

THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE **(LESSON THIRTY-FIVE)**

THE SECURITY OF THE CHRISTIAN **(PART EIGHT)**

In **Lesson 28** of our series of studies concerning **The Doctrines of Grace**, we commenced an examination of **The Security of the Christian** as it relates to his or her position in Christ Jesus. In every Lesson on this particular subject, we have argued that the Holy Scriptures clearly indicate that the position of an individual who has been saved by the grace of God is very secure. We have stated that the security of such an individual is bound up with the sovereignty of God, the unchangeableness of His purpose, and the constancy of His good pleasure. We have explained that this security is not based upon the merit or deserving of the individual but rather upon the finished, perfect work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. In other words, it is the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ and not the faithfulness of the saved individual that guarantees his or her security.

It is our decided opinion that the subject of the security of the Christian's position in Christ has serious implications in respect of his or her walk with the Lord and witness to others. Persons who believe that they can forfeit their salvation are, in most instances, not convinced that they are saved by grace **alone** through faith **alone** in Christ **alone**. They are generally of the opinion that their own works have become an integral part of their salvation or lack thereof. Such persons usually possess very little or no assurance of salvation. This is so because they can never be completely sure that they are genuinely saved at the present time or that they will ultimately be saved.

How can a person genuinely rejoice in the God of their salvation if there are doubts in his or her mind as to whether or not God will continue to deal graciously with him or her and complete the work which He has begun in his or her soul? How can an individual sincerely thank God for delivering them from the wrath to come if they believe that it is possible for them to lose the salvation that they believe they have, and ultimately be cast into the lake of fire?

One of the most devastating effects of a rejection of the Christian's security in Christ is the undermining of the love of God for His elect. The view that a saved person can easily forfeit their salvation is based upon the premise that God's love is conditional upon the behaviour of the individual and not on His oath and His covenant. This results in an inability to focus on God consistently. Persons who believe that their position in Christ is not secure are forced to focus more upon themselves and their own actions in order to secure their salvation than on Jesus Christ's finished work on Calvary and on His faithfulness. They do not really believe that He is the "*author and finisher*" of their faith.

We have made the point that God earnestly desires that His children know that they are secure in Him. **1 John 5:13** clearly indicates this: "*These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; **that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.***"

In seeking to ground our belief of the security of the saved person's position in Christ in the Scriptures, we have made reference to several passages from the Word of the Lord. Having done so, we are persuaded that the Bible overwhelmingly supports the view that a genuinely saved person will be preserved by the power of Almighty God until the day of Christ's return.

In this Lesson, we will consider some passages which on the surface seem to indicate that a saved individual can, in fact, lose their salvation.

JOHN 14:1-2, 6

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit... If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."

In chapters **13-17** of John's Gospel, we find the Lord Jesus preparing His disciples for spiritual service in an unbelieving, hostile world following His imminent departure. It is important for us to note that, in the immediate context, our Lord was specifically addressing only the eleven, saved, believing disciples who would form the apostolic foundation of His church (**Ephesians 2:20**). **John 13:30** informs us that Judas had previously departed from their company. Consequently, Jesus was not concerned here with testing the genuineness of the salvation of the eleven remaining disciples. His burden was to instruct them in respect of the new spiritual relationships they would have with Him, the Holy Spirit, each other, and the world following His ascension to the Father and the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. His purpose here was **to encourage** His disciples through the analogy of a vinedresser nurturing the branches of a vine. His purpose was **not** to admonish the disciples to test the genuineness of their profession and thereby warn them of a possible loss of their salvation.

In verse **2** He says, *"Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away."* There are those who interpret these words to mean that it is possible for Christians to have their salvation "taken away." But such an interpretation is highly unlikely if not manifestly erroneous, in light of such explicit and positive declarations to the contrary as are to be found in **John 4:14; John 5:24; John 6:37-40; John 10:28; John 18:9**. Let us repeat what we said in the opening paragraph: Christ was not here addressing a mixed audience, in which were true believers and those who were merely professors. Judas had already gone out! What the Lord said was addressed to believers only!

The Greek word translated *"taketh away"* is **airo** (**ah-ee-ro**) which means "to lift up, to take up or away." The Greek word **airo** is frequently translated *"lifted up"* in the New Testament. We have given four examples hereunder:

LUKE 17:12-13

*"And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: And they **lifted up** their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."*

JOHN 11:41

*"Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus **lifted up** his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me."*

ACTS 4:24

*"And when they heard that, they **lifted up** their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is."*

REVELATION 10:5

*"And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth **lifted up** his hand to heaven."*

In none of these passages could the verb possibly be rendered "taken away." It, therefore, appears to be more accurate to translate the clause as follows: "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he lifteth up." It would seem that it was John's intention that our Lord's words should be interpreted positively as an encouragement to fallen branches that God the Father, as the heavenly vinedresser, will tenderly care for His vineyard and "lift them up" in order to prevent them trailing on the ground and to ensure that they will be exposed to the Sun and have the potential to be fruitful. This interpretation is consistent with the actual practices of first century vinedressers and therefore, fits the context more accurately than the words "taketh away."

The view that this verse is dealing with a possible loss of salvation is problematic. For one thing, such a view does not flow well with the rest of the passage. There is a progression in this passage from branches which *"bear not fruit"* (verse **2**) to branches which *"bear fruit"* (verse **2**) to branches which *"bring forth more fruit"* (verse **2**) to branches which *"bring forth much fruit"* (verse **5**). This progression clearly indicates that it is the husbandman's objective to promote greater growth and productivity, not to frustrate potential growth with an act of condemnation.

Most plant life in the natural realm actually begin life without fruit, until they have grown sufficiently enough to sustain fruit. It would seem absurd for the Father to “cut off” all branches in His eternal judgment that were not bearing fruit; otherwise few branches in Christ would ever even begin bearing fruit!

But what, then, is the consequence for not abiding in Christ? In verse **6** our Lord says, “*If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.*” Is this a reference to judgment in Hell, as many seem to believe?

The meaning of these words of Christ appear to be this: If any one of the branches, any believer, continues out of fellowship with Me, he is “*cast forth.*” We must remember that the context of the entire chapter is the Christian’s life and service in the world and the bringing forth of fruit to the glory of the Father. The “*casting forth*” is done by the Husbandman, and evidently has in view, the stripping of the believer of the gifts and opportunities which he or she failed to develop.

But what is meant by the words, “*Men gather them, and cast into the fire, and they are burned?*” Let us carefully observe the change from singular pronouns to plural pronouns. “*If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.*” Our Lord does **not** say “men gather **him** and cast **him** into the fire, and **he** is burned.” The “*them*” and the “*they*” represent what is produced by the one who has been cast forth “*as a branch.*” And what is it that is produced by such a person? It is the dead works of wood, hay and stubble that we encountered in our previous Lesson: “*According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire*” (**1 Corinthians 3:10-15**).

What is to become of our “dead works.” **1 Corinthians 3:15** tells us: “*If any man’s work shall be burned* (the very word used in **John 15:6**), *he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.*” Abraham’s nephew Lot, is a perfect example of this. He was out of fellowship with the Lord, he ceased to bear fruit to His glory, and his dead works were all burned up in Sodom; yet he himself was saved!

In **John 15:6**, our Lord appears to be cautioning genuine believers about the possibility of not abiding in fellowship with Him and the consequent result of becoming spiritually fruitless and useless for the Lord. Nevertheless, a Christian’s position in Christ and his or her union with Christ is permanent and secure.

It is our opinion that a Christian, by consistently disobeying God’s Word and grieving the Holy Spirit, may eventually become like a branch that is unfruitful in the Christian life and has to be cast forth and as a result becomes withered. This represents a very solemn warning for every Christian. Either our lives bear fruit which will remain to the glory of the Father, as a result of our continuous fellowship with Jesus Christ; or, because of neglect of communion with Him, we are in great danger of being disqualified as His witnesses on earth. We are producing dead works which will be destroyed by fire at the judgment seat of Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:27

“But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”

It is important when we read **1 Corinthians**, to be aware that many persons who were members of the church of Corinth were opposed to Paul and questioned the legitimacy of his apostleship. We see evidences of this in **1 Corinthians 4:3-5, 18-21** and **9:1-2**. It is, in fact, clear that in chapter **9** of the letter, Paul is defending his ministry, not only in verse **27** but throughout the entire chapter.

In verses 1-2 he says, “Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord.” In almost every verse of this chapter, Paul is referring to his ministry. His personal salvation is never in question at any time in the chapter!

Consider verses 19-23 for example, “For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.” Clearly, it is ministry, not salvation that is being emphasized by Paul in this passage

In verses 24-27 context, Paul compares his ministry to that of an athlete who desires to compete in the games in order to win a prize. Toward this end, Paul runs with certainty, not with uncertainty. **Paul is not concerned with losing his eternal salvation but is very much concerned with being disqualified for ministry.**

The context of the entire chapter is not about Paul receiving eternal life or going to heaven but is instead about being faithful and useful to God in what God wants to accomplish in his life. The prize is not eternal life, for eternal life is a free gift of God. It cannot be earned.

The word “castaway” in 1 Corinthians 9:27, is a translation of the Greek word **adokimos**. With regards to this Greek word and its use in 1 Corinthians 9:27, the respected **Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words**, makes the following comments: **1 Cor 9:27, KJV, ‘castaway,’ RV ‘rejected’ (i.e., disapproved, and so rejected from present testimony, with loss of future reward).**

The word “castaway” is a technical word familiar to those who knew the Greek games. At the Greek games, there was a herald who announced the rules of the contest, the names of the contestants, and the names and cities of the winners. He would also announce the names of any contestants who were disqualified. Paul saw himself as both a herald and a runner. He was keenly aware that it was possible for him to be so busy trying to help others in the race that he might ignore himself and find himself disqualified. It was not a matter of losing personal salvation. **The disqualified Greek athlete did not lose his citizenship, only his opportunity to win a prize.** The whole emphasis is on rewards, and Paul did not want to lose his reward.

Since Paul desired to continue his ministry, and to run in a way that was pleasing and honoring to God, he ran with care and perseverance. The same thing is true for our lives. Being disqualified does not mean losing eternal life, but being disqualified from ministry or from opportunities to serve God in this life. Paul’s concern was to ensure that he did nothing that might cause his ministry to be justly blamed and bring a reproach on the Gospel. It was not that he feared that he would be a castaway eternally, or be everlastingly damned; for he was confident that the One who had begun a good work in him would continue to perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. He knew in whom he had believed, and was persuaded that He was able to keep that which he had committed unto him against that day. He was persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, would be able to separate him from the love of God, which was in Christ Jesus his Lord.

COLOSSIANS 1:21-23

“And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight: If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister.”

In verse **23**, Paul deals with the future glorification of the Christians in Colossae. The phrase “*the hope of the Gospel*” means that blessed hope of our Lord’s return. Paul had already mentioned this hope in verse **5**. He referred to it there as “*the hope which is laid up for you in heaven.*” The words “*Laid up*” are the translation of a Greek word which means “to be laid away, to be reserved, put to one side.” Metaphorically, the word means “to be reserved for one, awaiting him or her.” The word is in a construction in the Greek which gives the meaning as “the hope which has been laid away in times past with the present result that it is reserved for and awaiting you.” Paul is speaking of a hope that is reserved, stored up out of reach of all that could possibly render it null and void. It is a sure hope, laid up in heaven for the saints to enjoy in the future.

There was a time when these Gentile Colossians were without hope (**Ephesians 2:12**). The reason why they were without hope was because they were without God. But when they were reconciled to God, they were given a wonderful hope of glory. All of God’s children will one day be with Christ in heaven (**John 17:24**). In fact, so secure is our future that Paul stated that we have already been glorified! (**Romans 8:30**) All we are waiting for is the revelation of this glory when Jesus Christ returns (**Romans 8:17-19**).

Paul’s use of the word “*if*” in verse **23** may seem to cast a shadow on the assurance of our future glory but this is not the case. It is important to note here, that the word “*if*” here is the translation of the Greek word **ei** which does **not** refer to an unfulfilled, hypothetical condition, presenting the possibility of a future realization. The word has, here, the idea of “assuming that you continue in the faith.” In other words, Paul is expecting that the Colossian Christians will continue in the faith grounded and settled. By so doing, they would demonstrate that they were genuinely saved and would therefore be presented holy, without blemish, and beyond reproach before God. Paul was here addressing truly born-again Colossians, not unsaved professors of Christianity who would follow the Colossian heresy.

The use of the word “*if*” here does not suggest doubt or lays down a condition by which we secure our salvation by our works. Paul used an architectural image in this verse, referring to a house, firmly set on the foundation. The town of Colossae was located in a region known for earthquakes, and the Greek word translated “moved away” can mean “earthquake affected.” Paul was saying in effect here, “If you are truly saved, and built on the solid foundation of Jesus Christ, then, you will continue in the faith and nothing will move you. You have heard the Gospel and trusted Jesus Christ, and He has saved you.” In other words, we are not saved by continuing in the faith. But we continue in the faith because we are saved.

An alternative view is that this passage may be a warning concerning the Christian’s evaluation at the judgement seat of Christ. In **2 Corinthians 5:10** Paul writes, “*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*” The “judgment seat” (Greek **bema**,) was an elevated seat in the square at Corinth where magistrates sat to administer justice and where athletes who distinguished themselves in the arena received their reward. The judgment in view in this verse is not of the unsaved but of the saved. While it is true that for the saved person there is no condemnation (**John 5:24, Romans 8:1**), our Lord will hold us accountable for the deeds done in our body. Paul had already stated this truth in **1 Corinthians 3:10-15** which we considered earlier: “*According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.*”

In **Colossians 1:22-23**, Paul may be contending that faithfulness in the Christian life and a sure hope in the promise of the gospel produce a holy, blameless, and irreproachable life at the judgment seat of Christ. The conditional “*if*” in verse **23** refers to the presentation mentioned in verse **22**.

All genuine disciples will be presented before the Lord, but only those who persevere faithfully and hold firmly to their hope will be presented without reproach. Paul understands that this hope will inspire Godly living that will result in a good evaluation at the judgment seat of Christ.

1 TIMOTHY 4:1-2

“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.”

In this passage, Paul is dealing with the matter of apostasy which is the deliberate and permanent rejection of Christianity after a previous profession of faith in it. The noted theologian Albert Barnes, commenting on this passage made the following remarks: *“The meaning is, that they would ‘apostatize’ from the belief of the truths of the gospel. It does not mean that, as individuals, they would have been true Christians; but that there would be a departure from the great doctrines which constitute the Christian faith.”* Those who “depart from the faith” were never genuinely saved. They were closely associated with the church but were never really part of it as **1 John 2:18-19** clearly indicates: *“Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. **They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.**”* We make bold to say that this passage alone should be sufficient to settle the debate once and for all. Those who apostatize were never, ever genuine disciples!

In **1 Timothy 4:16** Paul writes, *“Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.”* Paul is here urging Timothy to give diligent attention to the public reading and teaching and preaching of the Word of God in the local assembly. The salvation spoken of here is not referring to the salvation of the sinner nor of the preservation of the Christian in salvation, for the reason that both of these are a work of God for man. The salvation referred to here is understood by a study of verses **1-3** which provide the context, namely, being saved from the teachings of demon-influenced men. Paul is informing Timothy that he himself, and those who are under his ministry will be saved from becoming entangled in these heresies if he will consistently focus on the reading of the Word, exhortation from it, and clear explanations of its meaning.

The **United Bible Society New Testament Handbook** offers the following comments in respect of this verse. *“The statement you will save both yourself and your hearers should not be taken literally, since in the New Testament the objects of salvation are sometimes spoken of as the agents (see, for example, **Rom 11:14; 1 Cor 7:16; 9:22; James 2:14; 5:15, 20; Jude 23**). In this letter the function of saving is assigned primarily to God, and this theological truth should influence the interpretation of the present verse. What is meant is not that Timothy is the one who will save himself and his hearers, but that he is the means by which he and his hearers will receive this eternal salvation... An alternative translation model for this verse is: “Be careful about the way you live and the things you teach. You must keep on doing these things that I have instructed you to do. As a result, through you God will save both you yourself and your hearers from judgment.”*

We will continue our examination of passages which seem to oppose the security of the Christian’s position in Christ in our next Lesson.