



Can A Christian Lose
His Salvation?

Assurance Assured

A Monograph

by
D.D. Edwards

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Prologue

It has been my experience with fellow believers when seriously discussing important doctrinal, but perhaps *non-essentials* that sooner or later someone says something like “It’s a *non-essential*, it’s not a big deal and we don’t want to be divisive.” So unity becomes more important than truth. I personally don’t believe truth should be subordinate to wrong headed thinking.

Now I am not saying we should be divisive, especially on non- essentials, but I am not talking about picking the color of the new carpet. The Bible tells us to admonish one another (Acts 20:30-32; Romans 15:14); we need to do that, especially in this day and age of rampant exegetical error of the Holy Scriptures. It’s kind of like shooting a rifle. If your sights are off $\frac{1}{16}$ ”, then 100 yards down range you miss your target by 10 feet.

While most Evangelicals I know accept the doctrine that *they* can have assurance of their salvation. I have found it true in my life that there are the low times, when I have stumbled and I am weak or depressed due to sin in my life or circumstances I can’t control, that I do question my salvation. I think there is scriptural basis for this. Recall the story of Elijah in 1 Kings. He makes a fool out of the prophets of Baal and calls down fire from God to consume the alter, the water-soaked sacrifice and the rocks and then in the next instant he is trembling in his boots and hiding from Jezebel (1 Kings 18:17-19:3). We all have our *down* times and it is at these times of weakness or despair the questions come. Am I really saved? How can I sin like that if I am. Can I lose my salvation? Make no mistake; these questions come from Satan. (1 Peter 5:8)

I think it is critical that we be Biblically anchored in what we believe doctrinally, even in certain “non-essentials”, so when Satan challenges us and waves of doubt break over us; our faith, our witness and ministry are not capsized.

In Sperry’s book *Major Bible Themes*, he says, “While believers in Christ accept the doctrine that they can have assurance at any given moment in their experience, the question is often raise, ‘Can a person once saved, become lost again?’ Since the fear of losing salvation could seriously affect a believer’s peace of mind, and because his future is so vital, this question is a most important aspect of the doctrine of salvation.”¹ As well as, I might add, his sense of spiritual communion with God.

Why am I doing this study? I was involved in a Bible study at my church, a friend and a brother in Christ stated that he believed that a Christian *could* lose their salvation. He didn’t say it that directly, but as soon as his statement hit me, I did a mental double take. He went on speaking, but I interrupted him “Wait a minute”, I said, “Are you saying you believe we can lose our salvation?” “Yes” he stated I think we can lose our salvation.” I challenged this statement by quoting Jesus’ statement from John 10 where Jesus says “no one will snatch them out of My hand.” My friend’s response was, “Yes no one can snatch us out of His hand, but *we can leap out of His hand.*”

The Underlying Problem

I am doing this study as an argument to show that it is in fact *impossible* to lose your salvation. The question then becomes, can we, in fact “*choose to leap* out of God's hand, as my friend stated? This is the question that this study will attempt to deal with. But it does not matter what Don Edwards says; what matters is what the Bible say?

It is my firm belief that the *non-essentials* so many Christians do not want to take a stand on in the name of unity, often have a big bearing on the richness, fullness and effectiveness of our lives, ministry and witness as Christians.

I was raised Presbyterian; my wife Betty, a Lutheran. Both congregations historically practice infant baptism. I do not believe it was a biblical practice 50 years ago, nor is it today. In fact, I believe it is a more dangerous practice today. Why? Fifty years ago the Judeo-Christian foundation, while crumbling, was still in tact. Postmodernism was not as prevalent in the U.S. or the church to the extent that it is today. Today people have a less of a grounding and understanding in scripture than in past decades.

Baptism, is a *non-essential* for salvation (Luke 23: 42-44), and saves no one by itself. Yet it is taught, overtly in some churches; covertly in many, that *baptism* conveys salvation all by itself or is needed in addition to Christ's atoning death. Infant baptism, in itself, is not a big deal. It is arguably not biblically based and is *not* ever described in the Bible, let alone prescribed.

The larger issue I see here with infant baptism is that it is too often done in a way that tacitly, if not explicitly sends a subtle or not so subtle message, that the baby being baptized *is saved* and is now a *Christian*. This is **totally opposed** to what God's Word teaches!

Too many people today are cultural christians (small “c”) at best and go to church only rarely. One time might be the baptism of their child or that of a relative or friend, and of course weddings and *maybe* Christmas and/or Easter. What they witness at church usually only enforces their erroneous views of Christianity and their own relationship, or lack of relationship to Jesus Christ. Following are some concerns that stem from this and from my own experience and observations.

1. The baptized child is brought up believing that because this he or she was baptized as a baby, he is automatically a Christian, even though there was no act of the will on his part and no conscious effort to choose or reject Jesus Christ. (John 3: 5-7)
2. The parents of the baby often believe he or she is now a “Christian” and is now protected with this “fire insurance policy” is destined to go to heaven no matter how he or she lives their lives.
3. Then there is *Confirmation Classes*, but in many cases confirmation is just a *rubber stamp* and *re-affirmation* of the existing lie that the child is saved.
4. Lastly at the root of it all is the lack of the Church to disciple its flock. When Jesus directed the Church to *make disciples* in Matthew 28: 19 it was *not* a suggestion—it was; it *is* a command!

Proof is that if you go into a majority of churches today on any given Sunday morning no one even carries their Bibles. When they do “study” the Bible many, so-called evangelicals,

come to the Bible with their presuppositions firmly entrenched and wrench from the scripture what they wanted it to say.

A.W. Tozer posited this in his *The Knowledge of the Holy* written over 60 years ago:

The church has surrendered her once lofty concept of God and has substituted for it one so low, so ignoble, as to be utterly unworthy of thinking, worshipping men. The low view of God entertained almost universally among Christians is *the cause of a hundred lesser evils everywhere among us* [emphasis mine]...no people has ever risen above its religion, and man's spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God. *Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God.*"²

I believe Tozer is profoundly right and his admonishment is one we should not take lightly.

If you doubt what I say look what the Barna Research Group said in a poll from September, 2000, "The United States has so many unchurched people that the nation has become one of the primary mission targets of *Christians who live in other countries* around the world." [Emphasis mine]

Salvation Gained

First I think we must ask...*how does man gain salvation* as taught by the Bible. How exactly does that happen; what does the Bible say?

The Bible says,

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works..." *Eph 2: 8-9a.*

The Bible says,

"⁹ that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; ¹⁰ for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. ¹³ for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."

Romans 10:9-10, 13

The Bible says,

"²³For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." *Romans 6:23*³ Period!

If God's gift of *eternal life* and man's *true road to heaven* is *by and through* the love of Christ, by **confessing our sins verbally** and **believing** in our hearts **truly** that Jesus Christ was crucified, died and was buried and bodily rose from the grave...then this gift comes by grace through faith and **not** by works.

Only God's unmerited favor through Jesus' death on the cross brings true salvation and eternal life with God. Therefore, can we lose this *gift* by works or by our actions? To do so would make a mockery of Jesus atonement. So we see in the verse above God's Word teaches that we cannot lose our salvation by works anymore than we can gain our salvation by works. Salvation is by grace; *through faith in Christ alone*--period.

Below is John 10:27-30, the verse I quoted in part to my friend, only in full context.

²⁷ "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;

²⁸ and I give eternal life to them, 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.*

³⁰ " I and the Father are one" (emphasis mine).

To interpret these verses in context when Jesus says *my sheep hear my voice*, he is talking about those that believe in Him; His followers. Then Jesus promises three things to his followers- 1. I give them eternal life; 2. They will never perish; 3. No one will snatch them out of my hand. *No one will snatch them out of my hand!*

Why is it no one can snatch them or to personalize it; why is it no one can snatch us out of Jesus' hand. In verses 29 and 30 we see that, "*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.*" [emphasis mine]

Now take note of the way John phrased these verses. He uses the phrase "snatch them out of my hand" twice. Why does he do that? Why not just use that in reference to Jesus; or to just God the Father? He repeats the same phrase twice, once in reference to Jesus and once in reference to the Father. Why didn't he just say *no one is able to snatch them out of God's hand?* John even says here in verse 30 that Jesus and God are the same, so why repeat it?

I believe it is for emphasis. We know that God is not a temporal being; therefore he doesn't have an actual hand. Jesus tells us you cannot be snatched out of my hand and God the Father say's you cannot be snatched out of my hand. So the hand of Jesus *and* the hand of God the Father guard us. Of course again, this is figurative language, but the Father and Jesus make up two-thirds of the Trinity and they are two different persons in the Trinity. What a bargain; two "hands" for the price of one salvation!

Verse 30 tells us in a direct way that Jesus is God. *I and the Father are one.* Did you get that? **I and the Father are one! I AND THE FATHER ARE ONE!!** And God is GREATER than anything, anybody, and any force. Therefore, if we think we can *leap* out of God's hand that means only one of two things:

1. We are more powerful than an Omnipotent, Infinite God, which means *we*, in fact, must be a God. Hello, is this Shirley McLaine? How scary is that?

Or...

2. If we are more powerful than God then obviously God cannot really be God. God must be so weak, so feeble he can't really save anyone anyway! What part of the Bible *can* we believe; the Bible is a book of myths and fairy tales. That also makes God a liar! Our faith is now worthless. *Hello, Jesus Seminar? Hello, Rabbi Kushner!*

If, as my friend suggests, we can *leap, run, or walk* out of God's hand, an *action we choose* to do and *by an act of our will and our works*; then that means the gift we received by faith through grace we have now rejected by works. Jesus agonizing death on the cross was pointless and the power of The Resurrection, if there was a resurrection, is nonexistent! The saving work that God ordained in Scripture was not consummated.

If you take the premise we can leap out of God's hands to its logical conclusion then, we are in the wretched state expressed by Paul,

¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁴ and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.

¹⁵ Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.
¹⁷... if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.
¹⁹If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.” (I Cor. 15 17,19)

Returning to John 10:28 Jesus plainly says, “I give **eternal** [forever] life to them and they will **never** [there is no way and nothing, NO-thing that can cause them to] perish”. In verse 29 He declares, “My Father...is **greater than all, GREATER THAN ALL**. God is the only infinitely existent, necessary, non-created being and no one [no person, no woman, no man, not ourselves] is able to snatch them out of my Father’s hand.”

...if we can leap out of God’s hand...an action we choose...then the gift we received by faith, through grace we have now rejected by works.

It is sheer and utter hubris to believe we are stronger or greater than God. It is nothing less than the idolatry of the garden “Sin has many manifestations, but its essence is one. A moral being, created to worship before the throne of God, sits on the throne of his own selfhood and from that elevated position declares, ‘I AM.’ That is sin in its concentrated essence; yet because it is natural it appears to be good.”⁴

God is outside of time. Therefore, His “hand” is also outside of time. We live inside of the time, space continuum, where there is a past, present and future; yesterday’s sins, today’s sins and tomorrow’s sins. God is in *the eternal present* outside of time. Our minds are temporal and think sequentially. It is difficult for us to comprehend this.

God’s Nature

Bocchino and Geisler, co-authored *Unshakable Foundations*, a book I highly recommend. They write, “...we must consider the kind of Being God is (His divine nature) and the kind of beings we are (our human nature).” ...since God exists outside of time [He is an eternal Being] and we exist in time [we are temporal beings], our sins have eternal consequences even though they are committed in time. From God’s perspective **He has had our sins before Him through all eternity** [emphasis mine].”⁵

“...from God’s perspective our sins have always existed, there needs to be an atonement (payment) that also extends into eternity... from God’s perspective evil and all injustices have been dealt with—from eternity.”

Think about that for a moment; let it sink in. *Every sin we will ever commit has been before God since before time.* So when I sin again in 5 minutes, that is not news to God, He has already *seen* that sin and the next sin I am getting ready to commit. To me this makes perfect sense, especially in the context of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross; which, the Bible says, paid the debt for *all my sins*, for all time and for yours too.

So if God has had our sins before him, eternally; then it has to be the case that he has had *sinner*s (which is every person ever created, *you and me*) before Him eternally. We have all sinned. Consequently all the sinners that have repented of their sins and have accepted Christ as Savior and all the sinners that rejected Christ as Savior-*all* have been before God through all eternity. We were not physically created, nor did we exist; but God *knew* us. The Bible tells us God knows the beginning from the end. David tells us in Psalm 139:15-16, “...*I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.*”⁶ I hope this makes some sense, because I think this is an important key to really understanding whom God is and our

relationship with Him. When we understand that better, then our assurance of our salvation becomes more certain to us.

Geisler/Bocchino continue, "...from God's perspective our sins have always existed, there needs to be an atonement (payment) that also extends into eternity. If Jesus was...God in the flesh—then His atoning work on the cross must also extend into eternity. ...since Jesus has two natures, His divine nature *exists in eternity* [emphasis mine] and acts as a shield protecting us against the consequence of our sins before God from all eternity.... For that reason, the Bible says Jesus was 'slain from the creation of the world' (Rev. 13:8). This means that from God's perspective evil and all injustices have been dealt with—from eternity. For us, however, since we are creatures of time, we have yet to see the end and how God set things right."⁷

The so called, "leap out of his hand" can not be possible for the true believer, in light of this, because **that hand is eternal** and that hand is the hand of Almighty God. "God has all of temporal time in view in one '*eternal present state*'; He acts in time from eternity. Our actions, however, are performed in time, are eternally before Him—to think otherwise is to think incorrectly about the nature and consequence of sin."⁸

**God dwells in eternity,
but time dwells in God.**

Did you get that? God acts in time from eternity! Our lives are lived *in time*, but **are eternally before Him** in one eternal present. God knew us before the foundations of the world. "God dwells in eternity, but time dwells in God. He has already lived all our tomorrows as He has lived all our yesterdays."⁹

Arminianism and Calvinism~Two Views of Security of Salvation

The claim that one who is once saved may be lost again is based on certain biblical passages which seem to raise questions concerning continuance of salvation."¹⁰ There are two basic opposing views of a Christian's *security of salvation*. The *Arminian* and the *Calvinist* view. There is about "eighty-five passages listed by those holding the Arminian view. . . ." ¹¹ However I don't mean to imply that the sheer number of passages lends credence to their validity.

Simply stated for purposes of this discussion, Calvinism is the view that supports the view of eternal security and Arminianism, which supports the view one can lose their salvation. These two views are further delineated by the *strong or extreme Calvinist* on one end and on the other end of the spectrum is *extreme Arminianism*.

Many who oppose the doctrine of eternal security do so on the ground that it is possible for a person to have intellectual faith without actually being saved. Have I really received Jesus Christ by faith as my personal Savior? Until this question is honestly faced, there can...be no ground for eternal security and no real assurance of salvation. Many who deny eternal security are merely saying that superficial faith is not enough to save."¹² It is true that only God knows our hearts (1 John 3: 20) and only he knows who is truly sincere and who is not. While salvation is the most important and critical question for any person, for the purposes of this discussion we will *assume* salvation and concentrate on our original, primary question of *eternal security; Can a Christian lose his salvation?*

The eternal security of the believer rests upon the understanding the nature of salvation. It is the work of God, not a work of man. It rests on the [infinite] power and the faithfulness of God not on the [finite, weak] strength and faithfulness of man. If salvation were by works or if salvation were a reward for faith as a good work, it is understandable how man's security might be in question."¹³

A couple of things can happen to a Christian, because of sin. The first is that we “lose” our fellowship with God. The Holy Spirit is grieved and we may not enjoy the fruits of the spirit or the blessings of effectively serving God. The second is that God will discipline us, even to the point of death (1 John 5:16). Tough love to be sure, but neither of these are evidence of a loss of salvation, but rather God burning away the dross in our lives; purifying us for an eternity with Him.

The Arminian (Wesleyan) view believe that “God knows in advance (by His omniscience) just what choices everyone will make, whether to accept or reject salvation...election is conditioned on foreseen faith.... ..on the basis of their foreknown free choice to accept Christ, God chooses (elects) to save them.”¹⁴ At first read that seems to be right. But the bible must be our “plumb line” for measuring doctrine.

God didn’t just *know* what would happen. “It appears that God actually *determined* what would happen and that He even assures its accomplishment by effectively working to bring it about. If God’s choice to save was *based on* those who choose Him, then it would not be based on divine grace, but based on human decisions.”¹⁵ This is solid Bible based teaching. John 15:16 tells us, “*You did not choose me, but I chose you.*”

Salvation can never originate from man and his will. That is the error made by every cult and world religion except Christianity; man reaching up to God to save himself. Christianity alone believes God had to and did reach down to man to save him through Jesus Christ. “...it does not depend on human desire or exertion,³¹ but on God who shows mercy.” Romans 9:16¹⁶

Interpretation

In their book, *Major Bible Themes*, Chafer and Walvoord write, “Many passages quoted in support of the insecurity of believers are in the form of warnings against superficial belief in Christ. A true believer because of his waywardness may be chastened or disciplined just as a child is disciplined...even to the point of taking away his physical life. This chastening, however is not an evidence of lack of salvation but...evidence he is child of God who is being dealt with by his heavenly Father.”¹⁷

Hebrews 6:4-6 is also is often quoted to support the position that a person once saved, can lose their salvation. Let’s look at this difficult verse and see if we can cast some light on it.

⁴ 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.

Who is this verse written to? Is it not written to Christians? It sure seems to be; the recipients are called *partakers of the Holy Spirit* (vs4). But it also says if believers “fall away” *it will be impossible to renew them*. Yet didn’t John 10 above just say that it is impossible to *fall away*. So what is going on here?

Tom Howe addresses Hebrews 6:4-6 verse in his book *When Critics Ask*. Dr. Howe tells us there are two basic interpretations. Some say these verses are addressing believers, others say they are not. Dr. Howe writes:

There are several problems with taking this to refer to nonbelievers... First, the passage declares emphatically that ‘it is impossible...to renew them again to repentance’. But few Arminians believe that once a person has

backslidden it is impossible for him to be saved again. Further...some of the passages are very difficult to take any other way than that the person was saved.” For example, (1) those spoken of had experienced “repentance”, which is the condition of salvation; (2) they were “enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift”; (3) they were partakers of the Holy Spirit; (4) “... they had tasted the good word of God”; and (5)... “the powers of the age to come.”¹⁸

So to summarize this Hebrew passage, these people plainly had...

1. repented
2. been enlightened (by the work of the Holy Spirit)
3. tasted the heavenly gift
4. been made partakers of the Holy Spirit
5. tasted the good word of God and
6. the powers of the age to come

They sure sound like believers to me!

Howe goes on to say,

The Arminians often argue that these people actually lost their salvation. ...the text seems to indicate that they cannot be saved again, *something even most Arminians reject [emphasis mine]*. ...those who hold a Calvinistic point of view (such as the authors) point to several facts. First the word for “fall away” (*parapesontas*) does not indicate a one-way action. Rather it is the word for “drift” indicating that the status of the individuals is not hopeless. Second, the fact that it is “impossible” for them to repent again indicates the once-for-all nature of repentance. In other words, they don’t need to repent again since they did it once and that is all that is necessary for “eternal redemption”. Third, the text seem to indicate that there is no more need for “drifters” ...to repent again...any more than there is [a need] for Christ to die again on the cross. Finally the writer of Hebrews calls those he is warning ‘beloved,’ hardly a term appropriate for unbelievers.¹⁹

Howe’s closing words on the subject in *When Critics Ask* states, “In any event, there is no problem here with the *inspiration* of Scripture [but]...the *interpretation* of Scripture among Christians who share...the belief that the Bible is the inspired Word of God in whatever it affirms.”²⁰

If God is infinite and, eternal, then He is independent. If He is not dependent on anything in His Creation, then He must be a simple Being (He has no parts, He is indivisible) therefore

. . . whatever He “has” He is. His attributes are identical to His essence or nature. So if God *has* knowledge, then He *is* knowledge. God's knowledge is independent of anything outside Himself. But if it is totally independent, then God's knowledge cannot be dependent on our free choices. The whole idea of there being a chronological or even logical sequence in God's thoughts is highly problematic for evangelical theology. *...God's attention does not pass from thought to thought, for His knowledge embraces everything in a single spiritual co-intuition [emphasis mine]*. If God is limited [in any way], then He is subject to disorder and to entropy (that is, He is running out of usable energy). Thus God will ultimately be exhausted.²¹

If this is true, then you might just as well jump on the hell bound express of Nietzsche and Darwin. Praise God this is not, and cannot be true of our God, the God of the Bible, of all creation.

Conclusion

Our assurance is not one of the paradoxical or “mysterious” areas of scripture, but is an area that God wants us to be sure of or assured of. However “God’s predestination and human free choice are a mystery, but not a contradiction. They go beyond reason, but not against reason, they are not incongruous, but neither can we see how they are complementary.”²²

Early on I said the most striking thing to me in doing this study is the realization that **all of our sins are before God and have been since the before time**. I knew God lived outside of time, but this crystallizes this in my mind. It has further reinforced for me that there is NO WAY I can be lost because I am His.

Philippians’1:6 tells us “that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.” “It may be concluded...that the eternal purpose of God which is for the preservation of His own can **never** [emphasis mine] be defeated.”²³

I will close with a Greek Hymn and a prayer that it might a creed we should strive for each day.

*My God, shall sin its power maintain, And in my soul defiant live!
 'Tis not enough that Thou forgive, The cross must rise and self be slain.
 O God of love, Thy power disclose: 'Tis not enough that Christ should rise,
 I, too, must seek the brightening skies, And rise from death, Christ arose.*²⁴

END

References

- ¹ Chafer-Walvoord, *Major Bible Themes*, 220.
- ² Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, vii.
- ³ All Scripture quoted is from the NASB, unless other wise noted.
- ⁴ Tozer, 46.
- ⁵ Geisler-Bocchino, *Unshakable Foundations*, 364,365.
- ⁶ *New International Version bible*
- ⁷ Geisler-Bocchino, 366.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 365.
- ⁹ Tozer, 62.
- ¹⁰ Chafer-Walvoord, 220.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 221.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 228.
- ¹⁴ Norman Geisler, *Chosen But Free*, 50.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ Biblical Studies Press, © 1996-2003 Biblical Studies Press, *The New English Translation Bible (NET)*
- ¹⁷ Chafer-Walvoord, 222-223.
- ¹⁸ Thomas Howe, Norman Geisler, *When Critics Ask*, 514.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 515.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*
- ²¹ Geisler, *CBF*, 52.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 54.
- ²³ Chafer-Walvoord, 228
- ²³ Author unknown

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