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ONCE SAVED, ALWAYS SAVED?

There are many doctrinal differences between Christians, and one of the biggest is between those who hold the "Calvinist" and the "Arminian" positions. Calvinists (represented by Lutherans, Reformed churches, Presbyterians, Southern Baptists, most Conservative/Evangelical churches, "Bible" churches, and many others) emphasize the sovereignty of God over mankind and believe that includes the matter of who will be saved and who will be lost. They believe that a person is saved by "faith alone," and that good works are not necessary before or after one is saved. They believe in predestination; which means that God chose those who would be saved before the foundation of the world, and that man has nothing to do with it. Ephesians 1:4-5 says: *God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.* These verses say that God chose us from the beginning, not because we were especially good or good looking, but simply because it pleased Him to do so. There are many similar passages in the Bible. The Calvinist position also holds to the doctrine of "eternal security," which means that once you are saved you can't be lost, once you are born again as a child of God you can't be unborn, no matter whether you live as a faithful Christian or not.

John MacArthur, pastor of Grace Community Church in California, an outstanding teacher and author, represents the Calvinist position. In his book, Security in the Spirit, based on the 8th Chapter of Romans, he writes: "The teaching that a person can lose his or her salvation is foreign to Scripture. It disregards the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father established that you are His forever. The Son confirms that and keeps you blameless. And the Spirit keeps you secure, stamping you with the divine seal. Those who have been saved are being kept saved (1 Peter 1:5)." What about those who backslide and turn away from Christ? Calvinists believe that they were never truly born-again. That is, they were never really Christians at all. Following are some of the Scriptures that confirm this position (I have shortened and paraphrased many of these Scriptures):

- Romans 10:9-10,17 - *If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. Faith comes by hearing the word of God.*
- Romans 8:1 - *There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.*
- John 6:39-40 - *Of all the Father has given Me, I will lose nothing, but will raise them up at the last day. Everyone who believes in the Son may have everlasting life,*

and I will raise him up at the last day.

- John 10:26 ff - *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. No one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand.*
- 2 Cor. 1:22 - *God has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee that we belong to Him.*

These are marvelous promises from the Bible, and there are many, many more passages like them. They give us great comfort, for we know our weakness and how dependent we are on God to save us and keep us. This doctrinal position prevents believers from falling into despair every time they sin. But I believe that an over-emphasis or misunderstanding of this doctrine (without attention to balancing Scriptures that emphasize our responsibility to obey God, to walk in obedience and holiness) has led to disaster among many Christians. A recent Gallup survey reported the following: 94% of Americans say they believe in God; 74% say they have made a commitment to Jesus Christ; 34% say they have had a new birth experience. But statistics also show that in America there is no difference morally or any other way between the majority of those who profess Christianity, including those who attend "Bible-believing" churches, and people in the world that make no such claims. There is no difference in levels of crime; cheating; shop-lifting; divorce; abortion; homosexuality; addictions to alcohol, drugs, and gambling; lying; etcetera.

Let me give an illustration. Many years ago I knew a young man in Ft. Collins who was married and had two children. His father and mother had raised him and his siblings in a good, Southern Baptist church. This man owned a business, and he hired a young woman to be cashier. In due time, he fell into adultery. He left his wife and children and moved in with his girlfriend. When his friends questioned him about what he was doing, he said: "I know that it is wrong. But I am saved, and I can't be lost, so I am going to do what I want to do!" Oh, my! I hope that is not what those who hold to the Calvinist position believe, because the Bible also says, *God is not mocked, and whatsoever you sow, that will you also reap. If you sow to the flesh you will reap corruption, if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life.*

Many Calvinists believe that the primary purpose or benefit of being "saved" is to go to heaven, and whether one becomes a disciple of Jesus and lives a holy, separated life is optional. So the preaching one hears in many of these churches is: (1) Accept Christ, be forgiven of your sins, and be born again (2)

Look forward to the rapture of the church which will take us out of this evil world before the great tribulation occurs (3) Good Christians attend church faithfully and tithed. (Does this sound familiar?)

Arminians are represented, historically, by Methodist, Holiness, Pentecostal, Charismatic, and many other denominations. (I am over simplifying this teaching a lot, and I know that there is a great mixture of beliefs in various denominations, churches, and individual Christians. I am far from being an expert on these matters and am sharing from my memory, most of which deserted me 30 or 40 years ago. Feel free to email your corrections to this teaching, but try to refrain from stoning me.) Arminians emphasize a person's free will and believe that God's predestination may be based on His foreknowledge of the choice people will make:

- John 3:16 - Whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.
- John 4:14 - Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him.....
- John 12:46 - I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.
- Acts 2:21 - And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Now consider some Scriptures that seem to call into question the position that one is saved by "faith alone:"

- Matt. 8:21 - Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven.
- James 1:22 & 2:17-19, 24 - But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. Someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.
- Romans 11:20-22 (Note that these verses follow closely after Paul states in Ro. 10:9 that we are saved by confessing and believing in Christ.) - Because of unbelief they (the Jews) were broken off. Don't be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches (the Jews), He may not spare you either. Consider the kindness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.
- Romans 6:1-2 - What shall we say then? Shall we continue to sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! (or God forbid! in the KJV)
- Romans 2:6-9 - God will render to each one according to his deeds. Eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness -- indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Gentiles.
- 2 Thes. 1:7-9 - When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in flaming fire, he will take vengeance on those who don't know God and on those who don't obey the gospel of the

Lord. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction.

- 1 John 3:4-10 - Let no one deceive you, he who practices righteousness (lives right) is righteous. He who (practices) sin is of the devil.
- Revelation 2 and 3 is addressed to "the churches," and is commonly understood as being addressed to all churches down through history. Christ warns five of the seven churches to repent and makes great promises to those who overcome. To the church in Sardis, Rev. 3:5, He warns them that whoever overcomes will not have his name blotted out (erased) from the Book of Life. This clearly indicates that his name had been previously written in the Book of Life, which is the record of those who will be saved.

The Bible teaches that every man will be judged by God for three things: (1) his actions or deeds. See Matt. 16:27 and Rev. 20:13 (2) his words (which are part of his actions, but are so important that they are mentioned in the Bible again and again). See Matt. 5:22 and 12:36-37 (3) his motives (the thoughts and intentions of his heart) See Heb. 4:12, Romans 2:6, 15-16, Rev. 2:23, 1 Cor. 13:1-3. The Bible does not teach that we will be judged by our profession of faith (by what we say we believe), because our actions, words, and motives clearly demonstrate what we truly believe, not what we claim to believe.

It is obvious that something is terribly wrong with most Christians' basic understanding of what it means to be a Christian. Jesus calls us to:

- Repent of our sins and believe in Him as Savior and Lord
- Follow Him
- Love Him with all our heart, soul, mind & strength
- Obey Him ("If you love me, you will keep my commandments." (Jn. 14:15) "Eternal salvation to those who obey Him (not just believe in Him) (Heb. 5:9)
- Live holy, pure lives. "He chose us that we should be holy..." (Eph. 1:4) "As He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct." (1 Pet. 1:15) "Walk (be led) by the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." (Gal. 5:16) (Also see Eph. 5:5-6 and 1 Cor. 6:9-10)
- Continually seek Him: pray, read the Word and seek to know Him and see Him more and more clearly.
- Abide in Christ - which means to love Him and obey Him (See John 15:1-10)
- Die to self, crucify the flesh, make your bodies a living sacrifice (Jn. 12:24, Gal. 5:24, Romans 12:1-2)

Does it seem to you that it is irrelevant to God what manner of lives we lead after we become Christians? Does it appear that the sole point of the Christian life is to go to Heaven, and that being a disciple of Christ on this earth is optional? God's purpose in sending His beloved Son to die for us was so that we could regain the image of God in which man was originally created. The image of God is simply to be Christ-like. We cannot accomplish that for ourselves - God transforms our character bit by bit as we believe in Him and follow Him. It is a lifelong process. And as God transforms us, He uses us to bring His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. And Heaven is awaiting those who are truly His, as

proved by the lives they live on earth. Wow! What a wonderful, marvelous destiny and purpose God has in mind for each of us. Have you signed up?

I am sure that in what I have written above I have misrepresented and defamed many, many Christians who hold to historic Calvinist positions. Holding to one position or another does not mean that a person is not living a faithful, holy life, fully committed to the Lord. Only God knows our hearts. I remember that two heroes of the faith were John Wesley and George Whitfield. These men were great evangelists of the 1700's who sacrificed their lives in preaching the gospel. Their faithfulness did much to transform England and the United States. John Wesley was the founder of the Methodist denomination. George Whitfield was a Calvinist who believed strongly in predestination, and John Wesley was an Arminian who believed strongly in free will. Their differences led to great arguments, and they separated for a period of time. But God dealt with each, and they came back together in Christian love and unity. May we have the same attitude in dealing with those with whom we disagree.

Superman

I have read a story several times that is supposedly true: An NBA star was riding first-class on a certain airliner. Bumpy air was encountered, and the seat-belt sign came on. The stewardess walked through and asked the star to buckle his seat-belt. He replied: "Superman don't need no seat-belt." She responded: "Superman don't need no airplane."

Rich Folks

In a book about world poverty that I am reading, it reports that for millions and millions of poor people around the world, the average size "home" they live in is 84 square feet. What! That shocked me, even though I have seen tarpaper and tin shanties in Mexico and Peru. My storage shed is 9x12 feet. That is 108 square feet! Families - mother, father, several children, and maybe a grandparent or Aunt, living in a space the size of one of the big closets in many of our homes. When you and I read stories in the Bible about rich folks, we need to realize - - that's us!

THE COMING PERFECT STORM

John Paul Jackson, a prophet who has a proven record and in whom I have confidence, has just released a book and DVD about a series of visions God has given him concerning "a perfect storm" of calamities that will come on the United States in the next ten years. Following is a synopsis of his vision, and I trust that you will pray about it:

The storm God has shown him is composed of five intertwined elements: religion, politics, economics, war, and natural events. He sees these calamities coming in waves, one after another, or combined and feeding off one another. The storm, representing the judgment of God, is coming because of the failure and sin of the church. (See 2 Chronicles 7:14) Because of our sin, the time has come when the leaders and

people of our nation are calling right wrong, and wrong right. These are some of the things he has seen in the vision:

Political

I saw an attempt on President Obama's life by Islamic extremists who made it seem that the attack was racially motivated. I then saw incredible race riots in the streets that were comparable to the massacre in Rwanda. We must pray for Obama's protection from assassination plots.

Natural

In time, because of severe drought (which is now occurring in south Texas and in California) water will be more expensive than oil, and several cities will evacuate thousands because there is not enough water to meet their needs. (Amos 4:7) Earthquakes will strike not only coastal areas but devastate the Midwest. I saw thunderstorms with huge hail, 24 inches of rain in 24 hours, three feet of snow in six hours, tornadoes in unusual places, some with winds of more than 350 miles per hour. Unexpected blight will hit various hybrid seed crops. All of this will cause a national food shortage.

War Issues

Iran and Russia will unite. A dirty bomb will explode in a coastal city in the United States. Israel will bomb Iran, and anti-Semitism will escalate as fuel prices soar. (Jer. 18:11) I saw terrorist attacks on malls, causing people to fear going to malls and expediting the exodus from cities into the country.

Religion

I saw a period when God was going to expose rampant immorality in the leadership of large churches and ministries in this country. The government will become hostile toward the tax-exempt status of churches and contributions. Public schools will ban Christian prayer but allow Muslim prayer because of fear of terrorism.

Economics

I see commercial buildings becoming vacant around the US. I saw large malls, once filled with stores, being used by the government to house people who have lost their homes and jobs. The economy will be further devastated by unwise economic decisions made by the government, causing massive debt, devaluation of the dollar, and double-digit unemployment.

FOUR THINGS THE CHURCH MUST DO

First, the church must return to knowing God and His ways rather than just knowing about God.

Second, the church must learn how to "contend for the faith" once again. We must study the Word, listen to God, and learn about the enemy's plans.

Third, the church must return to the love of God's Word and the belief that it is infallible and inerrant. This includes the conviction that Jesus Christ is the only way to God. We need a new revelation of God's power rather than just head knowledge.

Fourth, we will need to call solemn assemblies. We will need to:

- Turn to God with all our heart
- Fast with weeping over our sins
- Rend our hearts
- Call sacred assemblies

I also saw that God is going to allow the coming storm in order to draw us to Himself. This time of calamity will also be a time of great opportunity. Millions will turn to God because they have no other place to turn, and they will realize their desperate need for Him. God's love, provision, and protection will be poured out on His people. I saw people sitting down at tables with empty bowls, closing their eyes and praying, and when they opened their eyes the bowls were overflowing with food. I saw people being healed in an instant, and I saw many people being raised from the dead. *Then you will call upon Me and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.* (Jer. 29:13)

May the people of the United States seek the Lord and find Him. We still have the promise that if we turn from our wicked ways, God will heal our land.

God Bless,

Glenn

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COWBOYS' TEN COMMANDMENTS

(Posted on the wall at Cross Trails Church in Fairlie, Texas)

- (1) Just one God
- (2) Honor yer Ma and Pa
- (3) No telling tales and gossipin'
- (4) Git yourself to Sunday meeting
- (5) Put nothin' before God
- (6) No foolin' around with another fellow's gal
- (7) No killin'
- (8) Watch yer mouth
- (9) Don't take what ain't yers
- (10) Don't be hankerin' for yer buddy's stuff

Y'al git all that"

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