

Xenos Christian Fellowship
Christian Ministry Unit 1
The Nature of Salvation
Week 2 – The Security of Our Salvation

Editors' note:

- *Italics (lower case or ALL CAPS) show what students should write in their student outline.*
- **Bold (including bold italics and bold ALL CAPS) shows what appears in the student outline.**
- Regular text is used for lecture notes; ALL CAPS are used for emphasis.

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Introduction

Eternal security: *A Christian's salvation is secure and cannot be lost*

How would you respond?

FROM: -----

SENT: Wednesday, September 11, 2002

TO: XCF-ISSUES

SUBJECT: Assurance of Salvation, Eternal Security and Freewill

Let me introduce myself and ask a question that I have as a new Christian... I grew up in a Christian home, but only came to Christ about a year ago and I have tons of questions... I have heard that

Xenos believes in eternal security. From what I know this does not make sense and I have had experiences with a few friends that make this seem impossible. The main point is that since we always have freewill to choose, how could we be eternally secure if one day we turn away from God. Second, if we could turn away, how is there really an assurance of salvation... Any thoughts?

Discussion: What counsel would students in your class give this young believer?

John Wesley's advice:

“How does it appear that you are alive? And that you are now in ease and not in pain? Are you not immediately conscious of it? By the same immediate consciousness you will know if your soul is alive to God; if your soul is saved from the pain of proud wrath, and have the ease of a meek and quite spirit. By the same means you cannot but perceive if you love, rejoice, and delight in God. By the same you must directly be assured *if you love your neighbor as yourself; if you are kindly affectioned to all mankind, and full of gentleness and longsuffering.*” – John Wesley

Wesley says you can be assured of salvation IF you currently love your neighbor as yourself or IF you are full of gentleness and longsuffering. Is this biblically sound?

As you work with younger Christians and help them grow, you'll need to be able to field questions like the one above. In this lecture, we will cover several **common questions regarding salvation:**

- **Once I've made a decision for Christ, can I lose my salvation?**
- **Do I receive my salvation via a process—or all at once?**
- **Is salvation earned (or kept) by good works or observing rituals?**
- **Can I forfeit my salvation through sin?**
- **Could someone say they have received Christ and not grow spiritually?**
- **What about people who claim they received Christ, but no longer believe in Christ?**
- **How should I respond to those who reject eternal security?**

What is at stake?

- ***Our eternal destiny* – We need a solid answer to these questions. Repeating what someone has taught us or stating how we ‘feel’ about it is not enough. These issues are too important. Do you**

have your own convictions about what the Bible says about this topic?

- *Our approach to following God and serving him* – If we lack security in Christ, we will find it difficult to be others-centered or God-centered. If we lack security in Christ, for example, how do we have courage to be honest about sin?

Tonight we want to cover the BIBLICAL BASIS for eternal security, its PRACTICAL IMPORTANCE for growth and ministry, and HOW TO RESPOND to contradictory views.

The Biblical Basis for Eternal Security

Atonement words

What are the results of Christ's substitutionary atonement? One result is our new standing with God. The following biblical terms describe in more practical and concrete ways the new standing we have received through Christ's substitutionary atonement. We also call this our POSITION in Christ.

TERM	PASSAGES	HUMAN SETTING	MEANING	SPIRITUAL RESULT
Justification	Rom. 3:24 Rom. 5:1	Law-court	Acquitted; declared innocent	<i>Acceptance</i>
Redemption	Rom. 3:24 Gal. 3:13	Bondage in Egypt; slave-market	Delivered by payment of ransom	<i>Freedom</i>
Propitiation	Rom. 3:25 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10	Temple	Satisfaction of wrath	<i>Security</i>
Reconciliation	Rom. 5:10 2 Cor. 5:18-21	Human relationships	Restored intimacy by resolving the cause of alienation	<i>Intimacy</i>

All of these HAVE BEEN accomplished by the finished work of Christ (note past tenses; see also Colossians 1:13-14;2:13-14) and are therefore the PERMANENT possession of EVERY Christian from the moment of conversion. This leads us to the doctrine of eternal security.

Passages which emphasize eternal security:

(1 Pet. 1:3-5) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (4) to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, (5) who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

This passage stresses that *our glorification is a done deal* ("imperishable;" "undefiled;" "will not fade away;" "reserved in heaven for you."). In the meantime, Christians are "protected by the power of God."

(Rom. 8:1*,31-39) There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus . . . (31) What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? (32) He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? (33) Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; (34) who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. (35) Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (36) Just as it is written, "FOR THY SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." (37) But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. (38) For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, (39) nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

V. 1 stresses no condemnation from God period. Note KJV and NKJV textual error: ". . . who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." The KJV was based primarily on the Latin Vulgate, but since 1611, earlier Greek texts have been found which clearly indicate that this phrase does not belong in v. 1.

(Bruce Metzger) "The King James scholars in 1611 had to use printed editions of the Greek NT that rested upon the late Greek manuscripts, none of which was older than the 10th or 11th century. Translators today use editions of the Greek New Testament that rest upon manuscript evidence from the third and fourth centuries."¹

¹ Bruce Metzger, *The New Testament: Its Background, Growth, and Content* (2nd ed., Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1983), p. 286.

What difference would it make? This makes sanctification a condition for justification (Catholic theology). CONTEXT: Why would Paul praise God (7:25) as a Christian sinner, if God's acceptance is conditional to walking by the Spirit?

Vs. 31-34 stresses that God will never accept a charge against or condemn believers because Christ justifies us and intercedes for us.

Vs. 38-39 are a comprehensive statement – no one and nothing (inside or outside the Christian) can separate us from the love of God.

(Hebrews 7:25) Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

Explain Christ's intercessory ministry: *Jesus applies his finished work as often as we sin.* In other words, if we lose our salvation because of sin, Christ will have failed as our High priest.

(Jn. 10:27-30) 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. (30) I and the Father are one.**

(Millard Erickson) "Verse 28 is especially emphatic . . . In the clause `and they shall never perish,' John uses the double negative "ou me" with the aorist subjunctive, which is a very emphatic way of declaring that something will not happen in the future. Jesus is categorically excluding the slightest chance of an apostasy by his sheep. A literal translation would be something like `They shall not, repeat, shall not, ever perish in the slightest.' . . . All in all, this passage is as definite a rejection of the idea that the true believer can fall away as could be given."²

(Ephesians 1:13) In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation— having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, (14) who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

(Ephesians 4:30*) And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

² Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987) p. 1010.

“SEALED” In both of these passages, Paul speaks of the Christian as having been "sealed." When the Roman emperor stamped the wax seal of an official document with his signet ring, this seal communicated that the power Rome stood behind safe passage of the document to its destination. In the same way, at the moment of our conversion (1:13 “having believed”), God has given believers the Holy Spirit as his "seal" which guarantees our safe passage to heaven (1:14 "a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession;" 4:30 " ... by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption"). Although we can grieve/displease God by our poor behavior, this does not change our status with him. In 4:30 Paul affirms that a sinning Christian (one who is grieving the Spirit) is still sealed.

“PLEDGE” is a similar idea. It means "down payment." When we pledge that we will pay the full purchase of a house, we put down a percentage of the price in cash. God has given us his Holy Spirit as his "down payment" that he will complete our salvation (see also Rom. 8:23 - "first fruits of the Spirit").

(Millard Erickson) "If salvation could be lost, there would have to be some reversal of regeneration. But can this be? Can spiritual death actually come to someone in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, that is, to someone who has already been given eternal life?"³

We never find language in the New Testament that suggests God will “unseal” a Christian or remove his pledge.

(1 Thessalonians 5:23,24) Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (24) Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.

God himself will ensure that when Jesus returns, we will be presented before him as blameless.

(Philippians 1:6) For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

The work of salvation, which God has begun with our justification, he *will* finish at the day of Christ (his return).

³ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987) p. 988.

(Romans 8:29) For whom He foreknew, *He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son*, that He might be the first-born among many brethren . . .

(Ephesians 1:4,5) ... just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. (5) In love *He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself*, according to the kind intention of His will.

Predestination means "set the destiny of." These passages do not teach that God chooses who will believe in Christ. But they do strongly affirm that God sets the ultimate destiny of the believer. You have free will to choose whether you will step back from the rim of the Grand Canyon or jump over it – but if you choose to jump, though you can do a lot of things on the way down, your destiny has been set – you will splatter all over the canyon floor. In the same way, we have free will to choose to receive or reject Christ. But once we choose to receive him, whether we choose to grow or not, God sets our ultimate destiny – we will be completely conformed to Christ and be glorified.

(1 Corinthians 1:8) ... who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Recall the moral failure the Corinthian church had (sexual immorality, drunkenness at communion, divisions, softness on Jesus' resurrection, etc.). Paul could not have made this affirmation unless he believed in eternal security! Instead of threatening them with loss of salvation, Paul repeatedly affirms their security in Christ.

Personal Importance of Eternal Security

- **We cannot relate to God with confidence unless we know he accepts us as we are, with all of our sins.**

Recall Romans 8:1- "...there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Also, Christians who don't know their security in Christ remain superficial in their awareness of their sinfulness or defensive about it—they can't bear this light because their acceptance before God is still practically based on their righteousness. (GO BACK TO THE RIGHT-HAND COLUMN OF ATONEMENT WORDS CHART. These terms all elaborate on our security in Christ.)

(Richard Lovelace) "'I am accepted' - accepted as though my life displayed the spiritual perfection of the Messiah himself - ought to be

the automatic response of our hearts whenever we wake, like the compass needle that always points north. This is a response which is always relevant to our current spiritual condition. We never make such progress in sanctification that we can depend on it for (God's) acceptance. And our continuing record of sin and failure never expands beyond the limits of the love of Christ, who has covered our debts for all time, past, present, and future . . . Most Protestants have therefore concluded that *assurance of salvation is necessary for healthy spirituality*. Christians need to know that they have a secure status as adopted sons and daughters of God in order to behave naturally in his presence. For us to be phasing in and out of sonship according to our behavior, constantly testing our experiences to make sure we are in a 'state of grace,' short-circuits the reality of grace."⁴

- **We cannot relate to others appropriately unless we prioritize God's acceptance of us.**
God's acceptance and forgiveness of us is the dynamic that motivates us to accept and forgive others. Unless we are secure in Christ, we will tend to take our security from others' acceptance of us – which leads to a host of relational dysfunctions.

Ministry Application of Eternal Security

Our understanding of eternal security in Christ affects...

- *How we communicate the gospel to others.*

We should be clear that genuine willingness to bow to Christ and humbly receive forgiveness is stressed, but just as clear that *salvation* is a free gift, and that you may come as you are without any actual ethical change preceding your decision.

- *How we assure new Christians.*

We should stress what the Bible says about their new standing in Christ (POSITION) as foundational because this is OBJECTIVE and UNCHANGING. Experiential changes (conviction of sin, Bible coming alive, desire to share your faith, recognition of kinship with other Christians, prayer becomes personal, etc.) are important and should be pointed out by us because new Christians often do not see them – but these should be subordinate because they are SUBJECTIVE and FLUCTUATING.

- *How we discern the validity of professions of faith.*

⁴ Richard Lovelace, *Renewal as a Way of Life*, pp. 142-143.

What about the person who claims to be a Christian, but you are unsure if they really are? Here are two illuminating questions:

- Can he or she articulate the gospel? e.g. “If a friend asked you how to become a Christian, what advice would you give him?”
- Can he or she explain WHY they became a believer? There has to be some reason – inability to answer should raise doubts.

If there is no subjective evidence at all (see above), or if he seems confused about the gospel, we may want to consider explaining the gospel to him again.

But if the person is able to articulate why they are saved, we should accept this at face value and urge them to walk with Christ and grow spiritually. This was Paul's approach with carnal Christians like the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 5:11 – “a so-called brother”).

If, on the other hand, the person once professed faith in Christ but now clearly denies him, we should take him at his word and try to lead him to Christ—regardless of your view of eternal security.

Paul's opposition to the Judaizers is a warning of the tendency to erode our security based on the finished work of Christ. His response to the Judaizers is an example of how to deal with this tendency. He has no give on this issue, and is willing to fight over it (Gal. 1:6-9; 5:14; Phil. 3:1-3). We must be aware of contemporary Judaizers and know how to refute them if we want to have healthy Christian lives and help others have the same. Besides the obvious works-righteousness cults (Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, etc.), there are four objectionable views we will examine.

Four Biblically Objectionable Views

1. Radical Arminianism

Arminianism is named for Jacob Arminius (1560-1609), a Dutch theologian who was a strong proponent of man's freewill. We'll talk more about Arminius and his views next week. Radical Arminian groups (some Nazarenes; Church of Christ; etc.) teach that true Christians can lose God's acceptance by FALLING INTO SIN (drunkenness; sexual immorality; etc.). They usually use the verses below to support this belief.

We admit that the plain sense of some of these passages seems to indicate you can lose your salvation. But we must harmonize the Bible because God is its author. It is easier to harmonize these verses with the eternal security passages than it is to try to harmonize the eternal security passages with these verses. In addition, if we can demonstrate that the few

passages which seem to contradict eternal security in actuality do not, then the case for security is effectively demonstrated.

(Hebrews 6:4-6) For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, (5) and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, (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.

Discussion: What does it sound like the author is saying? (If a Christian lapses in his commitment to God – “fall away” – then he can lose his salvation. It is “impossible to renew them again to repentance.”)

Problem:

Vs. 4-5 seem to describe regenerate people (Christians).

Vs. 6-8 make it clear they are headed for hell (not just loss of reward).

Resolution:

Is this about falling into sin? *No.*

- “Fallen away” – to fornication? To drunkenness? No, to temple worship and the OT sacrificial system! Recall context of Hebrews. Many of the Jews reading this letter did not consider Christ’s atoning death adequate for them and persisted in relying on temple sacrifices to atone for their sin. This explains the strong language – “they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put him to open shame.” (v. 6) If they were Christians, their loss of their salvation would not have been the result of sin, but the result of a choice to reject Christ and his sacrifice.

Were they Christians? *Probably not.*

- All of the phrases in vs. 4,5 stop short of definitely describing a regenerate person. Even "partakers of the Holy Spirit" can refer to people who "shared in" (metecho) the Holy Spirit by witnessing his work through real Christians when they were in fellowship.
- Note the strong contrast between “they/them/those” in vs. 4-6 and “beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning YOU.” (v. 9) This contrast suggests that the people mentioned in vs. 4-6 are not Christians.

What is meant by the statement “it is impossible for them to be renewed to repentance...” in v. 6? This may mean that they have

blasphemed the Holy Spirit. Since they have received the full light that God has to give them and have rejected it, there isn't any further possibility of salvation for them. OR "since" in v. 6 may also be translated "while"—in which case the author is simply saying they can't be accepted by God as long as they reject Jesus as their Savior.

(Heb. 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, (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 the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, 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.

Problem:

Vs. 29 seems to describe Christians “sanctified” by the blood of Christ.

Vs. 26,27,29 make it clear that they will come under God’s judgment.

Resolution:

Is this about falling into sin? *No.*

- The key here is to interpret "sinning willfully" in light of the following context. Vs 29 defines it as rejecting Jesus as the Messiah, denying that his death had any atoning value, and insulting the Spirit's conviction about Jesus—not simply any sin we might purposefully commit.

Were they Christians? *Probably not.*

- Vs 29 says Jesus' death "sanctified" these people. If the author uses "sanctified" (10:14) as a synonym for justification, then weren't these people saved? It may mean that his death sets all people apart in a more general sense (as in 9:13 and 13:12; see also 1 Corinthians 7:14). “Receiving the knowledge of the truth” (v. 26) stops short of asserting regeneration.
- If 10:26ff is about a Christian losing his salvation because of sin, the author of Hebrews is doing an about face. In 7:25, we read that Jesus continues to intercede for us. In 10:10-14, the

author says that Christians have been “perfected for all time” by Christ’s sacrifice. And 10:19-25 teaches that Christians who rely on the blood of Jesus can enter the presence of God with confidence. Threatening Christians with loss of salvation would be out of place here because it doesn’t fit the immediate context. But we can see how fellow Jews (this could explain the author’s use of “we” in v. 26) who keep relying on temple sacrifices will never benefit from Christ’s sacrifice.

(Gal. 5:4) You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

Problem:

“You (Galatians) have been severed from Christ” and “you have fallen from grace” sounds like Christians losing their salvation.

Resolution:

Were they Christians? *Yes.*

The “you” does in fact refer to the Galatian Christians rather than the Judaizers (see 5:7-10).

Is this about falling into sin? *No.*

Read 5:1-7. Why are they in danger of being severed from Christ? Gambling? Stealing? Fornication? No! Instead they are “seeking to be justified by law.” Just as in Hebrews, these folks were returning to works of the law (in this case circumcision) to earn God’s acceptance. Paul is trying to get them to see that accepting circumcision is accepting justification by works, which is antithetical to why they trusted in Christ (to be justified by grace through faith).

Is this referring to loss of salvation? *No.*

If they begin to operate with this mentality, they will pull the plug on God's sanctifying power (see vs. 1-2 and especially "Christ will be of no benefit to you"). Paul argues in a similar fashion in Gal. 3:3 and Eph. 4:17-21.

(Col. 1:21-23a) 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...

Problem:

Being found holy and blameless on judgment day seems to be conditioned (“if indeed”) on continuing in the faith and remaining steadfast throughout one’s life.

Resolution:

- Paul may be using the terms "holy and blameless and beyond reproach" to refer to spiritual maturity (see Phil. 1:10; 2:15; 1 Tim. 3:10; Titus 2:8 for such usage). If this is the case, he is simply saying that God has reconciled (justified) us through Christ in order to present us to himself as spiritually mature people, and that this will happen as long as we continue in the faith.
- Also, remember Paul's reason for writing this letter. Gnostic false teachers have apparently eroded the Colossians confidence that they are saved, and Paul is seeking to restore that confidence (cf. 2:10-15). It is therefore a misuse of this passage to say he is warning them that they are not secure in Christ.

(2 Tim 2:12) If we deny Him, He also will deny us . . .

Problem:

This sounds like if Christians deny Christ, God will deny them (take away their salvation).

Resolution:

Is this about falling into sin? *No.*

This verse mentions denying Christ, not committing certain sins.

Paul is quoting a "theological confession" that may be using "we" in the widest sense of the word—all different kinds of responses to Christ.

"If we died with him, we shall also live with him." – This could refer to anyone who receives Christ.

"If we endure, we shall also reign with him." – This probably refers to the walking Christian.

"If we deny him, he also will deny us." – This could refer to people who had apparently received, but then later denied him, or simply to people who never respond to the gospel.

"If we are faithless, he remains faithful..." – This probably refers to a common Christian struggle with being consistently faithful.

IMPORTANT: Two different versions of Non-Eternal Security:

- *Salvation can be lost by rejecting Christ* (Hebrews 6,10; 2 Timothy 2:12) – Those who hold this position agree that our acceptance by God is based solely on the finished work of Christ. But they argue that just as we choose freely to receive this gift, we may choose freely to reject it. Notice that most of the passages above emphasize denying/rejecting Christ and/or his sacrifice rather than committing sins. Taking this position does not violate salvation by grace through faith alone. Properly understood, it doesn't really threaten the Christian's security since they don't intend to reject Christ.
- *Salvation can be lost by moral lapses or failure to mature* (Radical Arminianism) – Some groups teach that “backsliding” Christians who revert to sinful habits forfeit God's acceptance.

“The responsibility for continued obedience is binding on the Christian. The gospel requires much more than the 'acceptance' of Christ as a Personal Savior . . . The whole Bible, and particularly the New Testament, gives repeated counsel and command to the believer to take very positive steps toward moral recovery. These requirements are absolute. They are things the believer must do . . . Eternal destiny, not merely rewards, is at stake. God's forgiveness does not exhaust the obligations of the gospel; it begins the life of obligation.”⁵

This is heresy, because if we can lose God's acceptance by our sins, then we must be maintaining God's acceptance by our good works.

2: Roman Catholic soteriology

Instructors: In the notes that follow, we are not addressing the question of whether individual Catholics are saved. No doubt many are. Our focus instead is on the official doctrine of the Catholic church.

⁵ Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *Foundations of Wesleyan-Arminian Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1967) pp. 122,124.

According to Catholic theology, our salvation is not secure. Why is this?

- **The Roman Catholic church relies on two sources of authority for doctrine: the Bible and church tradition which includes papal teaching and edicts of Roman Catholic church councils.**

(Millard Erickson) "Instead, it posits two equal authorities, the Bible, and the unwritten tradition of the apostles, preserved, interpreted, and made explicit by the church."⁶

This second source of authority is found in papal teaching and the Roman Catholic church councils. Since scripture is viewed through church tradition, the tradition ends up being the final authority in matters of doctrine.

"Sacred tradition and sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the Word of God committed to the Church ... the task of authentically interpreting the Word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ ... It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, are in accord with God's most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls."⁷

- **Sola Scriptura:** Over against this, the Reformers affirmed "sola scriptura" – *the Bible alone is the authority for doctrine.*
- **Catholic canon law teaches that saving grace, while purchased only by Christ's work on the cross, is conferred in an ongoing way through the sacraments which must be officiated by the ordained priesthood.**

⁶ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1987) p. 1010.

⁷ Second Vatican Council, "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation," no. 10.

(Catechism of the Catholic Church) "The Church affirms that for believers, the sacraments of the New Covenant are *necessary for salvation*."⁸

(Catechism of the Catholic Church) "The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine grace is dispensed to us."⁹

The key sacraments that confer saving grace are *baptism* (through which original sin and all personal sins are forgiven¹⁰, *confirmation* (through which one receives the Holy Spirit)¹¹, *confession & penance* (through which mortal sins¹² are confessed to and absolved by the priest through prescribed prayers, etc.)¹³, and the *Eucharist*, which is "offered in reparation for the sins of the living and the dead."¹⁴

In Catholicism, therefore, one can never be sure of God's full and final acceptance in this life.

(Cardinal John O'Connor) "Church teaching is that I don't know, at any given moment, what my eternal future will be. I can hope, pray, do my very best—but I still don't know. Pope John Paul II doesn't absolutely know that he will go to heaven, nor did Mother Theresa of Calcutta . . ."¹⁵

- **Sola Fide:** Over against this, the Reformers affirmed "sola fide" – *salvation is a free and permanent gift received directly from God by faith alone* when an individual comes to Christ.

The Catholic system is wrong in three important areas:

⁸ The Holy See, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori, Missouri: Liguori Publications, 1994) p. 292.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 293.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 324-325.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

¹² "Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent." – Pope John Paul II, *Reconcilio et paenitentia*. 17 § 19 "If it is not redeemed by repentance and God's forgiveness, it causes exclusion from Christ's kingdom and the eternal death of hell, for our freedom has the power to make choices for ever, with no turning back. However, although we can judge that an act in itself is a grave offense, we must entrust judgment of persons to the justices and mercy of God." – The Holy See, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori, Missouri: Liguori Publications, 1994) p. 456.

¹³ The Holy See, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori, Missouri: Liguori Publications, 1994) p. 373.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 356.

¹⁵ Cardinal John O'Connor, *The New York Times*, February 1, 1990, p. B4.

- First, *it holds that forgiveness is actually conveyed through the rituals (sacramentalism)*, while the Bible insists that personal faith alone secures saving grace. The Old Covenant system never dispensed true forgiveness; it was only an incomplete picture of the once-and-for-all forgiveness bought by Christ which we can receive once-for-all (Heb. 10:10-14).
- Second, *it holds to a special caste of priests*. In the New Covenant, all true Christians are priests in the full sense of the word because we all have direct access to God through Christ (Heb. 10:19-22) and because we all can communicate God's grace to others through the Word (1 Pet. 2:9). This doctrine is referred to as the "priesthood of all believers." Christ is our only mediator (1 Tim. 2:5)
- Third, *it reverts to the ritualism of the Old Covenant*, which Hebrews 9 insists has been fulfilled and made obsolete by the finished work of Christ. This highly ritualistic way of relating to God, which was appropriate in the Old Covenant because of its instructional value, has been replaced by the centrality of a personal relationship with God through the indwelling Holy Spirit (Gal. 4:3-11). Ritual in the New Covenant has a much smaller role because of this (from hundreds of prescribed rituals to two; from strictly regulated rituals to loosely regulated).

Important qualification: *We are not saying that there are no saved Catholics!* There are, in fact, many Catholics who know the Lord and serve him. We are simply saying that they are saved and serving in spite of Catholic theology, not because of it.

Practical advice: Don't go out and attack your Catholic family and friends! Many Catholics don't even know what their church teaches. Instead, emphasize the biblical teaching on salvation as a free gift and your personal testimony. Many get saved from this, and then begin to see for themselves that their old church was off in its teaching . . .

3: Water baptism required for salvation

Many people and denominations teach that water baptism is necessary for salvation. Passages such as Acts 2:38, Mark 16:16, 1 Peter 3:21, Romans 6:3,4 and Col. 2:12 seem to teach this position. However, on closer examination, this teaching is not scriptural for the following reasons:

- **The biblical teaching on salvation by grace through faith alone is very clear** (John 1:12; Eph 2:8,9; Acts 16:30,31; Romans 3:24; Titus 3:5).

Gal. 2:16 is especially significant in light of its historical setting. Paul is refuting the Judaizers' insistence that faith in Christ is not sufficient for salvation, but that circumcision is also required. These are parallel teachings in that both require submission to a biblical ritual for salvation.

- **Passages used support this view can be harmonized with the "salvation by faith alone" position described above.**

Acts 2:38 & Acts 3:19 – Acts 2:38 gives two imperatives ("repent" and "be baptized"), followed by two results ("forgiveness of sins" and "you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"). Note that in Peter's next speech (Acts 3:19), he gives one imperative ("repent and return") and promises the same two results ("sins wiped away" and "times of refreshing from God's presence"). If water baptism is required for forgiveness and the Holy Spirit, why did Peter omit this imperative? Therefore, it is best to understand the promises of Acts 2:38 as connected to the command to "repent" alone. Peter also announced that it is God's will for believers to be water baptized, but he did not mean that baptism was necessary for salvation.

Mark 16:16 is part of the "long ending" of Mark (vs 9-20) that was not part of the original text. For more information on this textual issue, see Mark Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), pp. 601-605.

In **1 Peter 3:21**, Peter says, ". . . corresponding to that, baptism now saves you." The "that" refers to how God rescued Noah and his family from the flood (vs. 20). "Corresponding" is *antitupon*, or "anti-type." Peter thus identifies the ark rescue as a prophetic type of our rescue through Christ. Noah and his family were NOT saved by being water baptized, but by being put into (baptized into) the *ark*. In the same way, believers in Christ are rescued from God's judgment by being put into (baptized into) Christ. Therefore, the "baptism" in vs. 21 refers to the baptism by the Holy Spirit into Christ (see 1 Cor. 12:13), not water baptism. Peter seems intent on making this point by adding ". . . not the removal of dirt from the flesh . . ."

Romans 6:3-4 & Colossians 2:12 both refer to Spirit-baptism into Christ rather than to water baptism, since Paul says clearly in 1 Corinthians 12:13 that Spirit-baptism is the baptism that unites us with Christ.

- **Additional reasons for rejecting this view:**

In **Luke 23:42,43**, the criminal executed alongside Jesus was assured of eternal life by Christ for his faith. Of course, he never had the opportunity to be baptized (or do any good works for that matter).

In **Acts 10:47**, Cornelius and his household receive the Holy Spirit immediately when they believe the gospel. Peter insists that they be allowed to undergo water baptism because they have received the Spirit. Since receiving the Holy Spirit is synonymous with salvation and necessary in order to be a Christian (Romans 8:9), water baptism clearly had no bearing on their salvation. If this was the case with Cornelius and his household, why would God change something this important?

In **1 Corinthians 1:17**, Paul says, "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel." How could Paul say this if water baptism was necessary for salvation? Paul believed Christians should be baptized, but he obviously saw baptism as so much less important than explaining the gospel that he could pit them against each other in this verse. Why? Because the gospel saves when people believe it (Romans 1:16), while water baptism does not save.

- **Is water baptism required or not?**

Yes, but not for salvation. Clearly Jesus commanded us to be baptized and to baptize (Matt. 28:19). In this sense, baptism is required. We should be baptized after receiving Christ because Jesus has told us to proclaim our faith in him in this way. But, as we have seen above, baptism is not required for salvation. Like many other commands in scripture, we should obey them out of gratitude for our salvation, not as requirements for our salvation.

4: Lordship Theology

Lordship theologians affirm eternal security, but they define saving faith in a way that requires complete commitment to Christ and denies the possibility of carnal Christians. This has the same practical

effect as the above "losing salvation through moral lapses" view: unless you live a righteous life, you have no basis for thinking you are saved.

(John F. MacArthur) " ... eternal life is indeed a free gift ... that does not mean there is no cost in terms of salvation's impact on the sinner's life. This paradox may be difficult but it is nevertheless true: salvation is both free and costly ... It (saving faith) is an exchange of all that we are for all that Christ is. And it denotes implicit obedience, full surrender to the lordship of Christ. Nothing less can qualify as saving faith ... This is the kind of totally committed response the Lord Jesus called for. A desire to follow him at any cost. Absolute surrender. A full exchange of self for the Savior. It is the only response that will open the gates of the kingdom."¹⁶

This is double-talk. If salvation is free, it costs us nothing; if it is costly to us, then it is not free.

(John F. MacArthur) "(Saving faith) retains no privileges. It clings to no cherished sins, no treasured possessions, no secret self-indulgences. It is unconditional surrender, a willingness to do anything the Lord demands."¹⁷

He is making the pinnacle of spiritual maturity the minimum requirement for salvation. Accordingly, we must attain to a perfect attitude of submission before we can be forgiven.

If saving faith requires full commitment, then why do the epistles urge Christians to commit themselves more fully to Christ (Rom. 12:1; 1 Pet. 3:15)? Why do the epistles acknowledge that there are carnal Christians (1 Cor. 3:3,15), and why do they urge *Christians* not to submit to sin (Rom. 6:12,13)?

To demand from a person a "complete change of heart, attitude, interest, and direction" is to make regenerate behavior from an unregenerate person the requirement for regeneration!

(D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones) "It comes to this, that unless my life is a righteous life, I must be very careful before I claim that I am covered by the grace of God in Jesus Christ . . . Some of the most vital questions that I am asked, then, are these. Do you know God? Do you love God? Can you say honestly that the first and most important thing in your life is to glorify Him and that you so much want to do

¹⁶ John F. MacArthur, *The Gospel According To Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), pp. 140, 141.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 139, 140.

this that you do not care what it may cost you in any sense? . . . Let every man examine himself."¹⁸

Note: We must also affirm that *saving faith DOES involve sincere humility, bowing to God (Jn. 7:17)*. We agree that mental-assent faith only is not saving faith—there must also be personal trust and commitment to Christ. We also affirm that full commitment to Christ is our goal in the Christian life – but it is not the definition of saving faith!

Conclusion

Our salvation is secure!! Your salvation rests only upon whether you have accepted Jesus Christ as your savior, and nothing else. The vast majority of verses on the topic support the idea that one's salvation is secure. The verses that seem to imply otherwise are few and alternate interpretations can be found that harmonize with the rest of scripture. The teaching that one can lose salvation through sin or 'backsliding' is antithetical to grace and unbiblical.

(1 JN 5:13) I write this to you who believe in the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life.

- Note the apostle John's concern that his people KNOW they have God's acceptance. (vs. threatening loss of salvation to get behavioral results)
- This is a testament to the awesome power of the cross – that any sin, failure, offense you might commit has been covered by the blood of the cross; to claim his blood was not sufficient for you is to cheapen Christ's work.
 - Doesn't this produce a sense of gratitude in you? Your disciples?
 - Let's watch not only what we say we believe, but also what we emphasize.

Discussion: Do you remember the questions raised by the young Christian in the email at the beginning of this lecture? Below is one person's response. Based on what you've learned tonight, how would you evaluate this response?

FROM: -----
SENT: Wednesday, September 11, 2002
TO: XCF-ISSUES
SUBJECT: RE: Assurance of Salvation, Eternal Security and Freewill

¹⁸ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977) pp. 208,209.

For one thing, we have to remember that we never know who has truly become a Christian. Jesus was clear that “Many who call me Lord will not enter the kingdom.” Therefore, what looks like falling away to us, may be a pseudo Christian returning to what they really were all along.

Also Jesus teaches about the prodigal son. There, one who was truly a son acted like he wasn't a son for quite awhile. However, in the end, he was brought to discipline, and returned to the Father. This kind of situation might look like falling away to us, but is not.

Third, even though we have free will, some free will decisions are irreversible. For instance I can freely choose to jump off a cliff, but I can't change my mind halfway down. So making irreversible decisions does not necessarily deny freewill.

Fourth we have many clear statements in Scripture that salvation will not be lost. (Rom 8:1; Heb 13:5 and Eph 1:14 are examples). Note, this teaching is only found in the New Testament, and only after the time of Christ's death and ascension. The Gospel books usually reflect more the Old Testament view...

Finally, this is not a foundational area of teaching. Some very good Christians believe it is possible to deny Christ, and it doesn't seem to make much difference in their walks. However, one type of falling away teaching is very serious and cannot be allowed: namely, that people can lose their salvation because they sin too much. This would be teaching works salvation, which Paul says puts you outside Christianity. If people could fall away, it would only be by a deliberate choice to renounce Christ, and that even seems to be impossible for a true believer who has been sealed in the Spirit.

Memory Verses

Romans 8:1* – Christians will never be condemned by God.

Ephesians 4:30* – Christians are sealed by God for safe passage to heaven.

John 10:27-30 – Jesus will not allow anyone to snatch believers out of his hand.**

Assignment

- **Complete the Free Will, Predestination & God's Sovereignty Assignment.**