your Lord, he cannot be your Saviour!**

**FOOL'S GOLD.** I remember reading about the body of a prospector who evidently had died of thirst. They found him in the Californian desert. He had died clutching a bag of copper pyrites, "fool's gold". In his pocket was a piece of paper on which he had written, "I died rich"!

Is it possible there are millions who clasp to themselves a bag of fool's gold, thinking they can have the salvation riches of Christ and at the same time spend their lives serving themselves? Is it possible **once saved, always saved** is a teaching that has lulled multitudes into thinking they are rich, but who will die **adokimos**, reprobate and rejected paupers where eternity is concerned?

**For this reason we must pay earnest attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away (Heb. 2: 1).**

Is your Christian life just drifting along? Or are you straining every fibre of your being to attain to the first resurrection, pressing on for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus?