

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

ANSWERING DENOMINATIONAL DOCTRINES “Once Saved, Always Saved”

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

The Scripture tells us to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Welcome to our study titled “Answering Denominational Doctrines.” In this series of lessons we are going to note various doctrines that are promoted by denominational teachers and denominations themselves. We are going to look at what they say, and compare it with the Scriptures so that we can help people see the truth of God. Millions of people buy into these doctrines. The end result—if they live out these doctrines in their lives—will be that people will be lost. I hope you will consider two things. First, our motivation in looking at these doctrines and examining them biblically is to help people get to Heaven. We love people’s immortal souls, and we want them to go to Heaven. Second, we are here to please God and to preach the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). In what we say, we want to honor God, say what the Bible says, and ultimately point out error in order to help people know God’s truth and be saved.

The first doctrine that we want to answer from the Scriptures is known as “once saved, always saved.” It also is known as the doctrine which teaches that a person, once saved, cannot fall from grace. Or, it is known as “perseverance of the saints.” What is the core of this doctrine? In a nutshell, it says that once a person becomes a Christian, there is nothing he can ever do to be lost. Once a person obeys the Gospel and becomes a child of God, he never has to worry about being lost because he cannot be lost. I would like to represent this doctrine fairly by quoting from men who believe and teach this doctrine.

Baptist preacher Sam Morris, in a tract titled, *Do a Christian’s Sins Damn His Soul?*, said, “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.” That is pretty clear. The way a Christian lives, what he says, how he relates to other people, and the things in which he gets involved cannot ever cause him to be lost. At least this man is logical in his belief. This doctrine is not new. The following quotation from the 1950s shows that it has been around a long time. Bill Foster, a Baptist preacher in Louisville, Kentucky, made this statement: “If I killed my wife and mother, and debauched a thousand women, I couldn’t go to Hell. In fact, I couldn’t go to Hell even I wanted to.” That’s quite blatant and abrasive. But that is the logical conclusion of this doctrine, which teaches that once a person is saved, even he wanted to he could not go to Hell. Why? It is because, according to this doctrine, once a person is saved he is always saved. He can never fall from grace.

Today I want to ask the question, “What does the Bible teach about this doctrine?” We will be asking the great question of Jeremiah 37:17—“Is there any word from the Lord?” Or, as Paul said in Romans 4:3, “What do the Scriptures say?” Today we are concerned with what God has to say about this topic. Be sure that this doctrine is **not** taught in the Bible. In fact, the first passage we are going to examine takes the exact language of false teachers and says exactly the opposite of what they are saying.

In Galatians 5:4 we read, “You have become estranged [severed] from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.” Isn’t that interesting? Galatians is a book, according to its first chapter, that clearly was written to Christians (saints) who compose the churches of Christ in Galatia. To these Christians Paul says two important things. First, he refers to those who are thinking about going back to try to be justified by the Law of Moses, and tells them that if they do that they will be “severed from Christ.” Think about that image. We are the body; Christ is the Head. We can get into sin in such a way that we decapitate the Head from the body, thus preventing us from any longer being in fellowship with Christ. Second, Paul says, “You have fallen from grace.” How clear is that?! God clearly says—a thousand years before people came up with the idea that a person cannot fall grace—in the exact language of false teachers that Christians **already had** fallen from grace. The idea here is clear, especially in the Greek in which the New Testament is written. The word for “from” is *ek*. Some people say about Galatians 5:4, “Yes, it says that. But it doesn’t mean that a person is completely outside of Christ. Christ is in the center, and the person has just moved a little away from the center. He is not yet out of the circle.” That is not the language of the New Testament. The Greek word *ek* literally means “out of.” Christ is in one spot, and others who have “fallen from grace” are “out of” His blessings, benefits, and salvation. The Bible clearly teaches that a person **can** fall from grace. Once a person has been saved, that does not mean that he will always remain saved.

But this is not the only passage in the Bible dealing with “once saved, always saved.” Probably the clearest case example is that of Simon. In Acts 8 (around verse 13) Simon hears the Gospel proclaimed. Previously he was a magician and a trickster. But now he becomes a child of God. According to Scripture, he is a Christian. Simon sees that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, the Holy Spirit is given. Simon then reverts back to his old life style (after having become a Christian), and say, “I will give you money if you will give me that gift.” Peter tells him,

“Your heart is not right in the sight of God. you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity. Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you” (vss. 20-23).

What did Peter say about Peter’s money? He said, “Your money perish **with you!**” In essence Peter was saying to Simon, “If you don’t repent, your money will go to Hell along with you.” How clear is this example? It is crystal clear. God said to Simon through the inspired apostle Peter, “You are in sin. You have fallen from God’s grace. And you are going to go to Hell if you do not change your ways.” Simon then said, “Pray for me, that none of the things you have said will happen to me!” Why was Simon afraid? Why should he be afraid if he could not be lost? He was afraid because he realized the truth of the matter—that he was going to perish if he did not change his ways. Understand clearly that Simon was a Christian who got involved in sin. As a result, Simon was lost until he repented. This clearly teaches that after a Christian obeys the Gospel, his sins can damn his soul if he does not repent and live faithfully.

Now let’s examine 1 Corinthians 10:12. This example relates to the people who followed Moses in the wilderness and complained and murmured. God allowed their bodies to fall in the wilderness because of their sins. Paul is writing to Christians, some of who are involved in division (1 Cor. 1). Some are suing one another (1 Cor. 6). Some are involved in sexual immorality (1 Cor. 5-6). In other words, they are not living the way they ought to. In 1 Corinthians 10:12 Paul says to these Christians, “Therefore let him who thinks he stands

take heed lest he fall.” Some might say, “That’s all good and well, but Paul doesn’t mean that a person will be lost forever. He’s just talking about someone who moves away from Christ, but he’ll get back because he’s still inside the right area.” But that is not what the text says. In 1 Corinthians 10:10 we learn exactly what God means. God said that Paul meant such people would be “destroyed by the destroyer.” If these Christians did not mend their ways and get right with God, they would be destroyed by none other than Satan himself and live with him for eternity. Be logical for a moment and ask yourself, “If Paul were to say to Christians, ‘Take heed lest you fall,’ and a person could never fall, then what does 1 Corinthians 10:12 mean?” Why would Paul write to Christians and say, “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall”? If a person can never fall, those words have absolutely no meaning to a child of God. But when we take the Scriptures words as being correct regarding the fact that a Christian’s sins can damn his soul, then the words of 1 Corinthians 10:12 have great meaning.

In Luke 15 we find the example of the prodigal son. He decides to take his inheritance and spend it on wasteful (prodigal) living. He goes to a far country and spends all of his money. Eventually he finds himself in the muck and mire of a pig pen. He comes to his senses and says, “I have sinned against God and I have sinned against Heaven. I need to go back to my father and say, ‘I am not worthy to be a son; make me a servant.’” Of course, the father is there with open arms to receive him. But do you understand what this parable represents? God is the Father. That son represents any child of God who goes into sin and wastes his life in prodigal living. Was the son lost? Yes, he was! He was separated from the blessings of the father. He was separated from the benefits of the father. He no longer was in the house of the father. He was involved in sin. And until he said to himself, “I have sinned, and I have to repent,” he no longer enjoyed the fellowship of the father. The same is true of Christians today. We can sin so as to ultimately be lost.

Think about the words of 2 Peter 1:10 where Peter gives a warning to Christians that relates specifically to sin: “Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble.” Why must a Christian “make sure” if he cannot be “unsure”? Peter said, “Be even more diligent to make your call and election sure.” If a person is a Christian, and if the idea of “once saved, always saved,” is true, then that person does not have to worry about being unsure! Why would a Christian need to be “diligent to make his calling and election sure”? We find the answer in the last part of 2 Peter 1:10—so that Christian will not stumble so as to ultimately be lost. If a person can never be lost, then 2 Peter 1:10 has no meaning. Why does a person need to be sure or be diligent? Why should a person worry about stumbling if he can never fall? The Scriptures do teach that a Christian can be lost.

In fact, we even can see this principle relating to people in the Old Testament. Ezekiel 18:24 is probably one of the clearest pictures of God’s relationship with man, and of man’s relationship with sin if he gets involved with it.

“But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die.”

Notice from the text that a righteous man is under consideration. He is right with God, and at first is living as he ought to live. But then he gets involved in abominations and wickedness. Thus, it is possible for him to sin and turn away from God. What does the text say? “All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall

die.” The dying represents his spiritual death. Ezekiel 18:4 says, “The soul who sins shall surely die.” We are talking about spiritual separation from God (Is. 59:1-2). Our sins separate us from a loving God. The ways of those sins is spiritual death (Rom. 6:23). If a person remains in those sins, he will perish throughout all eternity. This is a clear example of a man who is righteous but who gets involved in sin. God therefore says that his righteousness will no longer help him, and he will be lost (unless he changes his ways).

Think about 2 Peter 2, where we see a picture of a Christian who once more gets caught up in sin so that he turns his life over to sin. What happens to this man? Is he still in a good, upright, and noble state? No. It is quite the opposite because it is a disgusting picture. In 2 Peter 2:20 we read,

“If, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.’”

Look at the clarity of the language. It is talking about a person who has obeyed the Gospel and been cleansed of his sins, but then once again gets entangled in sin and is overcome. This is a clear picture of a Christian whose sins once more overtake him. Peter said that if this happens, “the latter end is worse for them than the beginning; it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.” How could the person’s first state be any better than the last state? It is because the person had tasted the good things of Christ, and thus knows the things on which he is missing out. How horrible it will be for a person who was a child of God and who had all the blessings of God, yet who will sit in Hell saying, “If I had only remained faithful, I could have been in Heaven.” How could it be that such a person would not be in a lost state? The truth of the matter is that it is clear that they are lost! Look at the disgusting images used: “A sow, having washed, returns to her wallowing in the mire.” Is that a picture of someone who is still saved? Absolutely not! It is a picture of someone who was once saved, but who returned to sin and is now in a lost state. It is like a dog that returns to its own vomit. “How disgusting!,” you say. That is exactly the point. We would never say that a person in that state was in a right state before God. If a Christian gets involved in sin and then is lost again, it would have been better for him if he had never known the way of truth because now he knows the things on which he is missing out.

Think about the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:27. Paul was one who had changed his life. He formerly was a blasphemer and someone who persecuted Christians. He was there at the stoning of Stephen. But he changed his life and became a child of God. He recognized, however, that this was a battle he could lose if he wasn’t careful. He said, “I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.” If Paul could never be lost, what is the meaning of his statement? He said that he needed to “discipline his body lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified [or ‘a castaway’].” The word “castaway” is used in Hebrews 6:8, which is not talking about someone who “moved little farther away from Christ.” “Cast-away” or “disqualified” refers to someone who can be lost. The same Greek word is used in Hebrews 6:8 that is used in 1 Corinthians 9:27. The writer says, “If it bears thorns and briars, it is **rejected** and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.” To be a cast-away means to be rejected. The end of such people is that they will “be burned.” That is the future Paul faced if he failed to discipline his body daily. So, even Paul the apostle faced a struggle to be sure that he was faithful to God.

Another clear example is found in the Book of Revelation. In the letters to the seven churches of Asia, Jesus commended some of the congregations for their good works. But He also pointed out sins that, if left intact, would cause them to be lost. Revelation 3:5 is one of the clearest examples of how a Christian can ultimately be lost. "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels." Here, Jesus is saying that if a person remains faithful, and if he does not give in to sin, then He will not blot out that person's name." But that implies that there is a very real possibility that Christians (those in the church) can have their names blotted out of the Book of Life. Why would Jesus make that statement if such a possibility did not even exist? If Jesus told people that if they overcame sin and remained faithful, He would not blot out their names from the Book of Life, then implied from such a statement is the fact that if those Christians were not faithful, and if they did not overcome sin, then they would have their names blotted out of the Book of Life. This is a very strong teaching. Someone in the church and who is a child of God can be "blotted out of God's book" and lost forever if he does not remain faithful.

Now let's deal with the main passage that those who believe in "once saved, always saved," often use. There are passages that are misused because their true teaching is not pointed out. And when that happens, people ask, "Don't these passages teach that people cannot fall from grace?" One of those is 1 John 3:9 where we read, "Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God." Is this passage teaching that it is impossible for a Christian to sin? We have already looked at multiple examples elsewhere in the Bible which prove that such a concept is not true. Furthermore, if such an idea was true, then it would not be in accord with what John himself teaches in 1 John. For example, in 1 John 1:8 John said (writing to Christians), "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." If we take the position that 1 John 3:9 says we cannot sin, then we make God out to be a liar. In 1 John 2:1-2 John said, "If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins." John is saying, "Do not say that you do **not** sin! You **do** sin. And when that happens, you have a way by which you can deal with it." Even in the Book of 1 John, the idea cannot be that Christians **never** sin.

So what is 1 John 3:9 teaching? The Greek wording here is in the continual case. The idea is that if we "continue to live a life of sin," then we cannot be saved. John is teaching that a Christian cannot stay saved while continuing in a life of sin. The Greek word for "sin" is continual in its action. The Greek scholars and lexicons universally agree that John is saying that a person cannot **continue** in sin yet still be pleasing to God. He envisions here not just a one-time act, but instead a continual lifestyle of sin. For example, the English Standard Version, the New International Version, and other versions translate it this way: "No one, born of God, **makes a practice of sinning**, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot **keep on sinning** because he has been born of God" (1 Jn. 3:9). That is the sense of the language. God has already said that we do sin. If we say we do not, then according to what John said, we make God a liar. When we sin, we have an Advocate in Jesus Christ. Yes, we do sin. But we cannot be faithful to God by continuing to live a life of sin. When we look at 1 John 3:9 (which "once saved, always saved" advocate use so often) correctly, we can see that it actually teaches the exact opposite. A person cannot continue to live in sin why saying that he has God's Word in his heart, and claiming that he is a faithful child of God. The text of 1 John 3:9 teaches the exact opposite when it is viewed and understood correctly.

I want to ask you today if you have bought into the idea that once you become a Christian, you can never be lost. That is not true. Jesus said, "Be faithful **unto death**, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10). A person **can** so sin as to lose his immortal soul. But the good news is that such a thing is a possibility, God, does not want that to happen. Thus, He has given us everything we need to overcome sin. God does not want anyone to be lost, but instead wants everyone to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). God does not want us to be lost. And, in His infinite wisdom, He has given us the tools we need to be saved. The Bible is the living, powerful Word of the Almighty God (Heb. 4:12). If we put that Word into our hearts, it is able to help us live correct lives. Psalm 119:105 tells us that God's Word is "a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path." If we put the Word of God into our hearts, it will help prevent sin in our lives.

In this first lesson devoted to answering denominational doctrines, I want you to clearly understand that God has said that a Christian can sin so as to be lost. If you buy into the idea of "once saved, always saved," though it may be comforting, ultimately it will cost you your soul. You will not be watching for sin. And you will not be repenting of such sin as you should. Plus, you will not think that such sin could cause you to be lost in the first place. May God help each of us to be good students of the Bible, to contend for the faith, and to say, as God says clearly in Scripture, that we must be "faithful unto death."

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “ONCE SAVED, ALWAYS SAVED”

1. What does the denominational doctrine of “once saved, always saved” teach?
2. What important question did King Zedekiah ask in Jeremiah 37:17?
3. What important question did the apostle Paul ask in Romans 4:3?
4. According to Galatians 5:4, what had some first-century Christians done?
5. In Acts 8 after a man named Simon had obeyed the Gospel and become a Christian, what sin did he commit?
6. After Simon committed the sin mentioned in question #6 above, what did Peter tell him in Acts 8:20-23.
7. According to Acts 8:24, what was Simon’s response to the chastisement he received from the apostle Peter?
8. In 1 Corinthians 10:12, what good advice did the apostle Paul offer the Christians in Corinth?
9. What is the implication of Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 10:12 when it comes to the doctrine of “once saved, always saved”?
10. What is the implication for the doctrine of “once saved, always saved” from Peter’s statement in 2 Peter 1:10 (“Be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble”)?
11. Explain the implication of Ezekiel 18:24 for the doctrine of “once saved, always saved.”
12. In 2 Peter 2:20, what did Peter have to say about those people who had become Christians, but who then turned back to a life of sin?
13. What is the implication of the apostle Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 9:27 (“I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified”)?
14. What is the implication of the statement made by the apostle John in Revelation 3:5 (“He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.”)?
15. What did Jesus teach in Revelation 2:10, and what is the implication of that teaching for the doctrine of “once saved, always saved”?
16. According to the material contained in this lesson, what is the meaning of 1 John 3:9 (“Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.”)?