

Blue Ridge Brandmarks

“...I bear on my body the brandmarks of Jesus” - Gal. 6:17

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Is "Once Saved, Always Saved" True?

[Editor's Note: Recently one of our Bible Correspondence Course students sent in this question, “Is it true that once saved, always saved? I don’t read the scriptures this way.” I love to get a question like that!]

The doctrine that the saved can never be lost is sometimes called the impossibility of apostasy or the perseverance of the saints, and was first popularized by a Reformation leader named John Calvin. It is one of the five main points of the doctrine referred to as Calvinism. There are several passages of Scripture that appear to teach this idea, and several passages that appear to refute it. If we believe that the entire Bible is true, then we need to find an understanding of Scripture that agrees with everything that the Bible has to say about this important topic.

One of the Scriptures that appears to most strongly support Calvinism on this

point is what Jesus said in John 10:27-29: *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will 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.”*

The Calvinist concludes that this passage teaches that none of Jesus’ sheep ever perish, all receive eternal life and there is no circumstance that could result in them being outside of the hand of God and therefore lost. It is important to note that while this interpretation is consistent with this passage, it is not the only interpretation that is consistent with this passage and it is inconsistent with other passages.

For example, consider what Jesus said in 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 He takes away; and every branch that bears*

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fruit He prunes, 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, 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, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned."

Is the view that none of the branches in the vine of Jesus ever perish and that all receive eternal life consistent with this passage? Not at all! Some will be cut off,

But can we reconcile the removal from the vine and ultimate destruction of the unfruitful branches described by John 15:1-6 with the statement of Jesus about His sheep in John 10? The answer is a definite YES. In John 10:28-29, Jesus assures His disciples of their spiritual security because "*no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.*" In John 15, who is described as taking unfruitful branches out of Christ, the vine? The Father Himself (v. 2) who is identified as the vinedresser (v. 1), the tender of the vine. If God the Father removes an unfruitful branch from Christ, has anyone snatched it from the Father? No, He Himself is executing judgment on that branch. His power is absolute, no one is doing anything to the branch without His

IF GOD THE FATHER REMOVES UNFRUITFUL BRANCHES FROM CHRIST, HAS ANYONE SNATCHED THEM FROM THE FATHER?

taken away, and burned. The branches that receive this treatment are those that do not bear fruit and do not abide/stay in Him. One way we can reconcile the Calvinist view to this passage, is to say that the branches that are removed were never really in Christ. But what did Jesus say about it in verse two? "*Every branch IN ME that does not bear fruit He takes away.*" Another way of trying to reconcile the Calvinist view to this passage is to say that the branches are punished for their failure to bear fruit but are not ultimately lost. But I don't think there is any way we could more aptly describe final destruction for a branch than to be cut off, withered and burned with fire. I am not away of any satisfactory way to reconcile the Calvinist view with this passage.

knowledge and approval. So the teaching that God cuts off, takes away and burns unfruitful branches is not inconsistent with His power that prevents anyone from taking His fruitful branches from Him against His will.

The first part of what Jesus said about His sheep needs more attention, though. "*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish*" It may seem difficult to reconcile this plain statement of fact with the view that some of Jesus sheep may lose eternal life and perish.

Let's look at another passage to help us. In John 3:36, we read, "*he who believes in the Son has everlasting life;*

and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

Notice that this passage uses similar expressions to John 10 and is talking about the same subject, those who do and do not have eternal life. The Calvinist would tell us, "See! There are those who believe and are eternally safe and others who do not believe and are eternally lost." But wait; a person does not have everlasting life until he believes, right? So, before he believes is he a believer or an unbeliever? Clearly, he is an

sheep can never stop following? No, it doesn't. It identifies Jesus sheep as those who hear and follow Him. What does he promise to do for those sheep? Give them eternal life and ensure that they never perish.

Now notice: does this passage teach that a sheep can stop hearing and can stop following? No, it doesn't. It doesn't say one way or the other. If we want to know whether a sheep can stop hearing and following we have to look at other passages. John 3:36 and John 15:1-6 teach us that the sheep stops hearing and

IF THE BELIEVER CAN NEVER STOP BELIEVING, THEN THE UNBELIEVER CAN NEVER STOP DISBELIEVING

unbeliever. But does this passage not say, "*he who does not believe the Son shall not see life*"? If "*he who believes in him shall not perish (John 3:16)*" means he can never stop believing, then this passage means that the unbeliever can never stop disbelieving! But it doesn't teach that, does it? And that is the key to understanding this passage and the passage in John 10.

This passage (John 3:36) teaches that an unbeliever will never see life as long as he remains in unbelief. It also teaches that a believer has eternal life as long as he remains in belief. That makes John 3:36 consistent with John 15:1-6. Now let's see if we can understand John 10:27-28.

Jesus said, "*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.*" Does this passage teach that a sheep can never stop hearing? No, it doesn't. Does this passage teach that a

following Jesus when the Christian stops believing in Jesus, stops bearing fruit for Jesus and stops abiding in Jesus. With this understanding, we find the teaching of John 10 to be in full agreement with these other passages.

If you would like to study further, here are some passages that discuss the security of God's people: Psalms 37:23-24; John 5:24; John 6:58; John 11:25-26; Romans 8:28; Psalms 37:28; Psalms 89:29-33; 1 John 5:11-12

And here are some passages that warn God's people not to lose what they have by turning away from Him: 1 Corinthians 10:12; 9:27; Hebrews 3:12; 6:4-6; 2 Peter 2:20-22; Ezekiel 18:20-24

If you have a Bible question that you would like answered in the bulletin, the pulpit or in private, please let me know. And please keep praying for those who are studying the Bible with us!

◀Brent Paschall▶

NOVEMBER 2010 DUTY ROSTER

Weekday	WED	SUN	WED	SUN	WED	SUN	WED	SUN	WED
Date	11/3	11/7	11/10	11/14	11/17	11/21	11/24	11/28	12/1
Opening Prayer				John M.				Jonathan L.	
Morning Message	Randy F.		Eric B.		Jimmy F.		Alan M.		
Announcements	Matt M.	Bill A.	Bill A.	Randy F.	David T.	Don H.	Larry P.	Larry P.	John M.
Leading Songs	John M.	Eric B.	Randy F.	Brad F.	Leo R.	Larry P.	David T.	Charlie K.	Matt M.
First Prayer	Jonathan L.			Charlie K.	Don H.	Alan M.	Matt M.	John M.	Eric B.
Lead at Lord's Table & Contribution	Larry P.		Jonathan L.		Bill A.		David T.		
Assist	James M.		Ed M.		Brad F.		Jerry D.		
Assist	Jonathan L.		Don H.		James M.		Randy F.		
Assist	Kevin H.		Jeremy P.		Cody M.		Bill A.		
Read Scripture	Brad F.		Leo R.		Jerry D.		James M.		
Preaching	Brent P.		Brent P.		Brent P.		Brent P.		
Wed. Exhortation	Alan M.	Leo R.		John M.		Charlie K.		Jimmy F.	
Closing Prayer	David T.	Jerry D.	Larry P.	James M.	Eric B.	Ed M.	Matt M.		Randy F.

ALL ARE WELCOME!

Sunday

9:15 - Morning Message

10:00 - Bible classes for all ages

11:00 - Worship

Wednesday

7:30 - Bible Classes for all ages

Elders:

Jim Fields, Alan Moeller & Leo Rodrigue

Deacons:

Eric Bridge & John Malloy

Evangelist:

Brent Paschall

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