

One Saved, Always Saved?  
Series: Grace Works! #4  
Hebrews 10:26-31

Richard Tow 5-1-16

## Intro

One saved, always saved? Is that true or can a Christian lose his salvation? If so, how and when does that happen? This is one of the most common questions that people ask me about Scripture.

I do not give a quick yes or no answer: first, because there is a lot you have to know to get a sound, biblical answer to that question; second, because there are people in both camps that are sincerely walking with the Lord; and third, because there is a progressive learning experience most of us need to walk through while gaining an understanding of this.<sup>1</sup>

However, this is the fourth message in a series concerning grace; and that subject naturally leads to the question. We have laid some foundation for addressing the matter this morning. We cannot deal in depth with such a broad subject in a 45 minute message. There are major theological truths that feed into the answer. And again good people can disagree on this and still walk together in love.

It is the extremes that get us into trouble! Extreme Arminianism leads to unhealthy expressions of legalism. Extreme Calvinism leads to a kind of fatalism that engenders apathy and the moral laxity that I have alluded to in previous messages. These two theological camps are named after two men, John Calvin and Jacobus Arminius.<sup>2</sup> It would take hours to explore their theologies and the variations developed by their followers. We won't go there.

What I want you to understand at this point is the importance of receiving the word of God just as it comes to us in Scripture—allowing that to create balance in our understanding. There is a tension of truth found in the Bible that often challenges the rational mind. Let me give you a few examples.

Sovereignty of God versus Freewill of Man

Love of God versus Wrath of God

Mercy versus Justice

In Rom 11:22 Paul tells us to “*consider the goodness and severity of God...*”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> We learn things line upon line and precept upon precept. I need to know basic math before algebra makes sense, and I need to know algebra before I take my calculus course. Most people don't comprehend grace until they have tried some legalism, and discovered first hand their need for sanctifying grace. I have always had people in my congregations with various positions on this issue; and I'm comfortable with that. I do not insist we all agree on this matter.

<sup>2</sup> “Arminius answered the Calvinistic insistence on the perseverance of saints by stating that God would give the saints grace so that they need not fall but that the Scriptures seemed to teach that it was possible for man to fall away from salvation.” James Arminius, *Works*, trans. By James Nichols and W. R. Bagnall (Buffalo: Derby, Miller & Orton, 3 vols., 1853) 1:254, 281 as quoted by Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through The Centuries: A History of the Christian Church*. Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) p. 325.

<sup>3</sup> All Scripture quotes are in the New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

Today, we are particularly dealing with the tension between:  
Assurance & Security of the Believer verse Warnings & Admonitions to the Believer.

If you allow the Bible to speak into your life in the way God has provided it in Scripture, you will find a healthy balance in your walk with God. If you pick one side of the tension and reject the other side, you will eventually go into error.

The street next to my house has a deep ditch on each side of the road. If I stay in the middle of those two ditches, I will proceed just fine on my journey. If not, I will crash.

Over the years I have witnessed many people go into error. In every case, there was some truth in what they were saying. That part is usually not what got them into trouble. What got them into trouble was the other side of that truth that they rejected. When you listen to teachers, don't just listen to what they say; listen to what scriptures they avoid. What truths in the Bible (and you have to read it yourself to do this)—what part of it do they not say? Paul said to elders at Ephesus, “...*I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God* (Acts 20:27). If the preacher teaches on prosperity, does he ever deal with passages about self-denial (and *vice versa*)? If he teaches on the love and mercy of God, does he ever share the warnings and exhortations? (The whole counsel of God as it is given to us in the Word).

So the Calvinist who labors to explain away 2 Peter 2:20-21 just to maintain his system is not being honest with Scripture. The Arminian who explains away Eph. 2:8-9 is making the same mistake. Eph. 2:8-9 says, “*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.*”

2 Peter 2:19-21 says, “*For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. 21 For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.*” Both verses are inspired by the Holy Spirit and should inform our theology.

We need to compare scripture with scripture in developing our understanding of truth. But we must respect the inspired Word of God more than a preferred theological system. We must allow Scripture to shape our understanding of truth, rather than trying to force passages to fit into our theological system. That's why inductive Bible study should take precedence over deductive study. That's why Biblical Theology should drive Systematic Theology and not vice versa. I will resist the temptation to go into all that.

Instead I will walk you through my personal journey concerning the security of the believer.

### **Stage I.**

My first church experience was in very legalistic Pentecostal church. The women wore their hair in bun, long-sleeve blouse, dress that reached pretty close to the floor, and no make-up. Movies were taboo: no smoking, no dancing, no cussing. Sermons revolved around what you should not be doing. Most of us had done at least some of it that week, so the altars were full of people at the end of the service trying to get re-saved and promising never to do it again.

There was always this performance gap between what we should have been doing and what we actually were doing. Of course, we do have a performance gap between the perfection we're called to and the imperfect patterns that tend to beset us. Joseph Cooke identifies three responses to that gap that do not work. Yet these are common ways people cope with their struggles. (1) Lower the requirements. Jesus says that we are to do unto others the way we would have them do to us (Luke 6:31). But surely that doesn't apply to my business dealings.

After all, business is business. One of the things that seems to be happening in the American Church at large, is a lowering of the standards.<sup>4</sup> (2) Grit your teeth and try harder! Promise to do better next week. Fast some, pray more and see if that helps. Try and try even more when it doesn't work. (3) Throw in the towel and simply say, "Forget it; I can't do this so I'll just indulge my passions and hope for the best."<sup>5</sup> This is where a lot of people are who have just dropped out of church. None of those responses work. We have to learn the rhythm of God's grace and walk in His strength.

In my first church, they didn't tell us how to do it; they just told us we had better do it or else! So I kept trying harder. I believed that if I sinned I would lose my salvation.

Then one day I was reading James 2:10 "*For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all*" (KJV). And I thought, wow, this is worse than I thought. I looked at the context of that verse. Was James talking about murder or some perverted form of adultery? No, James was talking about having respect of persons (giving preferential treatment to people we think we might get something from). Now that's something Christians do all the time, and usually don't even count it as a sin. If you don't think pastors do it, go to a pastors' conference and watch who they try to talk with. If you don't think teenagers do it, watch how they seek approval from the "in crowd". Now James is saying that committing this seemingly insignificant sin makes you guilty of the whole law. So what about sins of omission? Did I pray the way I should have prayed? I didn't read my Bible very much today.

So I thought to myself, if a sin causes me to lose my salvation, this is going to be at least a daily occurrence.

The Catholic Church ran head long into this problem centuries ago. How could they adjust their legalistic system to make it work better? They added the non-biblical distinction of mortal sins verses venial sins.<sup>6</sup> Venial means forgivable. If I commit one of those, I'm still saved. If I commit one of the mortal sins, I have lost my salvation. So if we keep our legalism, we have to keep working the list.

I began to see in Scripture that committing a sin cannot be the criteria for losing one's salvation.

## **Stage II.**

Then I went to a Calvinistic church. Of course, I didn't even know what that was at the time. But they began to establish me in grace. They showed me from Eph. 1 that I had been accepted in Christ; that I had been adopted into the family of God. I got some revelation of my identity in Christ. They focused on verses that the previous church never taught on.

For example, 2 Thess. 2:16-17, "*Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, 17 comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.*" Instead of getting beat up every Sunday, I began to enjoy some comfort and assurance. I began to rest in the goodness and sufficiency of God. God is my Father; I'm in His family. Wow, that means something!

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<sup>4</sup> Connecting with the culture (while staying true to biblical mandates) is challenging. I personally believe priority in those decisions should be given to what Scripture tells us to do, above what is required in order to connect with the culture.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph R. Cooke, *Free For The Taking: The Life-changing Power of Grace* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co, 1975) p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part 3, Sec. 1, Ch. 1, Article 8, IV IV. THE GRAVITY OF SIN: MORTAL AND VENIAL SIN, retrieved at [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc\\_css/archive/catechism/p3s1c1a8.htm](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p3s1c1a8.htm).

That is comforting. Maybe God is not standing there with a stern face like my second grade teacher ready to strike my hand with a ruler every time I misstepped. Maybe God is for me and not against me (Rom. 8:31-39).

We looked closely at Rom 5:8-10 *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. 10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”* That really made a lot of sense to me. If God cared about me when I was His confirmed enemy, why would He care less for me now that I’m His child? So there is this side of truth. If I am God’s child He is working toward my ultimate salvation in powerful ways. Rom 8:29-30 *“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”* *“...whom He justified, these He also glorified.”* That sounds like He is going to get me all the way through this process! Instead of relying on my own performance, maybe I can rely upon the goodwill of my Father; maybe I can trust His grace to get me through.

At this point the **graph on the next page** was used in the teaching. This part of the teaching makes the following points from the graph.

(1) God has Provided Everything We Need to Succeed (2 Peter 1:3).

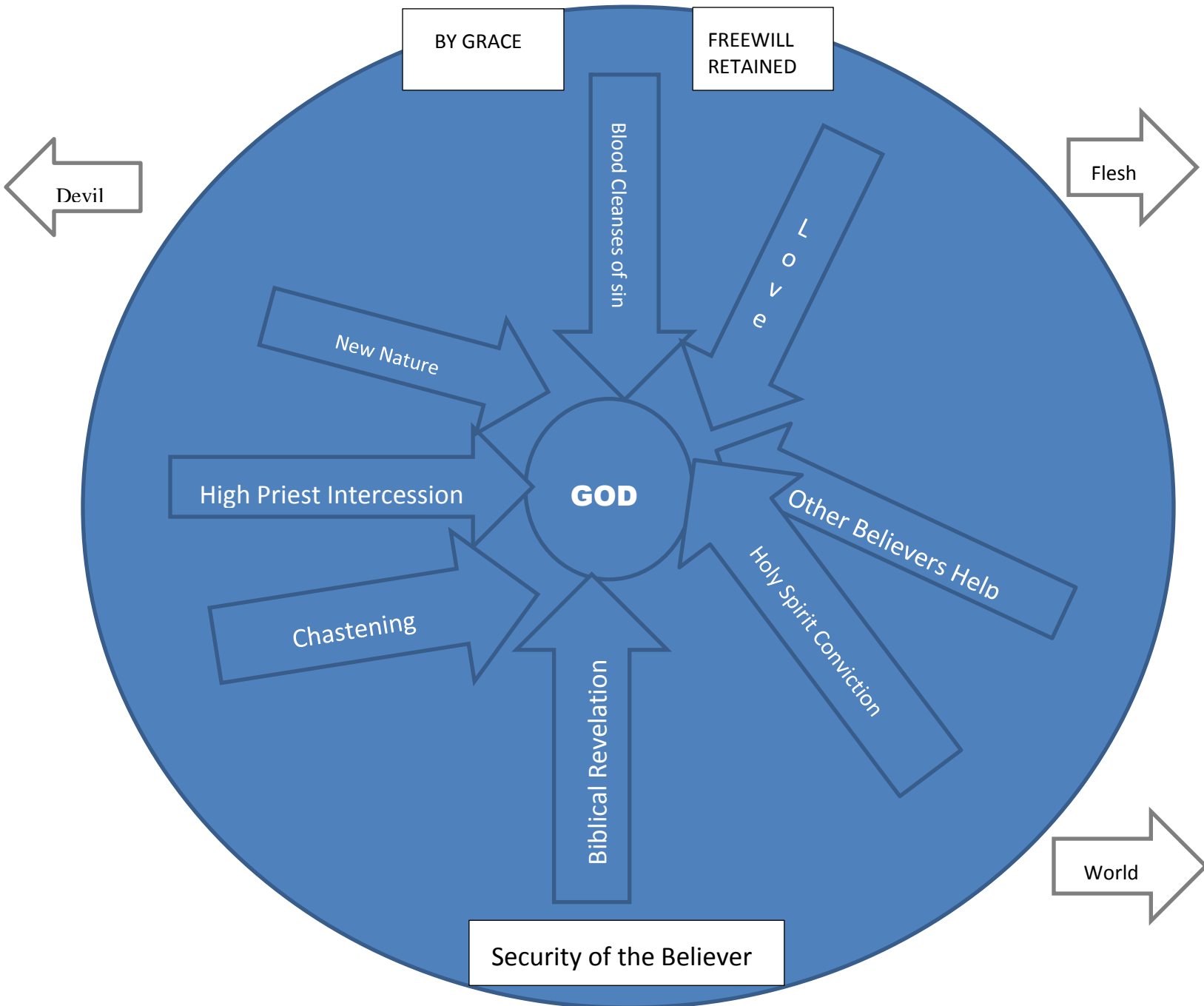
(2) The gravitational pull of grace toward God is exceedingly powerful. Here are a few of the factors:

- \_\_\_ Holy Spirit conviction of sin
- \_\_\_ Attraction of the Father’s love
- \_\_\_ Blood of Jesus cleansing of sin
- \_\_\_ High Priest intercession
- \_\_\_ Ministry from Body of Christ
- \_\_\_ Direction/revelation from Word
- \_\_\_ Inclinations of new nature
- \_\_\_ Chastening from Father

(3) The world, the flesh, and the Devil pull on us in the other direction. These will one day be eliminated.

(4) Freewill is never forfeited. However, the pull of grace toward God far exceeds the power of the world, the flesh, and Satan. The believer is secure *“in Christ.”*

God has Provided Everything We Need to Succeed (2 Peter 1:3)



>“*The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want.*”

“*The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want.*” God wants us, as His children, to live in the security of His love. He watches over us with love. He nurtures our progress. He corrects us so that we get back on the right path. Look how God dealt with David when he sinned. David was not rejected by God even though he committed terrible sins. He was chastened severely. His child died. His children fell into various sins and Absalom rebelled against him. David’s sin

cost him dearly;<sup>7</sup> but there was also a grace involved as well. When Peter denied the Lord, you don't get the feel from the story that he was rejected and on his way to hell. Jesus restored Peter to fellowship with Him after the resurrection. Grace was in operation in those cases. There are powerful forces of God's grace actively keeping us under the umbrella of God's love and protection.<sup>8</sup>

A believer should be living in assurance, not anxiety. *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”* (Rom 8:1 NIV). (No condemnation, no adverse sentence or verdict for those who are in Christ.) Christians do not experience punishment for their sin. Jesus bore the punishment on the cross. However, we do experience chastening and correction—and that can be pretty heavy duty at times. Heb. 12:7-11

*“If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? 8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. 11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”* Correction from God is even comforting because it means God is dealing with us as “sons.”

So there are passages in the Bible designed to bring comfort and assurance to God's children. John said he wrote his first epistle, *“...so that you may know that you have eternal life”* (1 John 5:13). In John 10:27-29 Jesus said, *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone 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 My Father's hand.”*

There will be some believers saved by the skin of their teeth so to speak. 1 Cor. 3:13-15 *“Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. 14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire”* (KJV).

So I became established in grace. The revelation of God's keeping power. The assurances and consolations in Scripture helped be to become more established and steadfast. It was good for me to get established in these truths. And there are other verses that we could go to that pull toward the Calvinist position.

### **Stage III.**

However, I began to wrestle with some verses that are very hard to explain under a “once saved, always saved” theology. Jude talks about people who are *“twice dead.”* Paul talks about people who depart from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1). Peter talks about people who would have been better off if they had never known the way of righteousness. Look with me at 2 Peter 2:19-22 *“For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. 21 For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment*

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<sup>7</sup> Gal. 6:7-8

<sup>8</sup> In the earth, gravity is a wonderful, unseen benefit. Grace is always working in our behalf, drawing us into God.

*delivered to them. 22 But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire."*

That did not sound like the eternal security message I had been taught in church. In 1 Cor. 10 Paul used Israel's experience to warn Christians about trying to drink of the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons at the same time. It didn't work for them, even though they had genuine experiences with God.

The book of Hebrews is written to comfort and to warn Jewish Christians to stay faithful to Christ. One of those warnings is in chapter 10. Beginning in verse 23 the writer calls them to continue in faith. Heb. 10:22-25 *"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."* Then he gives this warning in verse 26 *"For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. 28 Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people." 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."*

It's really hard to sugar coat that passage. Notice the word "we" in verse 26 *"For if we sin willfully...."* This is sounding a lot like the passage in Peter. Can a Christian lose his salvation? This is talking about someone who has *"received the knowledge of the truth."* Hebrews 6 talks about people falling away *"who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come...."* It's pretty hard to define that as someone who was never born again.

So where is the line in which a believer can lose his salvation? If it is when he sins, he's going to be losing it a whole lot, as we mentioned earlier. If a believer sins, he needs to go to the Lord and get the matter resolved, but he does not need to get re-saved. 1 John 2:1-2 *"My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."*

But here in Heb. 10 there is *"a certain fearful expectation of judgement, and fiery indignation."* This is someone who has lost his salvation. What causes a person to lose his salvation? Three things according to Heb. 10:29 (1) *trampled the Son of God underfoot, (2) counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and (3) insulted the Spirit of grace?* This is a purposeful, willful rejection of the covenant of grace that is offered through the gospel. This is not someone stumbling around or struggling with a besetting sin. This is an arrogant disregard for the Son of God. This is insulting, blaspheming the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of grace. This is counting the blood of the covenant a common thing. It is a rejection/renouncing of the covenant that was established by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

The key element is the renouncing of the covenant relationship with God. Because the Holy Spirit is such a Spirit of Grace, I think this is something that has to be extremely willful. Any person who crosses this line will be so calloused toward God, he will have absolutely no concern about his relationship with the Lord. Anyone who is concerned that he might have done

this, didn't do it. All that sensitivity would be gone. Anyone who is concerned that he has blasphemed the Holy Spirit, didn't do it. He would not care.

So where is the line? It's in covenant relationship. When you surrendered your life to Christ, you came under His headship, under His covenant with the Father. He became your Savior; He became your Advocate; He became your High Priest making intercession for you. He became your Surety. The Christian in covenant with God will receive chastening, discipline for disobedience. Sin is not overlooked. It is corrected. But in the covenant we are secure through Christ. We are not just on our own before God. We have an Advocate at the right hand of the Father—not to mention the fact that the Father Himself loves us and planned all this in our behalf. A Christian does not lose his salvation because he committed adultery. He may lose his marriage because of it. He may lose eternal rewards because of it. He may go through horrific chastening because of it. His life may start to feel like a living hell. But a sin does not break the covenant. However, a sin is a step in the wrong direction and if it is continued in it could ultimately lead to the things we're talking about here in Heb. 10. Only God knows when someone has crossed that line. Because grace is so powerful, I suspect it is very rare. The heart would have to become terribly hardened to do the three things listed in Heb. 10:29. This is why that person would never be restored. He would have no inclination whatsoever to do so. I've known people who have said very foolish things in a moment of frustration or anger. Their words may have been blasphemous. But if the heart is still responsive to God, they can be forgiven and restored to fellowship.

The security of the believer is found in the covenant relationship. Notice the phrase "*in Christ*" or "*through Christ*" in these verses. Rom 5:1 "*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand....*" 2 Cor 5:18 "*Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ....*" We don't have relationship with God independent of the covenant of Christ. That's why the person who willfully renounces that covenant is in some big, big trouble. There is no other sacrifice acceptable to God. God has no plan B. Jesus is plan A and that's God's only plan. If a person rejects Jesus and His sacrifice on the cross, there is no salvation available to him. Eph 1:3 "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.*" verse 6 says we are "*accepted in the Beloved.*" 2 Tim 1:9 "*who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.*"

The security of the believer is found in a posture of faith.<sup>9</sup> Eph. 2:8 says we are saved by grace "*through faith.*" Rom 1:16 "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes....*" John 3:16 "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*" If we had more time we would explore what biblical faith is. It is more than just intellectual assent. Jesus prayed for Peter that his faith would not fail (Luke 22:32). "*The just shall live by faith.*" In Romans 9-11 Paul talked about Israel's rejection of the gospel. In Rom 11:19-22 he writes, "*You will say then, 'Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.' 20 Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. 22 Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.*"

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<sup>9</sup> Please don't confuse this with an emotional state. It is simply a reliance on Christ for salvation.



So I believe in the security of the *believer*. When we are born again we came under the covenant of Christ. It is an everlasting covenant because it is between the Father and the Son. As long as our faith remains in Christ we cannot be lost. If we sin, we will be chastened. God does not just overlook the sin; He corrects it. Grace is a powerful influence to keep us in relationship with God. God has provided for us everything we need to walk with Him successfully. He is able to keep us from falling. However, there is the possibility of a person who has partaken of the heavenly calling and then willfully rejecting Christ and His covenant. That person would be lost and would have no inclination to turn to the Lord. For that reason we cannot say “once saved, always saved.” We can say with Paul, “...*I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day*” (2 Tim 1:12).