

# ONCE SAVED, ALWAYS SAVED?

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**INTRODUCTION.** Essentially every Christian I knew when I became a born-again Christian (in the spring of 1964, at the age of 26) believed once saved, necessarily always saved (eternal security). I was attending an evangelical Presbyterian church and started taking classes at a local evangelical Presbyterian seminary. I also had some association with IVCF and a local Bible church. The first three were Calvinistic, and the Bible church was at least Calvinistic when it came to the doctrine that it is impossible to lose your salvation. Because of what I had been taught, and especially by those who helped me find Christ (actually it would be more accurate to say He found me), I believed this doctrine was an important part of the gospel. If you had given me three sentences to present the gospel, I would have included once saved, always saved, and I could have given a few standard verses and arguments to support this doctrine. The last section of this paper discusses the origin of this doctrine and the primary passages of Scripture used to support it. Before closing this paragraph, I want to mention how thankful I am for all the good input I received from all the Christians I was associated with, first as one that did not know salvation, then as a needy young Christian. I very sincerely mean that.

Within a year of becoming a born-again Christian, I became friends with an Assembly of God pastor. This Pentecostal denomination is Arminian in doctrine. Arminians do not believe once saved, necessarily always saved. (Most Pentecostal churches, most Holiness churches, the Methodists, and others, are Arminian.) We talked some about this doctrine, and he gave me a book to read. The book, *Life in the Son*, by Robert Shank, was written to refute eternal security. This input began something of a serious struggle for me. Could this doctrine possibly be wrong? (It's often very difficult for Christians to accept the idea that some things they believe could be wrong; but we all need to humble ourselves before God and seek Him for the balanced truth and full salvation.) It took a couple years for me to come to a firm conviction that the Bible (that is, taking the balance of all that the Bible says related to this topic) does not teach once saved, necessarily always saved.

One primary reason for writing this paper is my concern with the abuse of this doctrine that is widespread in our day. This doctrine is often abused in a way that dampens any motivation for a healthy, necessary (Biblical) fear of God and the urgent need for repentance and holiness. Because of their understanding of eternal security, many can't hear much that the Bible clearly says, including the

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intense warnings of eternal judgment for those not ready to stand before God. This is not surprising, since many pastors etc., in an effort to defend the doctrine of eternal security, explain away the powerful warnings contained in many Bible passages, including those discussed in this paper.

I believe we have a great need for a revival of righteousness and holiness in our day. An abuse of the doctrine of eternal security is part of the problem, but a greater part of the problem is the common tendency to put most of the emphasis on forgiveness and positional (legal) righteousness while subordinating the need for righteous living and holiness. There is no denying the importance of forgiveness, but I don't believe this is more than ten percent of the gospel message. The ninety percent of the message is the transformation to righteous living and holiness. Holiness comes by grace, through the blood of the cross, as much as forgiveness does. God hates sin, and He sent His son to remove sin from the lives of His people, not just to bring forgiveness. I trust that this paper will stir up some Christians to the topic of holiness. I recommend my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin: Full Salvation Through the Atoning Death of the Lord Jesus Christ*, for further study.

Another reason for writing this paper is that the more we Christians come to the balanced truth of what the Scriptures teach, the more we can unite around the truth. I believe that's important. Even when we still don't agree on topics like the one discussed in this paper, we must do everything we can to promote unity in the Body of Christ, including treating one another with respect.

It is possible to believe in eternal security and still make righteousness and holiness a top priority item, and there are many such believers. Also, I should say that once saved, always saved is exactly what should happen, and will happen, if we do our part. We need to emphasize God's part (His love, plan of salvation, atoning sacrifice, grace, mercy, conviction, drawing, teaching forgiveness, drawing sanctifying power, Spirit, etc.) and give Him all the glory. But at the same time, it is mandatory that we know, and do, our part (as outlined in the Scriptures). Our part is pretty well covered by the word faith; that is, if you use the word faith in the full-orbed sense often used in the New Testament. (You could say repentance and faith.) But God doesn't just give us saving faith, and He doesn't force us to continue in faith. (See my "A Paper on Faith.") His grace is, however, sufficient for those who will appropriate it by faith, faith that is based on His Word. We desperately need the balanced truth of what the Bible teaches. Eternal security is closer to the balanced truth than the idea that Christians immediately lose their salvation if they commit a sin.

As far as I'm concerned, the passages of the Bible quoted (and discussed) below, are sufficient to demonstrate that the doctrine of eternal security is wrong. All of the passages speak rather loudly to me, but especially the passages from Revelation chapters 2 and 3, where the Lord Jesus Christ, in His resurrection glory, speaks to His churches (about AD 95). All quotations are from the NASB.

In concluding this Introduction, let me say that I consider the message of this paper to be good news. The gospel, by definition, is good news. God is good, and His will is good. It's good news to know that the gospel provides everything we need to become, and to remain, holy and blameless.

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God is not out to get us, but to bless us. To the extent that we walk in His will, He can bless us. Let's put Him first to the maximum so that He can bless us to the maximum, and be glorified to the maximum.

**Matthew 25:1-13. Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom. (2) And five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. (3) For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, (4) but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. (5) Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. (6) But at midnight there was a shout, "Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." (7) Then all those virgins rose, and trimmed their lamps. [Trimming their lamps means putting them in order, including adding oil to them.] (8) And the foolish said to the prudent, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." (9) But the prudent answered, saying, "No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves." [There is a limit to how much one person can do for another. We must all be prepared to stand before God.] (10) And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. (11) And later the other virgins also came, saying, "Lord, lord open up for us." (12) But He answered and said, "Truly I say to you, I do not know you." (13) Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.**

The main point of this parable is that all Christians are required to always be prepared and ready for the return of Christ, including being prepared for a delay in His return. This is a common scriptural theme. If we wait until the last minute to get ready, we'll probably be too late. To be ready for Christ's return includes believing the truth of the gospel and living in the righteousness and holiness of the gospel through the atoning death of Christ and by the enablement of the Holy Spirit. The "oil" in this parable symbolizes the Holy Spirit, or something similar, like the enabling grace of God. Those running out of oil are, of course, responsible for their situation.

This parable warns of the all-too-real possibility that many who start out as true Christians will not be ready for the return of Christ and will be denied access to God's eternal kingdom. It seems clear enough that initially all ten virgins are considered to be true Christians and members of the Body of Christ. They are all called virgins, and, more significantly, they all have lamps that have been burning (see verse 8). Some other verses from the same discourse by the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew chapters 24 and 25, spoken a few days before the cross) that also warn that some Christians will not be ready for His return and will miss heaven are Matt. 24:9-13, 42-51; and 25:14-30.

**John 15:1-6. I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. (2) Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit** [Bearing fruit includes living in the truth, righteousness, and holiness of God, and faithfully serving Him.], **He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit. (3) You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. (4) Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. (5) I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. (6) If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.**

All of the branches are pictured as being in Christ, the true vine. But we are warned that unless we continue to abide in Christ, we will be cut off from the vine and suffer eternal judgment (see verse 6). We abide in Christ by continuing to make Him and His Word top priority. Abiding in Christ is not automatic. It requires continuing on by grace through faith.

**Romans 11:17-24. But if some of the branches** [Jews that rejected the Messiah] **were broken off, and you** [It is clear in this passage that the apostle was speaking to Gentiles who had become part of God's true Israel by faith.], **being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, (18) do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. (19) You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." (20) Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; (21) for if God did not spare the natural branches** [the Jews who rejected Christ], **neither will He spare you. (22) Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness** [by continuing to hold (and live) the gospel by faith]; **otherwise you also will be cut off. (23) And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again. (24) For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more shall these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?**

**1 Corinthians 15:1, 2. Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, (2) by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you....**

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The recipients of this epistle had received the gospel in faith, at least most of them had. But they (like all Christians) must continue to “hold fast the word” of the gospel in faith, which isn’t just automatically accomplished. For one thing, they must continue to believe the same gospel that Paul proclaimed. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul was dealing with the fact that some were beginning to deny the bodily resurrection. We must continue to believe the true gospel if we want to be saved by it. We must also continue to live the gospel by grace through faith.

**Galatians 5:2, 4. Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. (4) You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.**

The apostle Paul had preached the gospel to the Galatians, and many of these Gentiles had become born-again Christians. Verses like Gal. 3:2, 3 and the awesome words of 5:4, “You have been severed from Christ...you have fallen from grace” confirm that they had become born-again Christians. To fall from grace is to fall from (to lose) the saving grace of God in Christ (to lose your salvation).

The problem was, as this epistle shows, that some time after Paul left Galatia the Judaizers came and preached a “different gospel” (Gal. 1:6) to them. And some of the Galatian Christians were, at a minimum, seriously considering their “gospel.” Their “gospel” required ceremonial works of the Mosaic Law, like circumcision (see, e.g., Gal. 5:3; 6:12, 13). But as the apostle strongly warns in this epistle, there is no other gospel than the one Paul had given them (e.g., Gal. 1:6-9), and to abandon it is to abandon salvation in Christ.

**1 Thessalonians 3:5. For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor should be in vain.**

1 Thess. 2:10-3:10 with Acts 17:1-15 gives the background to understand 1 Thess. 3:5. The apostle Paul was forced to leave Thessalonica before he wanted to, and before the church was adequately grounded. Not long after being forced to leave Thessalonica, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica from Athens “to find out about [their] faith,” etc. These Christians at Thessalonica had known opposition and affliction from the time of their conversion. There is no basis to doubt that they, at least most of them, had become born-again Christians (cf., e.g., 1 Thess. 1:5-2:14). But as 1 Thess. 3:5 shows, there was some basis for Paul to be concerned that, in the worst-case scenario, their “labor should be in vain.” The labor of Paul and his

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companions (Silas and Timothy) would have been in vain if the Christians at Thessalonica had turned their backs on the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of all their tribulation. But, thank God, Timothy brought back good news: Although he found their faith lacking in certain areas (e.g., 1 Thess. 3:10), he was able to bring back news of a genuine faith.

**Hebrews 3:5-4:3, especially 3:6, 12-14, 18, 19; 4:1-3. (3:6) but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end. ... (12) Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God.** [The writer of Hebrews clearly views his readers as true Christians, but he is concerned that some are in very real danger of “falling away from...God.” This strong warning permeates the entire epistle.] **(13) But encourage one another day after day...lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (14) For we have become partakers of Christ** [that is, we will partake of all the glorious blessings of God’s salvation in Christ], **if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end** [cf. Heb. 3:6] **... (18) And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest** [God’s “rest” here, understood in the higher sense, refers to the rest of His eternal glory. This is the meaning of “rest” in Heb. 4:1 and 3. His rest, understood in the lower sense, refers to the land of Canaan. I wouldn’t say that all of those who failed to enter Canaan will fail to enter the rest of God’s eternal glory.], **but to those who were disobedient? (19) And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.** [Note that unbelief and disobedience go together.] **(4:1) Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it.** [He is speaking of failing to enter heavenly rest.] **(2) For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also** [“they” refers to the sons of Israel at the time of the Exodus]; **but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in [or, with] those who heard.** [For God’s word to be effective in our lives, we must take it into our hearts, and keep it in our hearts, by faith. This includes obeying the word by grace through faith.] **(3) For we who have believed enter that rest.”** I agree with those commentators who translate “**are entering**” instead of “enter.” The whole emphasis of Hebrews is that we must keep running the race set before us until it is finished. Then, and only then, is the time for rest. But it is true that, in another sense, there is a rest for us as we run the race by faith. See, e.g., Matt. 11:28-30. God’s grace is sufficient.

**Hebrews 6:4-12. For in the case of those who have once been enlightened** [At a minimum, these words mean that the ones spoken of had come to understand the basic truths of the gospel. (In Heb. 10:32 “enlightened” is used of those who had become Christians.) I believe it is clear that the Christians being spoken to here (and in Heb. 6:1-3, 9-12; and in the verses quoted above from Heb. 3:5-4:3, and in the verses quoted below from Heb. 10:26-31, for example) had become born-again Christians (cf., e.g., Heb. 3:1, 6, 12-14; 4:14-16; 6:9-12, 19, 20; 8:1; 10:19-39; 12:1-13:25). The words of Heb. 6:4, 5 clearly speak of those who had become

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born-again Christians. I'm belaboring this point because so many try to evade the strong warning contained in these verses (and in many other verses) by arguing that those spoken of in 6:4-8 had not become born-again Christians.] **and have tasted of the heavenly gift** [The "heavenly gift" is salvation in Christ, or the equivalent.] **and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit** [These words further confirm that the recipients had truly become born-again Christians (cf., e.g., John 7:37-39; Rom. 8:9; Acts 2:33, 38, 39).], **(5) and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come** [To "taste" includes experiencing. In one (very real) sense, all true Christians already live in "the age to come." We have, in one sense, already had our final judgment and been resurrected into the eternal life of the age to come (see, e.g., John 5:24; Rom. 6:1-11; Col. 3:1-11). I believe the writer of Hebrews is speaking from this point of view in 6:2 when he mentions "the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment." Speaking from this point of view, he is very concerned lest his readers violate such a glorious salvation by falling away from the gospel of the new covenant. As the next verse, and much other scripture shows, there is a limit to how far God's people can go with sinning against His covenants. In the ideal case we won't have any sin. God knows our hearts; He knows rebellion. We know from this epistle that some of the readers were being tempted to draw back from new covenant salvation.], **(6) and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame.** [The writer is speaking of willful rebellion by those who were not babes in Christ, but were established in the faith. In Heb. 10:29 he speaks of one "who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which HE WAS SANCTIFIED." These verses were written to strongly warn the Christians who were being tempted to turn from their faith commitment to God and His Son and His gospel that they must stop their wavering and renew their commitment. These verses were not written to tell Christians who had a desire to repent that God would not accept their repentance. The recipients of this epistle were being encouraged to repent (where repentance was required) throughout this epistle. The devil and his hosts frequently tell Christians that God will not accept their repentance. Jesus said the devil is a liar.] **(7) For ground that drinks the rain which often falls upon it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; (8) but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned. (9) But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. (10) For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. (11) And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end ["To realize the full assurance of hope until the end" means to continue to the end with the full assurance that the things hoped for (especially the promise of heavenly glory), based on the promises of God (note "promises" in v.12),**

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will all come to pass. The only way that a Christian can “realize the full assurance of hope until the end” is by continuing to hold to, and walk in, the basics of the gospel by grace through faith.], **(12) that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.** The word translated “patience” could be translated “endurance” or “steadfastness.” The basic idea behind patience here is of continuing to press on by grace through faith, no matter what happens. To “inherit the promises” means to inherit the things promised in the word of God, especially eternal glory.

**Hebrews 10:26-31. For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins** [In context, he is speaking of a willful rebellion against the new covenant by Christians grounded in the faith. We know from verses like 1 John 2:1, 2 that forgiveness is provided for Christians through the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ. All sin is serious business, but most sin does not fall in the category discussed in 6:4-8 and 10:26-31. I believe we can safely say that any repentant Christian who asks for forgiveness will be forgiven. Satan has convinced many Christians that they have committed an unpardonable sin when they haven’t. He will even accuse Christians of sinning when they haven’t even sinned; his lies must be rejected.], **(27) but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES. (28) Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. (29) How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean** [common; NIV has “an unholy thing”] **the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified** [These words confirm that the writer is speaking of those who had become true Christians. They also confirm that he is dealing with the sin of willful rebellion against (which includes turning away from) the new covenant.], **and has insulted the Spirit of grace? (30) For we know Him who said, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY.” And again, “THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE.” (31) It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.**

**Hebrews 10:32-39, especially verses 35-39. (35) Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.** [He is speaking of the heavenly reward that all Christians who stay faithful to the new covenant will receive.] **(36) For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.** [Heavenly glory was promised for all believers who endure in faith to the end (to the end of their lives or to the time of Christ’s return).] **(37) FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY.** [The Lord is coming to save and to judge at the end of this age.] **(38) BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH** [That is, those who endure in faith



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will be rewarded with the fulness of eternal life – **THEY SHALL LIVE.**]; **AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM.** [That is, if he does not endure in faith, he will be rejected by God when judgment day comes.] **(39) But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.** To preserve the soul is to not lose it to eternal death. See below under James 1:21, 22.

**Hebrews 12:14-17, especially verses 14, 15. (14) Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification [holiness] without which no one will see the Lord.** [To miss seeing the Lord is to miss heaven. See Matt. 5:8. Holiness is required of Christians.] **(15) See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God** [Hebrews 4:1 speaks of coming short of God’s (heavenly) rest. To come short of the grace of God means to miss heaven. See Gal. 5:4. The NIV translates “misses” instead of “comes short of,” and there is widespread agreement on the meaning of these words in the commentaries.]; **that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled....** Deuteronomy 29:18 helps us understand the meaning of these words: “lest there shall be among you a man or woman, or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the LORD [Yahweh] our God, to go and serve the gods of those nations; lest there shall be among you a root bearing poisonous fruit and wormwood.” Apostasy tends to spread and it certainly is defiling. To the extent that it spreads, it destroys holiness and causes God’s people to come short of His grace.

**James 1:12-15. Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved** [having completed his life on the earth], **he will receive the crown of life** [In other words, he will receive the fullness of eternal life of the age to come], **which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.** [To love God includes living in His will (cf., e.g., John 14:15, 21, 23).] **(13) Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”;** **for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. (14) But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.** [One major point here is that God is not the source of temptation. He is against all sin and has provided salvation from sin (including victory over all sin) for those in Christ Jesus. His grace (with the emphasis on sanctifying grace) is sufficient. Cf., e.g., James 1:2-8, 16-18; 4:6; 1 Cor. 10:13. Every Christian has trials, and every Christian has the all-to-real potential to be tempted and to sin, but grace is provided which will enable us to resist temptation and to avoid getting into temptation in such a way that we are being “carried away and enticed

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by...lust” that results in sin.] **(15) Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished [completed], it brings forth death.**

James is not denying the possibility of repentance and restoration, but there is sin unto spiritual death. See, e.g., James 1:21; 5:20; and 1 John 5:16 (these verses are quoted and discussed below). Any sin that is repented of will not result in spiritual death.

**James 1:21, 22. Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness** [These things are incompatible with the righteousness and holiness provided by, and required by, the new covenant.], **in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.** [To save your soul is to not lose your soul to spiritual (eternal) death. Note James 1:15 above. James 5:20 speaks of repentance that “will save [a] soul from death.” In Matt. 16:24-27, Jesus speaks of losing one’s soul by not being ready to stand before Him on the day of judgment. In Heb. 10:35-39, we hear of the need to endure in faith “to the preserving of the soul” rather than “[shrinking] back to destruction” and losing your soul. To “receive the word implanted” is to take God’s word into your heart and live in line with it (by grace through faith).] **(22) But [And] prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.** “Doers of the word” live righteous lives, as required by God’s word, by grace through faith.

**James 5:19, 20. My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth** [This includes straying from being a doer of the word. Faith without works is dead.], **and one turns him back, (20) let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death** [James is speaking of spiritual (eternal) death, as he was in 1:15 and 21. See under 1:21. The only answer for one who has strayed from the truth of God’s word is to repent. ], **and will cover a multitude of sins.** For one thing, the sins of the one who repents will be forgiven and “covered.” We could also think of all the future sins of the one who repents that will never be committed. And, since sins tend to multiply in the lives of those touched by one living in sin, we could further think of all those sins that will never be committed.

**2 Peter 2:20-22. For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ** [They had escaped the defilements of the world through becoming Christians.], **they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. (21) For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness** [Christianity is “the way of righteousness” in that we

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are made righteous through the atoning death of the Lord Jesus as we walk by the Spirit of God through faith.], **than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment delivered to them. (22) It has happened to them according to the true proverb, “A DOG RETURNS TO ITS OWN VOMIT,” and, “A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire.”**

Throughout this epistle, the apostle Peter exhorts his Christian readers to be diligent to live righteous and holy lives, as required by the gospel, and as enabled by the grace of God, or he is warning them not to follow the false teachers to apostasy and destruction. The verses I have quoted constitute a strong warning against apostasy.

The first part of 2:20 confirms that Peter is speaking of those who had become true Christians. Not only does he say that “they have escaped the defilements of the world,” (cf. 2 Peter 1:4), but he also says “by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Peter speaks of the knowledge of God (the Father) and/or Jesus Christ in 2 Peter 1:2, 3, and 8, using the same Greek word for knowledge (*epignosis*) that is used in 2:20. All true Christians have something of a personal, experiential knowledge of God and His Son.

In verse 21, “the way of righteousness” emphasizes the righteous lifestyle required of Christians. “The holy commandment” is the gospel of the new covenant, which provides for, and requires, holiness. See, e.g., 1 Peter 1:13-2:1; 2:11-25.

**1 John 5:16, 17. If anyone sees his brother** [The word “brother,” along with the fact that they had to have life to commit a sin unto death, confirm that the apostle John was speaking of those who had become born-again Christians.] **committing a sin not leading to [unto] death** [spiritual (eternal) death], **he shall ask and God will for him give life** [spiritual (eternal) life; the Greek noun is *zoe*. It is assumed that the brother repents.] **to those who commit sin not leading to [unto] death** [spiritual death]. **There is a sin leading to [unto] death** [spiritual death]: **I do not say that he should make request for this.** (17) **All unrighteousness is sin** [All unrighteousness is serious business. If we sin we need to be quick to repent and to ask for forgiveness, and we must make it top priority to walk in victory over sin. God knows the heart.], **and there is a sin not leading to [unto] death** [spiritual death].

A primary reason for the apostle John to write this epistle was to warn his Christian readers that they must not follow the heretics that were trying to deceive them (see 1 John 2:26; cf. 3:7). The heresy in view was an early form(s) of Gnosticism, which was in such great error that it denied the blood atonement, a doctrine at the heart of Christianity. The heretics denied that they were sinners and the reality of the atoning blood of the Lamb. First John 2:19 shows that (at least some of) the heretics John was concerned about had once been members of the Christian church. For born-again Christians to accept the Gnostic “gospel” was obviously a very serious (deadly) sin.

Apparently the primary “*sin leading* [I prefer skipping this word “leading,” which was added in italics by the NASB] to [unto] death [spiritual (eternal) death]” that John was

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concerned with here, in the context of this epistle, was the abandoning of the gospel (by which the Christians had found life) and the acceptance of the Gnostic “gospel.” God knows the heart. John didn’t say that it was impossible for such Christians to repent (those who truly have a heart to repent can repent), or that other Christians could not pray for their restoration. But he did make it clear that such sin is very serious and that there was no guarantee that prayer for their restoration would be heard and answered by God (see 1 John 5:14, 15).

**Revelation 2:1-7. To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: (2) ‘I know your deeds [works] and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; (3) and you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary. (4) But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.**

[Their “first love” refers, at least for the most part, to their former love for God, which is now at a lower (unacceptable) level. And as the next verse shows, their love for God was reflected in their works (cf. John 14:15, 21, 23). Works reflect what is in the heart.] (5) **Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent** [Repentance is a word you don’t hear much today, whether dealing with those in the process of becoming Christians, or dealing with those already Christians. But the gospel hasn’t changed, and it is mandatory that we repent where repentance is required.] **and do the deeds [works] you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.** [In Revelation, a “lampstand” is a symbol for a Christian church (see 1:20). For the Lord Jesus to remove the lampstand from Ephesus means that the church there would no longer be part of His church, even though they might continue to consider themselves to be Christians and might continue to meet as a church. These words are of awesome significance and are somewhat surprising (even shocking), especially when you consider all the positive things said about this church. These words are so powerful that I assume they met with a repentant response in many at Ephesus. We must remember that the things that the Lord Jesus said to the seven churches about AD 95 apply to every church of every generation that is in the same situation. I have to assume that many Christians today need to repent more than those former Christians at Ephesus.] (6) **Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds [works] of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.** [We don’t have to know what particular sins are referred to here, but it is probable that (at least some of) these sins are spelled out for us in 2:14, 15: “to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality.”] (7) **He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes** [The Lord says these words about hearing and overcoming to each of the seven churches, and thereby to every Christian. To be an overcomer means to stay faithful to the end, which is required of all Christians.], **I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.**” To miss eating of the tree of life means missing eternal life and God’s New Jerusalem (cf. Rev. 21:7, 8; 22:14, 15, 19). It is very clear that the Christians that Jesus was speaking to in these verses were true Christians. Essentially everything Jesus said to them confirms that point, and the fact that they had a lampstand (which the Lord said that

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He would remove if they did not repent) proved that they were true Christians (cf. Rev. 1:20). I'm quite sure He intended for them to take His strong warning seriously.

**Revelation 3:1-6.** **And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars, says this: “I know your deeds [works], that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. (2) Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die** [The fact that the many Christians at Sardis who desperately needed to repent still had some of the life of God (note that Jesus exhorted them to wake up and strengthen THE THINGS THAT REMAIN, WHICH WERE ABOUT TO DIE) proves that they had become true Christians.]; **for I have not found your deeds [works] completed in the sight of My God. (3) Remember therefore what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. If therefore you will not wake up, I will come like a thief** [in judgment] **and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you.** [On Christ's coming after them in judgment as a thief, compare, for example, Matt. 24:50, 51; Luke 21:34-36; and 1 Thess. 5:2-4.] **(4) But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white** [The “white” goes with the righteous lives required of Christians (by grace) and with resurrection glory (cf. Rev. 6:11; 7:9, 14; 19:8, 14). To miss the white garments is to miss heaven.] **for they are worthy** [by the grace of God]. **(5) He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life** [On “the book of life,” see Rev. 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27. All those whose names are in the book of life will partake of eternal life in God's eternal kingdom. To have your name erased from the book of life is to miss God's eternal kingdom. The Lord Jesus strongly infers that many (even the majority) of the Christians at Sardis are on the verge of having their names erased from the book of life. Note that their names were in the book of life, which further confirms that they were true Christians. Note that Rev. 13:8 and especially 17:8 show that not all names have “been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world.” Only the names of the elect were written in the book back before man was created. (Note that Rev. 13:8 and 17:8 just speak of the non-elect of Antichrist's generation.) This involves God's foreknowledge (cf. Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:4, 5), not that we are competent, or have enough information, to fully understand such things. I should point out that the Bible also makes it clear that Christ died for all and calls for all to repent and believe the gospel (see, e.g., Mark 16:15, 16; Acts 17:30, 31; 1 Tim. 2:3-6; 1 John 2:2). It seems that there was still room for repentance at Sardis, and I assume that some did repent after hearing these awesome words. All such persons will be among the overcomers. Surely we should all take such warnings seriously, and be motivated to repent, as required.], **and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels.** [If He doesn't confess our name before His Father, we aren't His people.] **(6) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**

**Revelation 3:11.** **I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown.** Everything that the Lord Jesus says to this church, the church in Philadelphia, is positive (for a pleasant change). However, here in verse 11, He exhorts

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them (and all like them who are prepared for His return) to stay faithful to the end. To lose your crown would be to lose your place in God's eternal kingdom. In Rev. 2:10 He spoke of giving the faithful ones (we must all be in this category) "the crown of [eternal] life." All true Christians will reign with Christ in glory forever (cf., e.g., Rev. 2:26, 27; 3:21; 5:9, 10; 20:4, 6; and especially 22:5).

**Revelation 3:14-22. And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning [i.e., the Origin or Source; cf., e.g., John 1:1-3] of the creation of God, says this: (15) "I know your deeds [works], that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. (16) So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.** [The Lord Jesus says He will not tolerate "lukewarmness" (complacency; lack of commitment/faithfulness) in His people. Of course He will not tolerate "coldness" either. But, at least if they were cold it would be clear that they were not really right with God, and some might have seen a need to repent. Persons spit out of His mouth (what awesome words!) would cease to be His people. But there is still room for these Christians to answer this powerful warning and call to repentance, as verse 19 shows.] **(17) Because you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,' and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked** [God's people have often wrongly assumed that material prosperity necessarily proves that all is well in their relationship with God. And those prospering in the world tend to become complacent, making a place for God at the edge of their lives, a place He will not accept.], **(18) I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire** [that is, true gold, heavenly gold (things like truth, righteousness, and holiness), that we might have a true (heavenly) reward], **that you may become rich** [that is, truly rich (rich in the things of God)], **and white garments** [garments that go with righteous and holy lives], **that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eyesalve to anoint your eyes, that you may [really] see.** [In other words, repent and begin to live in line with the reality of the gospel.] **(19) Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent.** [For these Christians to be zealous and repent will convert them from their lukewarm state. Throughout these verses Jesus spoke to them as those who had become true Christians but who were about to lose that status if they didn't quickly repent. The fact that Laodicea is one of the seven churches that had a lampstand confirms that Jesus He was speaking to them as Christians, but Christians on the verge of losing their lampstand (cf. Rev. 2:5).] **(20) Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door** [with a repentant heart, in faith], **I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.** [In this context, these words were an invitation for the Christians at Laodicea (and all other Christians with the same need to repent) to repent and begin to fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ, putting Him first place in their hearts and lives.] **(21) He who overcomes** [and again, we must all be overcomers], **I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.** [See Rev. 22:3-5. All overcomers will reign with the Lord Jesus Christ forever. To miss this reign is to miss the destiny of all the members of God's true Israel.] **(22) He who has an ear, let**

**him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**

FIVE PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE THAT EMPHASIZE THE NEED FOR CHRISTIANS TO BE RIGHTEOUS, AND WARN THAT THE UNRIGHTEOUS WILL NOT HAVE A PLACE IN HEAVEN:

**Romans 8:12-14. So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh** [“To live according to the flesh” means to live in sin, doing the works of the flesh. To live according to the flesh means to not live according to the Spirit.]—**(13) for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die** [The apostle Paul is speaking to born-again Christians. They have spiritual life. As Rom. 8:1-11 show, it is only born-again Christians who can avoid living according to the flesh. They can, and must, live in/by the Spirit. If Christians do not walk by the Spirit of God and appropriate the life, righteousness, and holiness He provides, there is nowhere else to go but back into spiritual death, which culminates in eternal death—[they] must die.]; **but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds** [or, works] **of the body, you will live.** [Christians are required to walk by the Spirit on a continuous basis. As they do, they are putting to death the deeds of the body. The “deeds of the body” equals the “works of the flesh” of Gal. 5:19-21, which equals all sin. For a Christian to put to death the deeds of the body means that the Christian, by the enablement of the Spirit, doesn’t sin. “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you [most certainly] will not carry out the [sinful] desire of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). (If a Christian should sin, forgiveness and restoration are provided through the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ when we confess our sins and repent.) By living in the Spirit, the Christian stays in spiritual life, and, at the end of this age, they will inherit eternal life in its full glory - “[they] will live” (Rom. 8:13).”] **(14) For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God.** Part of the definition of what it means to be a Christian is that we must be led by the Spirit of God on a continuous basis. In this context, all the emphasis is on being led by the Spirit to “[put] to death the deeds of the body”; that is, to live in the righteousness and holiness of God. All such persons - these are the sons of God.

**1 Corinthians 6:8-11. On the contrary [But], you yourselves wrong** [Greek *adikeo*] **and defraud, and that your brethren.** [In verses 1-7, the apostle Paul rebuked the Christians at Corinth for taking their disputes with one another before the non-Christian courts. But in verses 8-11 he deals with a much more serious problem. He speaks to the Christians who had sinned against their brethren in the first place. (These sins had led to the court cases previously mentioned.) He sternly warns them that such sinning (and not just because they were sinning against other Christians) was totally incompatible with the Christian lifestyle. The apostle writes from the point of view that all his readers had become born-again Christians. I assume that most of them had. In verses 9-11, he says that those characterized by sin will not inherit the kingdom of God. Hopefully such strong words met with a repentant response in many Christians at Corinth. We must take such warnings seriously, but I’m afraid that many Christians of our day don’t understand the awesome significance of these words.] **(9) Or do you not know that the**

**unrighteous** [The Greek adjective translated “unrighteous” here is *adikos*. The Greek verb used in verse 8 (*adikeo*) is closely related to this adjective, being derived from it. This helps confirm that Paul intends to include the ones doing wrong (and defrauding their brethren) in verse 8 with the unrighteous of verse 9, thereby issuing a powerful warning and call to repentance.] **shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, (10) nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (11) And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.** Verse 11 shows that Christians, by definition, are to have left these, and all other sinful things, behind. This is a big part of what the good news of new covenant salvation is all about, not to minimize forgiveness. Paul’s words include the message that every Christian that has not left these things behind, or has picked them up since conversion, must repent and put them off now, with the highest priority.

**Galatians 5:16-24.** (This passage is discussed in more detail in my book “Holiness and Victory Over Sin: Full Salvation Through the Atoning Death of the Lord Jesus Christ.”) **But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.** [“The desire of the flesh” is to do “the [sinful] deeds [works] of the flesh” of Gal. 5:19-21. In other words, the desire of the flesh is to sin. “The flesh” is man (spirit, soul, and body) in spiritual death, without the Holy Spirit. “The flesh” is the old man which we are supposed to have crucified by the grace of God in Christ (Gal. 5:24; cf. Rom. 6:6). But the trouble is that the old man has not been annihilated, and it still wants to live and manifest itself in sin. And the old man can manifest itself in sin to the extent that we don’t walk in the Spirit through faith on a continuous basis. To walk in the Spirit through faith requires, for one thing, that we really know and understand the gospel.] **(17) For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the [sinful] things that you please.** [It is important to see that the primary warfare is between the Spirit (not the spirit of the believer) and the flesh (the old man that still wants to live). The Christian must continually cooperate with the Spirit through faith. (Of course it is true that faith is of the heart/spirit/inner man, not the body.) It is also important to see that the flesh, as the word is used in this passage, includes the work of demon spirits. When the apostle concludes this verse with the words “so that you may not do the things that you please,” he means that you may not do the sinful “desire[s] of the flesh” mentioned in verse 16.] **(18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the [Mosaic] Law.** [This verse is quite relevant to the overall message of this epistle. The Judaizers were trying to convince Paul’s Gentile converts in Galatia that they must submit to the Mosaic Law and be circumcised, etc.] **(19) Now the deeds [works] of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, (20) idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, (21) envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.** [First, note that “the [works] of the flesh’ include sinful attitudes etc. (and not just sinful acts)



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and that they are not at all limited to sins associated with the literal “flesh” (the physical body). And, more significantly, when considering the topic of this paper, the apostle Paul issues a powerful warning to Christians that their lives must not be characterized by sin. They must make it a top priority to make sure that they truly are living in the righteousness and holiness required by the gospel by walking by [in/after] the Spirit through faith. If not, they shall not inherit the kingdom of God. I believe the apostle intended his readers take these words seriously and not assume that these words certainly couldn't apply to them since they knew they had become born-again Christians. They knew that they had received the Holy Spirit (e.g., 3:2), but a walk in the Spirit doesn't automatically follow, and, therefore, neither does heaven.] **(22) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.** [Even as walking in the flesh produces predictable results, the works of the flesh; walking in the Spirit produces predictable results, “the fruit of the Spirit” and righteousness and holiness.] **(24) Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.** [Christians cannot annihilate the flesh (the old man) so that it will cease existing, but they can, and must, keep the old man dead, that is, dead in the sense that it does not manifest itself in sinful works. See, e.g., Rom. 6:1-11 and 8:12-14 (discussed above). Romans 6:1-11 and much other scripture show that the atoning death of the Lord Jesus conquered sin and enables Christians to live in victory over sin. 1 Peter 2:24 is one of my favorite such scriptures: “He...bore our sins [with the guilt and the penalties, including the major penalties of spiritual death and bondage to sin] in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness....” We cannot overemphasize the importance of the atoning death of the Lord Jesus, but it is also true that we cannot overemphasize the importance of the Holy Spirit. There is no Christian holiness apart from both of them. And it is equally true that we will not be holy (and holiness is not optional) if we do not do our part by cooperating with God's sufficient grace through faith, “[crucifying] the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal. 5:24)]

**Galatians 6:7-9. Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. (8) For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life.** [To sow to the flesh is to do the works of the flesh (5:19-21), not living for God in the righteousness and holiness of the gospel. To sow to the Spirit is to live for God in the righteousness and holiness of the gospel, producing the fruit of the Spirit (5:22, 23). To not reap eternal life is to miss heaven and to partake rather of eternal death.] **(9) And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary.** That is, we shall reap eternal life if we continue to sow to the Spirit until the end by grace through faith.

**Ephesians 5:1-10. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; (2) and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. (3) But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named [as existing] among you, as is proper among saints; (4) and**

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there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. (5) **For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater** [The covetous man bows down, so to speak, before the things he covets], **has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.** (6) **Let no one deceive you with empty words** [That is, with empty words like the following: “God doesn’t care all that much how you are living as long as you asked Christ into your heart and call yourself a Christian. He understands your sin and He could never condemn you, and He certainly could not fail to take you into His heavenly kingdom. You don’t have to be too concerned with finding out what the Bible says, or with repentance, or holiness.” However, the apostle Paul (in these verses) says something quite different.], **for because of these things** [that is, because of living in sin] **the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.** (7) **Therefore do not be partakers with them** [The apostle is speaking, at least for the most part, of God’s wrath on judgment day. The point is that if you are living like the sons of disobedience, you are, by definition, a son of disobedience, and you will be “partakers with them” of God’s wrath.]; (8) **for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light** [The light includes the truth, righteousness, and holiness of God. For Christians to walk in the light is not optional.] (9) **(for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth),** (10) **trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.** I would translate, “approving” or “demonstrating” instead of “trying to learn.” For one thing, the “goodness and righteousness” of the gospel isn’t that complicated. When we walk by God’s Word and by His Spirit, we will think right, thereby “approving” the things that please God.

SOME MORE PASSAGES THAT DON’T FIT THE IDEA OF ONCE SAVED, NECESSARILY ALWAYS SAVED (Most of these passages are briefly discussed, or just listed. Some of these passages are as relevant to our topic as those discussed above, but I had to draw the line somewhere):

**Luke 8:4-15 (Matt. 13:1-9, 18-23; Mark 4:1-20).** (11) **Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God. ...** (13) **And those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away.** (14) **And the seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity.** (15) **And the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.** It is not enough to have a good beginning; we also need a good ending. Bad soil can become good soil by beginning to make God and His word top priority.

**Luke 14:25-35, especially verses 26, 28-30.** (26) **If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate** [by comparison of his love for Christ] **his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.** [In our day prospective converts seldom hear that God requires a total

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commitment. They may not even hear of any required commitment.] (28) **For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? (29) Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, (30) saying, “This man began to build and was not able to finish.”** When prospective converts are faced with such exhortations to “calculate the cost,” they will probably set their hearts to finish the race (by grace, through faith), or they will put off becoming Christians. However, when the “gospel” is presented in a way that leaves out the need for repentance, total commitment, calculating the cost, holiness, etc. (as is commonly done in our day), it’s not all that surprising that many end up falling away (and that many “Christians” never were born again).

**Acts 14:21, 22. And after they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging [exhorting] them to continue in the faith, and saying, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”**

**Romans 6:16. Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience [to God/the gospel] resulting in righteousness.** The apostle Paul exhorts his born-again readers with the fact that if they willfully submit themselves to sin, they are turning from God’s kingdom of life and righteousness to the kingdom of sin and death, and the end result will be eternal death. Compare Rom. 8:13a.

**Colossians 1:21-23. And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, (22) yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—(23) if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard....** For Christians to inherit “the hope of the gospel,” which equals the glory of heaven (cf. Col. 1:5, 27), they must continue in the faith until the end. This includes their continuing to hold the basic truths of the gospel and their continuing to live in the holiness of the gospel. I recommend my book *Holiness and Victory Over Sin* (pages 186-190) for further study on these important verses.

**2 Peter 1:1-11, especially verses 10, 11. (10) Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; (11) for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.** These verses make it very clear Peter is writing to born-again Christians. But the apostle doesn’t just assume once saved, necessarily always saved.

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Also see 2 Peter 2:20-22, which was discussed above.

Other passages: 1 Cor. 9:24-27; 10:1-22; 1 Tim. 4:1-5; 5:11-15; 6:9-12, 17-21; 2 Tim. 2:10-26; Heb. 2:1-3; 1 John 2:28, 29; 4:17, 18; Jude 1:20-24; Rev. 21:7, 8; 22:18, 19.

## ORIGIN OF THE DOCTRINE ONCE SAVED, ALWAYS SAVED

This doctrine originated, for the most part at least, with the later view of Augustine. He died AD 430. I'll quote part of what L. Berkhof, a Calvinistic theologian, said under the heading, "The Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints in History" ("Systematic Theology" [Eerdmans, 1939, 1941], page 545): "The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints [this is the equivalent of once saved, always saved/eternal security] is to the effect that they whom God has regenerated [caused to be reborn] and effectually called to a state of grace, can neither totally nor finally fall away from that state, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end and be eternally saved. **THIS DOCTRINE WAS FIRST EXPLICITLY TAUGHT BY AUGUSTINE** [[my emphasis. The fact that this doctrine wasn't explicitly taught in the early church writings in the years before Augustine (AD 354-430) weighs very heavily against the doctrine being true. I'll include an excerpt that deals with the teaching of the early Christian writers on this topic when I finish this quotation from Berkof.], though he was not as consistent on this point as might have been expected of him as a strict predestinarian. With him the doctrine did not assume the form just stated. He held that the elect could not so fall away as to be finally lost, but at the same time considered it possible that some who were endowed with new life and true faith could fall from grace completely and at last suffer eternal damnation."

I'll quote part of what David Bercot says on the view of the early Christian writers under the subheading, "Can A Saved Person Be Lost?" ("Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up: A New Look at Today's Evangelical Church in the Light of Early Christianity" [Scroll Publishing, 1989, 1999], pages 65, 66):

"Since the early Christians believed that our continued faith and obedience [true faith includes obedience (by grace)] are necessary for salvation, it naturally follows that they believed that a 'saved' person could still end up being lost. For example, Irenaeus [about AD130-200], the pupil of Polycarp [who knew the apostle John], wrote, 'Christ will not die again on behalf of those who now commit sin because death shall no more have dominion over Him.... Therefore we should not be puffed up.... But we should beware lest somehow, after [we have come to] the knowledge of Christ, if we do things displeasing to God, we obtain no further forgiveness of sins but rather be shut out from His kingdom' " ("Against Heresies," bk. 4, chap. 27, sec. 2. [Heb. 6:4-6]). [Irenaeus didn't mean that there is no forgiveness for sins committed after conversion, but that (according to the Bible) we Christians must know that it is very dangerous to play with sin, and especially sin that falls in the category of being willful, defiant sin or apostasy.]

Tertullian [about AD160-240] wrote, 'Some people act as though God were under an *obligation* to bestow even on the unworthy His intended gift. ... For do not many

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afterwards *fall out of grace? Is not this gift [of salvation] taken away from many?* (“On Repentance,” chapter 6)

Cyprian [about AD200-258] told his fellow believers, ‘It is written, “He who endures to the end, the same shall be saved” [Matt. 10:22]. So whatever precedes the end is only a step by which we ascend to the summit of salvation. It is not the final point wherein we have already gained the full result of the ascent.’ (“Unity of the Church,” section 21)

One of the Scripture passages that the early Christians frequently cited is Heb. 10:26: ‘If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left.’ Our preachers usually tell us that the writer of Hebrews wasn’t talking about saved persons. ... All the early Christians understood this passage to be talking about persons who had been saved. ....” (Many more similar quotations from early Christian writers [quite a few of these brethren were martyred for Christ] are available. See the appendix of this paper.)

It is important to understand that the perseverance of the saints was only part of the package that Augustine came up with. An important part of the package was the idea that man is so completely fallen that he has no ability to respond to [or to cooperate with] God’s grace. Calvinists often use the words “Total Depravity.” I agree that man is so fallen that God must take the initiative in our salvation, and that salvation must be all of grace since we do not merit salvation in any way. But Calvinists (following Augustine) include the idea that man is totally unable to respond to (or cooperate with) God’s grace or have faith and God must do everything, including giving faith to His chosen ones.

I believe the Bible clearly shows that faith (believing) in Christ/the gospel is our part. (It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss this topic, except to say that even the few verses that some have used to try to show that God gives us saving faith are, in my opinion, being misunderstood. This includes Eph. 2:8 and Rom. 12:3. On Eph. 2:8 see the *Amplified Bible*. This topic is discussed in some detail in my, *A Paper on Faith*, which is 114 pages.) However, it must be understood that we could not have faith in Christ if God didn’t do His part first. This includes His sending His Son to die for us, His sending the gospel to us as individuals, His work of convicting, drawing, etc. And it must be understood that faith is nothing to boast about. We are simply receiving what God freely gives us at a high cost to Himself. God must receive all of the glory, as Calvinists rightly insist.

Two other parts of Augustine’s package (using typical Calvinistic terminology) are “Unconditional Election” and “Irresistible Grace.” Since all men are totally depraved, there isn’t any difference between men that would enable God (by foreknowledge) to elect one person and not another. No man, they say, has any capacity for faith or to cooperate with God’s grace. Therefore, His election must be unconditioned by anything in man – His election is unconditional. And since everything depends on God’s sovereign will and power, who could possibly resist His saving grace - it is irresistible. If He chose you for salvation, you will be saved! And you will persevere – you will not lose your salvation. Who is man to thwart the plans of God?

One more basic point that is typically held by Calvinists (though this was not held by Augustine) is “Limited Atonement.” That is, Christ did not die for all, but just for the elect. This makes sense when you consider salvation from a Calvinistic point of view, but

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I believe verses like 1 Tim. 2:4-6; 1 John 2:2 refute the idea of limited atonement. Calvinists try to reconcile such verses with their doctrine, but, in my opinion, quite unsuccessfully. With limited atonement the Calvinists are reacting against the Arminian position that the atonement was in its intention universal. From their point of view, it insults God to speak of His intention to save a people with the result that many of them are not saved. I'll quote from Berkhof again (page 394): "The Reformed position is that Christ died for the purpose of actually and certainly saving the elect and the elect only."

"The Five Points of Calvinism," which are all briefly discussed above, yield the **TULIP**: Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and the Perseverance of the Saints. You also hear of four-point Calvinists; they reject the idea of limited atonement.

It is very important to see that the doctrine of once saved, always saved did not arise on its own, but as part of the Augustinian/Calvinistic system briefly described above. The doctrine follows quite naturally once you accept this theological viewpoint. However, it would have been very difficult for the doctrine to arise on its own with wide acceptance because of its limited scriptural support, especially when you consider the many passages of scripture that clearly refute the doctrine. Many such passages are discussed in this paper. The primary verses used to support the doctrine are listed below.

There are many Christians today, including many Baptists, who hold once saved, always saved but do not agree with much, if any, of the Augustinian/Calvinistic viewpoint. However, I believe we can say that their doctrine traces back to this viewpoint (whether directly or indirectly) in most cases. After all, the doctrine of eternal security is appealing, and easy to accept. I'll quote from W. W. Adams. (At the time of this writing he was a professor at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The quotation is taken from the Introduction to *Elect in the Son* by R. Shank (Westcott Publishers, 1970). I mentioned an earlier book by R. Shank in my Introduction.) "Let it be remembered that, less than a hundred years ago, all five cardinal points of Calvin's system of theology generally prevailed among Baptists, as theological textbooks of the times will confirm. Today, only one point remains to any appreciable extent among Baptists, inevitable perseverance, and there is growing evidence that Baptists are increasingly questioning this last vestige of the central core of Calvin's system of theology. Our only legitimate concern in all of this is, What saith the Scripture?" Amen!

Although I don't believe Calvinism represents a fully balanced scriptural viewpoint (this is also true regarding most other theological traditions), I can say that many Calvinists are solid, Bible-believing Christians. And I can say that there is a scriptural basis for the Calvinistic viewpoint. (I'll list some key verses in the next paragraph.) The early Calvinists (as do many Calvinists today) guarded against a serious abuse of once saved, always saved by several means. One was to put an emphasis on the need for righteousness and holiness. But today, some Calvinists and some non-Calvinists who hold eternal security insist that holiness is not required. It is not necessary to make Jesus your Lord, just your Savior. Many of them say that all that is required is that you have had a conversion experience, even if you are living in sin. Some even say that you don't have to continue to have faith to maintain your salvation, including Charles Stanley in his book, "Eternal Security."

I believe the Arminian position (which, for one thing, rejects all five points of Calvinism) is somewhat closer to the scriptural balance than Calvinism. (We desperately

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need the balanced truth of what the Bible teaches.) However, they (some more than others) typically miss some of the balance by minimizing, or explaining away, many of the passages of scripture emphasized by Calvinists. Some verses that fit a Calvinistic emphasis are John 6:37, 39, 44, 65; Acts 2:39; 13:48; 16:14; Rom. 8:28-30; 9:6-29; 1 Cor. 1:24; Eph. 1:4, 5, 11; and Rev. 17:8 (The names of the elect have been written in the Lamb's book of life from the foundation of the world), and there are more such verses. Most of these verses do not deal directly with eternal security, but they provide a theological framework that fits the doctrine. The verses used to support eternal security are listed below.

Although many Calvinists speak of the need for holiness, they typically deny the possibility of walking in victory over sin. For example, they typically use Romans chapter 7 to try to prove that such a victory is impossible. John Calvin interpreted Romans 7 this way. Arminians typically teach (rightly from my point of view) that Christians can walk in victory over sin, and their interpretation of Romans 7 fits this viewpoint. James Arminius (AD1560-1609), from whom the Arminians were named) wrote a 200 page paper on Romans 7, giving, for the most part at least, the correct interpretation.

Aiming for a Balanced Biblical Viewpoint. It seems clear to me that Calvinists and Arminians both have a scriptural basis for their viewpoints, but by emphasizing their key verses and minimizing, or explaining away, the key verses of the other side, they both tend to miss the balanced Biblical truth. (This tendency is not, of course, limited to the Calvinistic/Arminian controversies.) We desperately need the balanced truth of what the Bible teaches. D. A. Carson (*Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension* [Baker, 1994], page 3) says: "Some writers draw every possible conclusion out of all passages which stress or presuppose God's unconditioned sovereignty, and then construct a system to filter out and explain any other evidence. Methodologically speaking, such an approach is no different from that of writers who focus on man, his responsibilities and choices, and conclude on the basis of their system that God's sovereignty is necessarily limited, perhaps self-limited, in some way."

I think we must admit that the Bible is written in such a way that it permits misunderstanding by supplying many verses that fit a Calvinistic emphasis and many that fit an Arminian emphasis. And at the same time there isn't much in the way of warnings to remind us that many such verses, though true, do not represent the balanced Biblical truth. Also, there isn't much of an attempt to tie both strands of truth together in a systematic way. This is not to criticize the Bible, of course; God isn't on trial and neither is His Word. But we must recognize that many verses need to be balanced out with the rest of the Bible to arrive at the balanced truth

E. P. Sanders (*Paul and Palestinian Judaism* [Fortress Press, 1977]) demonstrates that other ancient Jewish writings (like the Dead Sea Scrolls) contain passages which speak of God's sovereign rule in such a way that you would think that they believed man had nothing of free will, but as you keep on reading you find other passages that speak of the need for man to do his part. I'll include a quotation from Sanders, pages 446, 447: "Although the individual's ability to decide and commit himself to a way or a Lord seems to us to exclude predestinarian statements, we should recall that the two generally go together in Judaism. Just as the Qumran covenanters [The Dead Sea Scrolls came from

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Qumran.] are called both the elect and those who choose God, so Paul has no difficulty in thinking of those who accept the gospel as being the elect of God (cf. also 1 Thess. 1:4; 1 Cor. 1:24, 26; Rom. 9:11f.; 11:7). Precisely how we should formulate the balance between predestination and decision in Paul is difficult to say.”

As I said, I don't believe we have enough information (even if we were competent to understand it in our present state of existence) to fully understand such things, and we don't need to fully understand them. However, we do need to make it a top priority to humble ourselves before God and seek Him for a balanced understanding of His Word. And we must make sure we do the things (by grace through faith) that He requires of us.

Verses Used To Support Eternal Security:

**John 6:39. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.** This verse certainly emphasizes God's role in our salvation. If this was all the Bible had to say on the subject, I would still believe in eternal security. However, I should mention that God's will isn't always done. He doesn't will for His born-again children to rebel against Him or turn their backs on Him.

**John 10:27-29. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; (28) and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. (29) My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.** There is some emphasis on God's sovereign role in these verses, but we can also see something of man's part in verse 27. Also, the issue is not whether anyone is able to snatch a believer out of the Father's hand (they aren't able), but whether a believer can apostatize and stop following Him, thereby willfully abandoning His hand. This paper shows that there are a large number of passages in the New Testament which show that true Christians can fall away from God.

Most of the other verses that have been used to support eternal security fit into the category of God's being able to protect and/or keep His people. I have seen the following such verses so used: John 17:11-23; Rom. 8:31-39; 2 Thess. 3:3; Heb. 7:25; 1 Peter 1:5; Jude 1:24; and Rev. 3:10. Thank God for all such verses, but they don't begin to demonstrate that we are eternally secure *no matter what we believe or do*. They help put the emphasis where it should be—on God's part. We must look to Him to keep us, but at the same time not neglecting to fulfill our covenant responsibilities (by His sufficient grace). It is significant that essentially every passage listed in this paragraph is strongly balanced out by other verses in that very book of the Bible (not to mention the other books of the Bible), as the many verses discussed in this paper demonstrate. I'll just take time to cite two examples: Hebrews 7:25 says: **Hence, also, He is able to save forever [or, completely] those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.** For one thing, we can see something of our part in drawing near to God. But, more significantly, the book of Hebrews is filled with awesome warnings that some of these Christians were on the verge of apostasy and eternal destruction. Many such warnings from Hebrews are quoted and discussed in this paper.



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Revelation 3:10 says: **Because you have kept the word of My perseverance** [that is, they had kept His word, which required perseverance on their part], **I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth.** These significant words were not spoken to all the Christians, but to those who were faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ (see Rev. 3:8-11). The Lord had something very different to say to the Christians who were not being faithful, as the passages from Revelation chapters 2 and 3 that we discussed above demonstrate. He warned them that they would no longer be His people if they did not repent. And as we discussed, it is clear that Jesus was warning people who had become born-again Christians.

Two other verses that I have seen listed to try to prove eternal security are Rom. 11:29 and Phil. 1:6. The first verse doesn't provide much support for the doctrine (and especially when read in the light of Rom. 11:19-24) since Paul is dealing with God's promise to ultimately save Israel, not with a promise to save every Israelite. Nor does Phil. 1:6 really support the doctrine. For one thing, these words were not spoken to all Christians, but to the Christians at Philippi. This church had a special relationship with the apostle Paul, who had founded the church. As the epistle to the Philippians shows, this church had supported Paul's ministry in a very special way, and he knew of their overall faithfulness to the gospel. However, even this church needed to deal with a few problem areas, and there certainly was no guarantee that every single Christian at Philippi would persevere to the end. Paul exhorted the Philippians with some very significant words, words fully applicable for us too. Every Christian that heeds these words can be sure of their eternal security. I'll conclude this paper with these words: Phil. 2:12-16. **So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; (13) for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.** [His grace is sufficient, but not effective without our cooperation. He doesn't force us to believe the truth or to keep believing the truth, and He doesn't force us to live according to the truth or to keep living according to the truth in the righteousness and holiness of God.] **(14) Do all things without grumbling or disputing; (15) that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, (16) holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ [judgment day] I may have cause to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.** If, in the very worst case scenario, all of the Christians at Philippi turned their backs on the Lord Jesus Christ (which wasn't about to happen), the apostle's work at Philippi would have been in vain.

May God's will be accomplished and His people be edified through this paper!

Karl Kemp; September 1996

A few changes were incorporated in July 2000; a few words were added in 2011; and several paragraphs were added along with a few revisions in September 2011. Also I am

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including some ten pages of quotations from the Appendix of my paper titled “A Verse-by-Verse Study of 2 Peter: Includes a Lengthy Appendix that Contains Excerpts and Comments Dealing with the Doctrine ‘Once Saved, Necessarily Always Saved?’ and Related Issues (Mostly Dealing with the Viewpoints of Augustine and the Calvinists); the Appendix Includes Many Quotations from the Early Christian Fathers Dealing with Eternal Security and Related Issues.” The Appendix is 100 pages. (Here I’ll just be quoting some ten percent of what is quoted in that Appendix.) You could get a copy of this 133 page paper for \$7, which won’t fully cover the cost of the printing and postage, but I want to make it available to you. (Karl Kemp; P. O. Box 1816; St. Charles, MO; 63303. E-mail: [kkemp7753@sbcglobal.net](mailto:kkemp7753@sbcglobal.net).)

That Appendix also serves as an appendix for this present paper, “Once Saved, Always Saved?” I also dealt with this important topic in several other papers; see “A Paper on Faith” (dated May 1997); “The Christian, the Law, and Legalism” (dated December 1997); “Verse-by-Verse Studies of Ephesians Chapters 1 and 4; and Romans 8:16-23,” which includes extensive excerpts from Norman Geisler’s *Chosen but Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election* (dated November 1999); and “A Verse-by-Verse Study of Romans Chapters 9-11” (dated March 2001).

The first section in that Appendix is titled, “Excerpts from Douglas J. Moo’s Commentary on 2 Peter that Deal with Eternal Security” (*2 Peter and Jude* [Zondervan, 1996], pages 153-159). I don’t always agree with what Moo, a Calvinistic scholar, says, but I have a lot of respect for his ministry and I have appreciated his writings for a long time. I’ll make some comments in brackets [ ] or [[ ]] in the middle of this quotation, as I frequently do in my writings.

“I am therefore faced with a series of texts that appears to conflict with my belief in eternal security. What do I do? ... [Moo says that the best option he can come up with at the present time is to deny that the false teachers of 2 Peter had become true Christians, but as he continues in the last paragraph on page 154, he says:] this alternative, however, does not ultimately satisfy me at the exegetical level. [I’m thankful that Moo admits there are serious problems with this interpretation; we need more such honesty in the body of Christ. We must make it a top priority to be faithful to God and be aiming for the balanced truth, not trying to prove that we have been right or trying to win an argument. We, and especially ministers, are going to have to answer to God.] Peter in the text we are looking at, and even more clearly the author to the Hebrews, gives every indication of describing these people as they really are [as those who had become true Christians], not as they appear to be. [And this fact, this very important fact, a fact that can’t be disregarded, isn’t just true for the passages in 2 Peter and Hebrews. Many other passages, including Revelation chapters 2, 3, make it quite clear that the warnings against falling from grace deal with true Christians.] At this point, then, I have failed to come up with a natural and convincing interpretation of 2 Peter 2:20-22 that harmonizes with my ‘eternal security’ theological context. ...

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[I'll drop down to Moo's concluding paragraph of this subsection. Still believing that eternal security is a biblical doctrine, he says:] my hesitant conclusion is that the best interpretation I can now discover is that Peter is not talking about truly regenerate believers. [In other words, his commitment to the doctrine of eternal security forces Moo, at least for now, to interpret 2 Peter 2:20-22 (and many similar passages) in a most unnatural (and I would say clearly wrong) way.] But I will honestly admit that I am not finally satisfied with this conclusion, and I keep coming across warning passages that I struggle to do exegetical justice to. ...I am in process on this issue, still convinced that eternal security is a biblical doctrine, but less convinced that I used to be." Moo is at least headed in the right direction.

Before leaving Moo I'll quote part of what he says in his "Contemporary Significance" section dealing with 2 Peter 2:17-22 under the subheading "Concern about holiness of life" (pages 157-159). "To be sure, I am inclined to think that eternal damnation is not a real threat for the Christian. But the danger is that such a theological position will lead to smug satisfaction, a presumption on God's grace. Belief in eternal security must not lead to unconcern about holiness of life. ... ..we Christians are called to respond to the truth about God that we learn and are warned about the consequences if we fail to do so.

... 'Cheap grace' is endemic among contemporary evangelicals. ... The problem is that we don't often enough hear that God is holy and terrible in his majesty, that he is just and cannot abide sin.... [[An equally serious "problem," if not a greater problem, is that we don't often hear that the new covenant in the blood of Christ provides grace sufficient for Christians to walk in victory over sin. Most Christians, including most Calvinists, teach that we can never stop sinning until we get to heaven, and they even quote verses to supposedly prove this point. I deal with this super-important topic in my book *Holiness and Victory Over Sin* and in many of my papers.]] ... We Calvinists must be extremely careful that we do not allow our belief in or teaching about eternal security to remove or lessen the responsibility that God places on our shoulders to grow in the grace he so richly makes available. ...."

The second section in the Appendix is titled, "Excerpts from *Kept by the Power of God: A Study of Perseverance and Falling Away* by I. Howard Marshall." The book was published by Paternoster Press, 1995 (third edition).

In the opening paragraph I said, "Although I don't agree with I. H. Marshall on every detail, he effectively demonstrates that the Scriptures don't back up eternal security, and he deals with this topic in a more balanced way than most writers do. He deals with a large number of passages from the New Testament, including essentially all those I dealt with in "Once Saved, Always Saved?" I'll quote quite a bit from what Marshall says in this book, but I won't be able to get into the details regarding most of these passages here [in the Appendix of the paper on 2 Peter].

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Here at the end of my paper “Once Saved, Always Saved?,” I’ll just quote part of what Clark Pinnock says in the Foreword of this book. (I recommend getting a copy of Marshall’s book, and my 133 page paper on 2 Peter, with the 100 page Appendix.)

“Dr. Marshall is an eminent New Testament scholar of evangelical convictions whose name is associated with scholarly work of the highest quality. ... He conducts a historical-grammatical investigation of all the Scriptural materials which treat the subject of apostasy and falling away, and produces ample evidence to support his thesis that the security of the believer is conditioned upon his faithfulness to Jesus Christ. It is simply not possible to maintain that the warnings in the Bible against turning away from the truth describe an imaginary or hypothetical danger. They are addressed to us all, and we all must heed them.

... Biblical truths when they are carefully examined are often controversial and challenging. It is so with the biblical doctrine of apostasy. Belief in... eternal security, is very widely entertained by multitudes of evangelical Christians, even though it belongs generically to the Augustinian-Calvinistic tradition in theology, a doctrinal system which they do not generally hold in its other dimensions. Nevertheless, it is a fact that Dr. Marshall’s argument is controversial and will not be immediately accepted. One reason for this is the understandable fear that the doctrine of conditional security may unsettle a proper and vital Christian assurance. After all, the Word of God continually reminds us of our spiritual rights and possessions, and breathes an atmosphere of settled confidence. There is nothing in Dr. Marshall’s book that undercuts this assurance. We are kept by the power of God, as his title boldly states. However, he would not have us disregard the threats to perseverance which the Bible presents or the commands to abide steadfastly in the truth with which its pages abound. ....” (pages 11, 12).

The next section in the Appendix of my paper on 2 Peter is titled, “Excerpts from ‘From Augustine to Arminius: A pilgrimage in Theology’ by Clark H. Pinnock.” This article by Clark Pinnock is the first chapter (pages 15-30) of the book titled, *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* [Bethany House Publishers, 1995; the book was originally published by Zondervan in 1989]; the book was edited by Clark Pinnock.

“In speaking of Augustine and Arminius in the title of this chapter, I am using the names of two famous theologians to symbolize two profound ways of structuring the answer [to the question “how divine sovereignty and human freedom relate to each other”] - Augustine placing the emphasis on the sovereignty of God and Arminius putting it on significant human freedom. [Arminius, unlike Augustine, left room for the input of man in salvation.] My pilgrimage can be described as a journey from Augustine to Arminius. But I could as easily have spoken of Calvin and Wesley, or Luther and Erasmus. ...” (page 16).

I’ll quote part of what Pinnock says in his section titled “A Hole in the Dike.” “I held onto this view [the Calvinistic TULIP view, which he was taught when he became an evangelical Christian] until about 1970, when one of the links in the chain of the tight

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Calvinistic logic broke. It had to do with the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints [once saved, necessarily always saved].... I was teaching at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School at the time and attending to the doctrine particularly in the book of Hebrews. If in fact believers enjoy the kind of absolute security Calvinism had taught me they do, I found I could not make very good sense of the vigorous exhortations to persevere (e.g., [Heb.] 3:12) or the awesome warnings not to fall away from Christ (e.g., 10:26), which the book addresses to Christians. [[I had a footnote here: Hebrews chapters 6 and 10 were two of the first passages that forced me [Kemp] to begin to reconsider what I believed about the impossibility of Christians losing their salvation. It was quite difficult for me because I had accepted eternal security as a foundational doctrine of Christianity. It took me a couple of years, but eventually the teaching of the New Testament forced me to abandon the doctrine. I'm thankful that I can say that I still have the assurance of salvation that I have had since I became a born-again Christian. God is good and full of mercy, but I do have a fear of sinning against Him, a healthy fear, a fear required by both the Old and New Testaments.

I would have preferred learning the gospel in a more accurate form to begin with (regarding eternal security), but I'm very thankful I wasn't taught the gospel by those who think that they are always losing their salvation. Talk about serious insecurity.]] [[Pinnock has a footnote here, "I. Howard Marshall called my attention to the same conundrum in the entire New Testament in his book published about that time *Kept by the Power of God: A Study of Perseverance and Falling Away* (London, Epworth, 1969; ...Bethany, 1975)."] It began to dawn on me that my security in God was linked to my faith-union with Christ and that God is teaching us here the extreme importance of maintaining and not forsaking this relationship. The exhortations and the warnings could only signify that continuing in the grace of God was something that depended at least in part on the human partner. And once I saw that, the logic of Calvinism was broken in principle, and it was only a matter of time before the larger implications of its breaking would dawn on me. The thread was pulled, and the garment must begin to unravel, as indeed it did" (page 17).

I'll also include part of the quotation I included in the Appendix from what Pinnock said in the Introduction of the book *Grace Unlimited*, which was edited by him [Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999]. "Augustine's view of irresistible grace was a new theology in the early Christian church. ... [Pinnock has a footnote here, "On the novelty of Augustine's theology, see Roger T. Forster and V. Paul Marston, *God's Strategy in Human History*.... I'll quote from that book later in this Appendix.] ...

The standard criticism leveled against a theology of this kind [which holds that we have a definite role to play in our salvation] is synergism [which means man is *working together with* God, cooperating with God]. It is supposed to bring into the event of salvation a decisive human work, and thereby destroy its purely gracious character. But this is simply not the case. Faith is not a work at all (Rom. 4:16). It is not an achievement and has no merit attaching to it. It is simply the surrender of the will to God, the stretching out of an empty hand to receive the gift of grace. In the act of faith, we renounce all our works, and repudiate completely every claim to self-righteousness. Far from encouraging

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conceit and self-esteem, faith utterly excludes them (Rom. 3:27). ... Faith is...the *response* to grace God calls for through which salvation becomes a reality to the individual concerned. We are saved by God's grace *through faith*" (pages 14, 15).

Pinnock didn't stop with rejecting the Calvinistic TULIP; he eventually went beyond the Arminians and espoused a viewpoint that has caused many evangelicals to be concerned, including many Arminians, and me. As the quotations from him that I included in the Appendix of the paper on 2 Peter show, Pinnock went on to question whether God can know with certainty the choices we will make in the future. Also, I quoted from another book where Pinnock strongly argues for annihilation, not hell.

I'll quote a small part of the next section of the Appendix, which is titled, "Excerpts from 'Salvation and Apostasy' by Dale Moody." "Salvation and Apostasy" is section 55 in Moody's book, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation* [Eerdmans, 1981] (pages 348-365). Moody's viewpoint is all the more interesting because he is a Southern Baptist scholar. It is well known that Southern Baptists along with most other Baptists are strong for the viewpoint once saved, always saved. Moody started teaching at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1945.

"There are several warnings in the Synoptic Gospels [Matthew, Mark, and Luke] about the danger that disciples may fall away, but perhaps the plainest passage is...the Parable of the Sower (Luke 8:9-15). Some only hear the word of God without believing it, but those in a second group 'believe for a while and in a time of temptation fall away' (8:13). A. T. Robertson [a Southern Baptist scholar known especially for his expertise in New Testament Greek] comments: 'Ostensibly [apparently] they are sincere and have a real start in the life of faith.' (*Word Pictures in the New Testament* [Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1930], Vol. II, page 114.)

Superficial believers are not the only type that falls away. The thorny ground in the Parable of the Sower represents those who hear the word of God, 'but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature' (8:14). Those who hold fast the word of God 'in an honest and good heart' are the only ones that 'bring forth fruit with patience' (8:15). It is amazing how preconceived dogmas blind so many to the realism of this parable. It happens before their eyes in so many ways, but they refuse to see what is so obvious" (page 349).

Now I'll quote part of what Moody says in his last subsection, titled "Apostasy in Tradition" (pages 358-365). "Warnings against the danger of falling away from faith may be noted in every New Testament writing but Philemon, which has no doctrinal discussion at all! Why then has this teaching been excluded in much of the Christian theology of the West? The answer on examination comes home loud and clear: tradition has triumphed over Scripture. At least three distorted traditions and interpretations may be noted in Western theology." Moody goes on to discuss Augustinianism, Calvinism, and two branches of Evangelicalism that have their roots in Calvinism.

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The next three sections of the Appendix are titled, “Excerpts from *Apostasy: A Study in the Epistle to the Hebrews and in Baptist History*’ by Dale Moody”; “Excerpts from *The Universal Power of the Atonement*’ by Terry L. Miethe”; and “*The Nature of Divine Sovereignty*’ by Jack W. Cottrell (10 pages).” I won’t quote from any of those sections here.

The following section in the Appendix (13 pages) is titled “Excerpts from *God’s Strategy in Human History* by Paul Marston and Roger Forster.” (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000; previously published by Highland Books in 1974. In the preface to the new edition, the authors mention that this is a major new edition.)

I was directed to this book by Clark Pinnock in the Introduction to *Grace Unlimited*, from which I quoted earlier in this paper. After saying “Augustine’s view of irresistible grace was a new theology in the early Christian church. Before that time her teachers...had emphasized the universality of grace and the possibility of declining it,” Pinnock referred to this book in a footnote. The footnote said, “On the novelty of Augustine’s theology, see Roger T. Forster and V. Paul Marston, *God’s Strategy in Human History*....” I’ll just include brief excerpts from the Appendix of this book, which is titled “Early Teaching on Freewill and Election” (pages 289-342). ...

Excerpts from under the heading, “The early church” (pages 290-296).

“The great divergence between Augustine and earlier writers is generally accepted. ... Actually, Augustine can really not be called an ‘early church father,’ since he was some 350 years after Paul.... Unlike some key earlier figures, he spoke a different language [Latin], struggled with Greek, and knew little or no Hebrew. It is therefore very surprising that so many writers conclude that he got it right and effectively everyone else before him got it wrong. ....”

For one thing, a very important thing, the early Christian Fathers didn’t believe, as Augustine (in his latter viewpoint) did, that man is so fallen that he has no capacity to respond to God with faith or cooperate with His grace. I wouldn’t say that the Fathers before Augustine always said everything just right on this topic (there is room to balance out some of the things they said), but I believe they were more right than Augustine. These pre-Augustine Fathers are also sometimes criticized for speaking of being saved/justified by faith *and* works (or the equivalent), which supposedly shows they didn’t understand grace. Again, I’m not suggesting that the earlier writers always said it just right, but more often than not the greater problem is that those criticizing them don’t understand that works *are* required of Christians. As I [Kemp] have discussed at length in my previous writings, there is no such thing as faith in Christ that doesn’t work, producing works (righteous works; a righteous life), by the grace/Spirit of God; works aren’t optional for Christians.

Excerpts from under the heading “The early church and freewill” (pages 296-305).

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First I'll quote part of what Marston and Forster said on page 114 regarding freewill. "Humans have been given the freedom to will something different from the will of God. The early church referred to this as human 'freewill.' "

"Not a single church figure in the first 300 years rejected it [free will] and most of them stated it clearly in works still extant. We find it taught by great leaders in places as different as Alexandria, Antioch, Athens, Carthage, Jerusalem, Lycia, Nyssa, Rome, and Sicca. We find it taught by the leaders of all the main theological schools. The only ones to reject it were heretics like the Gnostics, Marcion, Valentinus, Manes (and the Manichaens), etc. In fact, the early Fathers often state their beliefs on 'freewill' in works attacking heretics. Three recurrent ideas seem to be in their teaching:

1. The rejection of freewill is the view of the heretics.
2. Freewill is a gift given to man by God – for nothing can ultimately be independent of God.
3. Man possesses freewill because he is made in God's image, and God has freewill [We must acknowledge, however, that the fall greatly affected man and the extent to which his will is free.]"

Marston and Forster quote extensively from the early church Fathers in their appendix, and I included quite a few of those quotations in the Appendix of my paper on 2 Peter.

Excerpt from the next sub-heading heading in their book, "The new theology: Augustine (AD354-430)" (pages 305-314).

"It may seem surprising that after such universal agreement among early Christian writers there should be a change. Nevertheless there was.... Augustine became obsessed with the denial that human 'merit' was involved in salvation. Augustine speaks of the 'merit of faith,' and so arrives at the extraordinarily non-Pauline notion that faith is itself a kind of 'work' and so must be a result of an irresistible gift." That is, Augustine came up with the idea that if faith was something that man did (in response to God) he would merit salvation; therefore God must give faith to His elect. And once you accept the idea that God chooses some, and that man has no capacity to cooperate with God's grace or to have faith, and that God gives them faith, it is easy to accept the idea that God will also make sure that none of His elect fall away. (pages 305, 306)

The next section in the Appendix of my paper on 2 Peter is titled, "Excerpts from *Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up: A New Look at Today's Evangelical Church in the Light of Early Christianity* by David Bercot." I quoted a short excerpt from these excerpts in the body of this paper, "Once Saved, Always Saved?"



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The next section in this Appendix is titled, “Excerpts from *Life in the Son* by Robert Shank” [Bethany House Publishers, 1960, 1061, 1989]. I’ll include three brief quotations from these excerpts.

Shank mentions that his “study of the Scriptures led him to abandon a...doctrine he once cherished [as a Baptist minister], and who sincerely hopes that his endeavor will encourage others to re-examine a doctrine of critical practical importance. [Then he says:] Sometime we no longer shall know in part. The final word awaits the coming of Him who is Alpha and Omega. Meanwhile, believing that to disagree with sincere men is not to dishonor them, and that truth is served by honest inquiry, let us press toward a fuller understanding of the Holy Scriptures and a more accurate definition of saving faith in Jesus Christ” (page vii).

“Please excuse me [Shank says] from the company of any who ‘maintain that the believer is insecure.’ It is abundantly evident from the Scriptures that the believer is secure. But only the believer. Many who have debated ‘the security of the believer’ have missed the issue. The question is not, Is the believer secure? But rather, What is a believer?” (part of footnote 3 on page 55).

“There is no warrant in the New Testament for that strange at-ease-in-Zion definition of perseverance which assures Christians that perseverance is inevitable and relieves them of the necessity of deliberately persevering in faith, encouraging them to place confidence in some past act or experience...” (page 64).

The last section (32 pages) in the Appendix is titled “Excerpts from *The Believer’s Conditional Security: A Study in Perseverance and Falling Away* by Daniel Corner.” I make many comments myself in these excerpts.

“I [Karl Kemp] wanted to make the reader aware of this book and to include some excerpts from it in this paper [the paper on 2 Peter]. Daniel Corner takes a very strong stand against the doctrine of once saved, always saved (OSAS) in this lengthy book (801 pages). He is intensely involved with this topic - he says he *hates* OSAS. I agree with most of what Corner says in this book and he is thorough; I’ll quote extensively from him here (and I could have quoted a lot more), but sometimes he goes too far for me. I have two primary concerns: (1) I believe Corner is too quick to say that Christians have lost their salvation, and (2) I believe he is far too quick to say that many Christians, including many respected leaders, aren’t real Christians.” In the Appendix I included a copy of the letter I sent to Corner that deals with these two concerns after giving these excerpts.

Corner discusses a large number of passages from the New Testament (and quite a few from the Old Testament) to demonstrate that the doctrine OSAS just isn’t true. He discusses many of the faulty arguments used by those who believe OSAS. He also includes extensive quotations from many early Christian writers to demonstrate that they did not believe once saved, necessarily always saved. And he deals extensively with the

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strong correlation between this doctrine and the somewhat backsliden condition of much of the Christian church of our day. I'll quote a statement from Corner's Internet site:

Because of the teaching once saved always saved, grace has been taught as a license for immorality for so long, and without challenge, that when Scripture is quoted, such as 1 Cor. 6:9, 10 or Rev. 21:8, it is disregarded, and the giver of God's Word is falsely accused of teaching legalism, bondage, works, etc. This reflects how truly dark are the days in which we live!

[Still quoting Kemp] There's no doubt in my mind that an abuse of the doctrine once saved, always saved is one of the primary causes for the sinful state of so much of the church in our day. I believe it should be said, however, that some Christians who hold this doctrine so emphasize the need for Christians to learn and to live in the truth of God (in accordance with His Word) and the need for Christians to deny self, to walk in love (especially toward God) and to live in the righteousness and holiness of God that they substantially limit the damage caused by this erroneous doctrine" (page 103 of the Appendix of my paper on 2 Peter). A Christian could believe once saved, always saved and live a life full of the righteousness and holiness of God by His grace, but an abuse (a widespread abuse) of the doctrine once saved, always saved has done great damage to the cause of righteousness and holiness in the body of Christ for large numbers of Christians.

Excerpts from Corner's Chapter 10, "Grace, the True and the False" (pages 166-199).

"Because of the way many understand grace today, they would either unconsciously discount Paul's words in Ephesians [5:5-7] and Romans [2:7-9] [and in many similar verses written by the apostle Paul and by others] or would tend to label them legalism, bondage, cultic or some sort of *work's salvation*" (page 168). [Quoting Kemp now] Some of those teaching OSAS are so far off that they say we don't even need to stay in faith to the end, and many of them teach that how we live as Christians has nothing to do with whether we will go to heaven (in other words, works are not required for salvation). Corner quotes from quite a few OSAS teachers in this chapter to document this, and he lists many verses from the Bible to show how wrong they are.

It's true that Paul frequently said we are saved by *faith*, not *works*, but it's extremely important for us to learn the balanced truth of what the New Testament teaches on this topic. I have discussed this topic (and the closely related topics) extensively in my previous writings. (Start with my "A Paper on Faith" and "The Christian, the Law, and Legalism.") Paul would be quick to agree with James that faith without works is dead (it's not real faith), and he would, of course, be quick to agree with what the Lord Jesus said in Revelation chapters 2, 3 about the need for Christians to have the necessary *works*. Paul's epistles make it very clear that he didn't consider obedience to God in righteous, holy living to be optional for Christians. Obedience to God and the gospel in our daily lives is included in what faith means; we obey by God's enabling grace through faith. We cannot earn salvation by faith, but we must cooperate with God's grace through faith; we must work out our salvation with fear and trembling and all diligence by faith.

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But what did Paul mean by faith, not works. A careful study of what Paul said regarding this topic in his epistles reveals the following four points: (1) Paul was against *works* without having *faith* in Christ. This was a problem Paul faced with the Israelites. (2) Paul was against bringing the ceremonial works of the Law into the new-covenant. This was a problem Paul faced with the Judaizers. (3) Paul was against man's trying to earn salvation by his works (especially works of the Law). We terribly confuse the issue and frustrate the grace of God if we try to earn what God has freely given. And, (4) Paul was against *works* of the flesh (our works are to be done by/in the grace/Spirit of God) being done for the glory of man. God must receive all of the glory!

I'll quote part of what Corner says under the heading "What Is the True Grace of God, According to the Apostle Peter?" "It seems that the Apostle Peter shared the same concern that both Jude and Paul had about false grace teaching that existed back then (Jude 1:3, 4; Eph. 5:5-7). Peter wrote:

I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that **THIS IS THE TRUE GRACE OF GOD. STAND FAST IN IT** [Corner had bold print for emphasis (1 Pet. 5:12 NIV)].

[Corner then goes on for the next two and a half pages quoting verses that Peter wrote earlier in this epistle which demonstrate the need for Christians to obey God and to be dead to sin and to live in righteousness and holiness (by God's grace in Christ). Corner then concludes this section with two paragraphs that I'll quote:] "We are saved by grace (Eph. 2:8, 9), *kept* and *strengthened* by the Lord (Jude 1:1; 2 Thess. 3:3). We can add nothing to the finished work of Christ (Heb. 10:12). However, according to the Apostle Peter, there are some basic Christian responsibilities that do exist under the umbrella of the true grace of God, which **CANNOT BE** [Corner had bold letters for emphasis here] *adding works to grace*, making salvation by *faith and works*, or denying the infinite work of Christ, as some would falsely accuse. Otherwise, Peter was in error and teaching falsehood by telling the Christians to *do* or *be* all of the aforementioned things, and then at the end of his letter, stating that **THIS WAS THE TRUE GRACE OF GOD IN WHICH CHRISTIANS WERE TO STAND FAST** [Corner had bold letters here].

Apparently Peter had a vastly different understanding of grace than many do today! ... **DEAR READER. ANSWER THIS QUESTION FOR YOURSELF; ARE YOU STANDING IN PETER'S TYPE OF GRACE – THE TRUE GRACE OF GOD OR SOME COUNTERFEIT UNDER THE NAME OF GRACE** [Corner had bold print for emphasis]?" (pages 178-182).

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