

I want you to hear one man's story:

When I was quite young I gave myself to the Lord. I then drifted away from the church – and from Jesus – and ended up walking in a wilderness for 25 years. For 25 years I cursed Jesus and fought against Christianity. I 'studied' the Bible looking for 'wrongness' in it and read as many anti-Christian writings as I could. I became an intellectually strong anti-Christian and could debate, and win, with committed Christians in many areas, specially on early church history. Guess you could say that I was like Saul, a zealot against the Christians.

One day, in a fit of despair after being separated from my wife of 19 years, I asked "the Creator" (my concept at that time) how I could get her back. I heard an audible voice (which I instantly knew to be Jesus) say: "Believe in Me". It was mind blowing to say the least. I can understand the confusion Saul must have felt when he was slam-dunked to the ground by the very Person he was persecuting. It was the same with me.

*Was I 'saved' during those 25 years of anti-Christian 'preaching'? From my own heart I can say a resounding **NO**. If I had died and gone to Heaven during that period I would have screamed to be taken to Hell! ⁱ*

Alright, so you understand that man's story??? He made a commitment to Jesus when he was young, but then later on, he completely went against God. What was his status? Was he saved? Or was he lost?

So the question is:

Once I've given my life to Jesus, am I saved forever? Am I on a road I cannot get off of (even if I want to)? ... Or, can I possibly **lose** my salvation?

And we're asking this question because we've been working our way through the book of Revelation. And taking the Bible at face value – what's clearly written in some of what we've read so far, seems to indicate, that if a Christian doesn't persevere in their faith, they can lose their salvation... And yet a lot of churches, and a lot of Christians, will **very strongly** disagree with this. They will say that provided someone makes a decision to give their life to Jesus, that no matter what happens after that, they are saved for all eternity.... *And in the case of the story we just heard, these people would say "Either he was never saved in the first place (even though he believed he was sincere), or he was never lost – So no matter how much he felt he was rejecting God, he was still a Christian (even if he didn't want to be)."*

How do churches come to such diametrically opposed positions on this?

Today we're looking at the very **popular** doctrine (the teaching or belief) that **many** reformed and evangelical churches hold, called "Once saved, always saved."; or "Perseverance of the Saints"; or "Eternal Security"... And we're going to turn to our bibles, to see whether that's what the **Bible** teaches or not.....

The denominations that hold to the doctrine of OSAS – Presbyterians; Bretherans; some Baptists; some Independent churches; I'm not sure if the Anglicans do or

not – the Westminster confession which was originally written for the Church of England holds to it...

Those who **don't** hold to OSAS – Methodists; most Baptists; I don't think the Lutherans do; Most churches of Christ don't; and Pentecostal churches are a mix – some do; some don't.

The first thing I want to say is that you won't find the phrase "once saved always saved" in your bible (not that that's a reason for it not to be true [e.g. word "trinity"]) – so where did this belief of OSAS come from?

Something I've noticed, is when major denominational churches disagree on something as important as salvation, usually what we will find, is that either a church's **tradition** or its **theology, colours** what they read in the Bible on a certain topic. And instead of taking the Bible at face value, when it seems that the Bible is teaching something that their theology doesn't agree with, they find another explanation to explain away what the Bible would otherwise be actually quite clear about...

And so in some of the passages that we've read over the last few weeks, those who believe in OSAS would say, "Of course Jesus isn't saying here that we could ever lose our salvation – that's assured – that's a given. He's talking about our reward – you lose your reward – you don't lose your salvation..." *And in fact on Christian Radio only a week or so ago, I heard Chuck Missler say that exact thing, where to me the Bible verse he was reading, seemed to be very clearly warning that if you weren't faithful, you could lose your salvation, but his theology would not fit with what*

*the Bible was saying, and so he had to find an alternate explanation that **would** fit his theology. (and his explanation was, “It can’t be talking about losing your salvation – it’s about losing your reward”)*

And so they begin with their theological position and whenever they read the Bible, their theology (what they believe about God – what they believe about salvation) is shaping how they interpret the Bible...

Whereas I believe, that it should be the other way around: The Lord intends that the Scriptures, the word of God, should be shaping our theology – The Bible should be shaping what we believe about God, rather than what we believe about God, shaping how we interpret what the Bible is saying.

And so I’m going to be asking you today, to put your theology aside, and we’re going to study the Scriptures, to see what the **Scriptures** say about whether a Christian can lose their salvation. But before we do that, I think we need to know what we’re pushing aside. I believe it’s important for us to have a quick look at what **kind** of church background – what **kind** of theology, shapes someone to believe in OSAS... And we need to have a bit of a look at church history to get there.

One of the greatest periods of upheaval in the Christian church, is what’s known as the reformation. In 1517, in response to grave injustice, and corrupt church practices in the Roman Catholic Church, Martin Luther published his

Ninety-Five Theses, condemning the practices of the church... And thus began the Reformation.

The church was reformed – very reluctantly in fact – and it’s very hard to separate the religious from the political goings ons. Anyway the reformers were seen as heretics, and so they had to leave the Roman Catholic Church, and form a new church... And just as when we formed our little church of “Bush Disciples”, and had to put together a statement of belief, so too did the reformers.

And as they nussed out what they believed, and what the Bible taught, there were some very bitter debates amongst the reformers, as they found they **disagreed** with one another on certain topics.

One of the very influential reformers, was a bloke by the name of John Calvin. And I find some of John Calvin’s writings to be very helpful in a fair bit of what he wrote about the Christian faith.

And when it came to the doctrine of Salvation (what we believe about how we get saved) John Calvin concentrated his theology very strongly on the doctrine of predestination... Which **is** biblical. God pre-destines us – God chooses to call us and save us. But the way John Calvin saw it, “Being saved, is taken completely out of human hands, and is completely in God’s hands...”

And after John Calvin’s death, Calvinism was developed by taking Calvin’s thoughts even further... and in 1619, the 5

points of Calvinism were produced, and the acronym “TULIP” was used to help remember the 5 points of Calvinism:

And this is what Calvinism teaches:

T – Total Depravity

Without God, human beings are so evil – so sinful, and our free will is so enslaved by sin, we could **never** choose to do good. Therefore we would never choose God.

U – Unconditional Election

Since we can’t choose for ourselves, **God** has chosen some people to become righteous.

L – Limited Atonement

Calvinists believe that Jesus **only** died for those He has chosen to save

I – Irresistible Grace

They believe that if God chooses you, there’s no way that you can refuse Him – you cannot resist Him – you have no free will in the matter.

P – Perseverance of the Saints (OSAS)

Calvinists believe that since **God** has decided who will be saved, and they cannot **resist** God’s grace, well there’s no way they can get out of it.

Do you see their logic? It all begins with a very strong idea of what it means for God to pre-destine us. This predestination, to the Calvinist, removes any possibility of free will... I guess they see “predestination” as “pre-

determination”. God makes the decision – you have no free will.

The other side of the debate was the Arminians, and I actually believe the truth is somewhere in between...

So, “What does it mean that God would pre-destine us?” Well that means that God prepares for our **destiny** ahead of time... But what is our destiny? Well ultimately it is to be saved... But biblically, being saved isn't a ‘single-point-in-time’ event – being saved is a process... When you begin believing in Jesus Christ, that's when you begin ‘being saved’.

1 Corinthians 15:1, says: **Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.**

Alright, the Apostle Paul is saying, that being saved isn't a one off event. Paul preached the gospel to them, and they received it... And many evangelicals would say at that point, “You're saved, and you can't be unsaved... That's the end of the story.” But that's not where Paul finished. He says “I preached it; You received it; you now stand in it; And in which you are being saved... if you continue to hold fast to it... otherwise the commitment you first made, when you first believed,,,,, won't do you any good at all.

So Biblically, being saved is a process, which has to be worked through to completion, when our Lord returns.

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Righto, the classic Bible passage that gets used to explain “predestination” and to propose “Once saved always saved”, is Romans 8. I’m going to read that for you now, but then we’re going to go a few pages further on, to Romans 11, so we can hold it in balance with everything that Paul is saying on the matter...

Romans 8:28–39 (ESV)

²⁸ **And we know that for those who love God** (you see that? It’s those who love God. And in the Greek, this love, is a verb in the present tense – Alright, “We know that for those who are loving God) **all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.** ²⁹ **For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son** (When’s that going to happen? Are you conformed to the image of Jesus? Not yet you’re not – when Jesus returns and completes our salvation – that’s when we’ll be conformed), **in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.** ³⁰ **And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.**

³¹ **What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?** ³² **He who did not**

spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;

we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The picture given here, is that those who are standing so strong in their faith, that they would even be killed before denying Jesus, - their salvation is secure. Nothing can take their salvation away...

But did you notice in that list, there was **one** thing that wasn't listed there???? Ourselves... What he's saying here, is "If you're standing in the faith – if you are loving God, nothing will separate you from the love of God..."

But that doesn't mean that we can't remove ourselves from His grace... Just a few pages on, in Romans Chapter 11, Paul tells us what the consequences are, for not continuing in the faith.

Paul is talking about Israel's unfaithfulness. Out of the multitude who God rescued out of Egypt, only 2 of them entered the promised land. And when Jesus Christ came, Israel hardened their hearts against Him, and Paul uses the image of branches being broken off of the olive tree, to show how much of Israel have been cut off from salvation in Jesus Christ..... But then he goes on to give us a warning:

Romans 11:21–22 (ESV)

²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches (Israel), neither will he spare you. (gentile Christians)

²² Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen (unbelieving Jews), but God's kindness to you (Christians), **provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.**

If we don't continue in God's kindness – if we don't continue in faith and obedience, we too will be cut off.

Righto, I think we've spent enough time on predestination and theology, because we don't have a lot of time... Let's turn to the Scriptures themselves? What does the Bible say?

As I prepared for today, one preacher who I heard, said that there were 80 New Testament references, warning that we can lose our salvation... And I don't doubt that that is so, because there are a lot... But we're not going to look at 80. We'll just look at a few.

In Romans 11, it was saying that we are only saved, when we are in Christ. If I am cut off from Christ, my salvation is gone...

And there's a similar theme in John 15. Jesus said:

⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me (do you know what that word "abide" means? Whoever remains in me; Whoever stays in me; Whoever perseveres in me) **and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.** (and here's the warning) **⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.**

How secure does that make you feel? If somebody doesn't persevere in their faith in Jesus Christ, do you think that's saying "they're going to be secure"???? How can this be anything other than an image of judgment.

While we're in John, let's go to the most well-known verse
John 3:16

16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

In the Greek, the word "believes", is in the present tense: that whoever is believing in Him, will not perish but have eternal life... What does that say about those who are no longer believing in Him?

In Jude, we are told that God is able to keep usⁱⁱ... But we're also told to **keep ourselves** in the love of Godⁱⁱⁱ...

In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus tells us about those who believe and endure for a little while, but then they fall away...

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul talks about the Christian life in terms of "running the race":

26 So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. 27 But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

What does it mean to be disqualified? It means you're out of the race – you don't win a prize. What's the prize? Eternal life...

Colossians 1:23 Gives us a promise of our worthiness before God, **if you continue** in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.

In Hebrews 9, it tells us that the second coming of Jesus, is not to deal with sin, but **to save those who are eagerly waiting for him**. It doesn't say anything about those who once believed in Him, and now don't want to have anything to do with Him.

Now, there's 2 common ways that the OSAS camp will usually explain all of these verses:

1. The first, is to say "The Bible isn't warning us about losing salvation – it's warning us about the possibility of losing our reward."
2. And the second explanation that gets used, is that the bible is talking about people who were never saved in the first place.

And that all seems to be a very **neat** way of wrapping it all up... That is until you start to look at it more in depth. How would they explain this one:

James 5:19–20 (ESV)

¹⁹ My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, ²⁰ let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his

wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Alright, so he addresses them as brothers – that means they're Christians. And he says **if anyone among you wanders from the truth**, alright, so this is if a **Christian** goes astray in their faith (so we can't say they were never saved in the first place). And if you bring this person back to faith again, you **save his soul from death** It's not his reward that's at risk – he's talking about saving his soul from death... Meaning? If somebody wanders from the faith, and they're not brought back, they don't get eternal life – they're damned to death.

And likewise, how about this one:

2 Peter 2:²⁰ If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. ²¹ It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on (it).

This is very clearly talking about somebody who has become a Christian. **they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ** ... Alright, so they are saved, but then they go back

to the ways of the world... And they turn their backs on Jesus... Then they're worse off than when they first began.

This is very clearly not talking about losing some kind of reward – it's talking about losing salvation. If the one who turned his back on Jesus continued to be saved, he wouldn't be worse off than before he was saved, would he?

As I look at the Scriptures, I cannot see anything else, other than them stacking up against the belief of OSAS. Our relationship with Jesus Christ needs to be continuous and nurtured.

OK. So if there's no such thing as "Once saved, always saved", so what? What's it mean for us?

Well it affects us on 2 planes. The first is our own salvation. It is so very important that we keep on in the faith. And your story may be like the story that I began this message with. You may of, at one stage given your life to God, and then you haven't thought much about it since. Be warned. God's message for you today is "Endure" "Return to your first love" "Get real with God again". Faith isn't like an insurance policy you buy once and then you have it. Faith is something which has to be lived day by day, and we're being saved day by day, right through until our Lord returns.

The second plane it affects us on, is how we relate to others. What measure do we put in to encouraging our brothers and sisters in Christ, to persevere? And how diligent are we in chasing up those who **once** used to worship, but now seem to have fallen away?

This isn't just the job of the minister. And we don't just chase people up, so we can maintain a few numbers in church. If we love our brothers and sisters in Christ, we'll be concerned for them, and we will want to make sure that their salvation is **not** at risk.

You see, this is a journey that we're **all** on. And at some time or other we **all** need encouragement. And if you're concerned about the eternal wellbeing of your brother or sister, then it's an absolute necessity for you to become involved in their journey, and to watch out for them, and to speak the truth to them in love.

God is so good. He doesn't want any of His children to be lost. Jesus Christ prays for each of us. The Holy Spirit dwells inside of us. But ultimately, **we** either choose to be faithful or unfaithful.

So let's continue in the faith, and encourage one another to continue in faith.

Questions?

ⁱ http://www.anointedlinks.com/once_saved.html

ⁱⁱ Jude 24

ⁱⁱⁱ Jude 21