**A Discussion of “Once Saved, Always Saved”**

**Or**

**Perseverance of the Saints**

Definition: The belief that once a person is chosen by God for salvation and is subsequently saved, it is impossible for that person to then not actually be saved and go to heaven.

First Point: This is rather obviously a false teaching. Any simple reading of the Bible by an untaught person would never take the reader to this conclusion. This leads us to our first point:

**I. Where did this doctrine come from?**

This will be followed by our other two points:

**II. What proof-texts will the believer in this doctrine use?**

**III. What does the Bible teach on perseverance/falling away?**

**I. Where did this doctrine come from?**

It goes back to the doctrine of Predestination.

Which comes from belief in total depravity and Original Sin.

This teaching originated (sort of) with Augustine.

It was carried forward by Luther and Zwingli.

Most importantly, it was promulgated by John Calvin and Reformed theology.

Here is the teaching at its most basic.

TULIP

T Total depravity

U Unconditional election

L Limited atonement

I Irresistible grace

P Perseverance of the saints (ie. once saved, always saved)

It is ironic, that this really “nice” doctrine is the direct descendant of total depravity.

Augustine took one quality of God and magnified its relative significance over God’s other qualities.

That quality was God’s **sovereignty**. Nothing in all creation can violate God’s sovereignty.

Add to that Augustine came from a Neo-Platonist and Manichean background, both of which saw physical things as inherently evil. He believed we, in our physical nature, are totally depraved.

**Total Depravity**: The belief that human beings are born so depraved that we are completely unable to do anything good. We cannot respond to God’s love and repent.

Original sin: Closely related to Total Depravity. It is the belief that we inherit this total depravity from Adam. We are genetically totally depraved.

This is why Augustine conceived the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception so that Mary could be born without original sin.

**Unconditional Election**: If God predestines you for salvation, then you will be saved, despite any inclination on our part for or against this election. Again, we have no active part in our own salvation.

Unconditional election was only conceived because of total depravity. This is simply a logical series.

**Limited Atonement**: Jesus died only for those who were unconditionally elected.

Again, no one would ever conceive of this doctrine from scripture or anywhere else without the establishment of the prior doctrines.

**Irresistible Grace**: If God chooses to give you his grace, then you will accept that grace, again, whether you like it or not.

(same comments as above)

**Persistence of the Saints**: If, out of his sovereign will, God saves you, then, out of that same sovereign will, you will in fact be saved. You cannot lose your salvation. In other words, “once saved, always saved.”

Those who believe in the doctrine of “Once Saved, Always Saved” buy into this theology, even if they do not realize that they do, and even if they do not understand the underlying logic. This doctrine is absorbed and subliminally trained from pulpits even if it is never explicitly spelled out.

**II. Proof-texts for Once Saved, Always Saved.**

Note: In this outline, I will not be directly confronting TUL or I. This is not a “refutation” of Calvinism. It is only a refutation of Once Saved, Always Saved, as well as an attempt to provide a correct biblical teaching to counteract this doctrine. For this reason, we will not consider the proof-texts of Calvinism and of Original Sin. We will only look at the proof-texts for the P in TULIP.

There are really only two common proof-texts for this doctrine.

1. John 10:28-29 “I give them [ie. his sheep] eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greather than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.”

Response: True, they cannot but obviously we can walk “out of his hand” as Jesus taught (as we will see)! He is teaching that they cannot snatch us, but is he teaching that we cannot leave?

2. Romans 8:37-39 “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Response: True, they cannot but obviously we can choose to separate ourselves, as Paul taught (as we will see)! He is teaching that they cannot separate us, but is he teaching that we cannot separate ourselves?

These are about the weakest possible proof-texts imaginable. Only out of their context, only under a particular assumption (TULIP) do they even work.

Admittedly, if these were the only verses in the Bible, the “Once Saved, Always Saved” doctrine could be read out of these passages (even though this is not what they say). However, we should ask what does the Bible teach, on balance, on this question?

**III. What does the Bible teach on perseverance/falling away?**

These are not proof-texts. Some might say, “One person’s proof-text is another person’s proof.” Why? Because what they are teaching is consistent with the entire message of the books being cited. It is consistent with everything taught by this particular author. Even passages which are not designed to discuss this doctrine consistently imply this common-sense interpretation.

A. Hebrews.

Hebrews 3:7-11 They shall never enter my rest.

Hebrews 3:14 We… share in Christ IF we hold firmly till the end….

Hebrews 3:16-4:11 esp. 3:16-4:1

Foreshadow of the Jews in the wilderness.

Let us make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall short of it…

Hebrews 6:4-8 Who is he talking to?

* a. been enlightened (NT church “enlightened” = baptized)
* b. tasted the heavenly gift (salvation?)
* c. shared in the Holy Spirit
* d. tasted the goodness of the word
* e. tasted the coming age (saved)

That Hebrews commentary: Two audiences; Christians and Jewish believers who have not yet chosen to be baptized. (circular reasoning)

What happens to these people?

* It is ***impossible***… if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance.
* They are crucifying the Son of God all over again.
* Land that produces thorns… will be burned.

Let us be careful how we use the term “fall away.”

Hebrews 10:26-31

* Crucifying the Son of God all over again.
* Subjecting Jesus to public disgrace
* Trampling the Son of God under foot. (Heb 10:29)
* Insulted the Holy Spirit (Heb 10:29)
* Blasphemed (spoken against) the Holy Spirit (Matt 12:32)
* Committed the unforgivable sin (1 John 5:16, Luke 12:10)
* What is the “unforgivable sin?” To willfully, deliberately continue in sin. (Hebrews 10:26)

Hebrews 12:14-17

* See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and ***defile many.*** (ie. They were pure but
* become defiled)
* He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.
* Hebrews 12:25 If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth (Moses), how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven (Jesus).

By the way, Hebrews also emphasized that we can be confident in our salvation…

Hebrews 6:9-20. We are ***confident*** of better things in your case.

v. 16-20 He confirmed it with an oath. Two unchangeable things….

Two unchangeable things:

God’s Word

God’s Oath (Genesis 22:16-18)

Jesus, your anchor, is behind the veil with the Father

Hebrews 10:19-23

We have ***confidence*** to enter the Most Holy Place

Let us draw near to God… in ***full assurance*** of faith.

For he who promised is faithful.

Hebrews 10:35-36 Do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded…. You will receive what he has promised.

Confidence, Assurance vs concern for falling away.

Both are true. We need to find the balance.

B. Peter. 2 Peter 2:20-22

C. James James 5:19-20

C. Paul Gal 5:19-21 Phil 2:12 Romans 11:19-22

D. Jesus Parable of the Lost (Prodigal) Son. Parable of the Lost Coin. Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13). Matthew 24:10-13

E. The Old Testament (Ezekiel, for example) Ezekiel 18. The entire book of Ezekiel is about God’s people falling into sin and God leaving the temple. This is a parable of our relationship with God personally.

Historical foreshadow: Hebrews 3:7-4:11 uses the Jews leaving Egypt, but falling in the desert and not entering His rest as a foreshadow for us possibly losing our salvation.

Q: Is this false doctrine a salvation issue? Probably not, but it is a dangerous doctrine. If a believer does not take heed to the passages above, their lack of attention to their own salvation might be a fatal mistake.

Summary:

The doctrine of “once saved, always saved” is rather obvious false doctrine. This doctrine is the result of a false presupposition that we are born totally depraved because of Original Sin—that we can do nothing good. We cannot save ourselves. Works salvation is impossible. Yet God gives us a choice. We cannot earn salvation, but in order to be saved, we must respond to God’s offer of salvation by choosing to put our faith in him and to come to him for our salvation.