

Sovereignty And 'Once Saved Always Saved'

Are We Guaranteed to Make It?

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This world's Christianity has a doctrine referred to as "Once Saved, Always Saved." In broad terms this doctrine teaches that once a person has accepted Jesus Christ as Savior, his salvation is secured on the basis that it is impossible for the Sovereign Almighty God to fail in what He sets His hand to do. After all, is there not a scripture in Philippians 2:11-12 that says, "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, ... and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord"? Does the reference to bowing and confessing imply that every person is submissive and saved?

There is another scripture in II Peter 3:9 that says "God is not willing that any should perish." Does this verse indicate that because God is not willing, that He will impose **His** will on all, and thus all will be saved?

There are other scriptures that can be put to this use, and a case can be built that makes it look as though these people **have** a doctrine—indeed that "*once one is saved, one is always saved.*" [The method of thinking maintains] that once one **truly** is saved, he is saved forever and ever.

I think this question must be asked: If it is possible for a person to fail to make it into God's kingdom, is it God who has failed? Another thing to consider is that this doctrine generally operates on the basis that all God wants to do is **save** people, and that there are no other overriding issues to His purpose. For example, those who believe in this doctrine do not see the ongoing nature of God's creation; i.e., that creation did not end in Genesis 2; rather the creation of Adam and Eve only set the stage for far more creative activity in the spiritual realm. Therefore neither do they fully understand the importance and proper use of free moral agency, of meeting our responsibilities to God and man, and the very necessary aspects of His mercy, love, and justice in the governance of His creation.

Would it be merciful love to allow a miserable rebel to continue in his misery, causing problems for everybody whose life he touches, for ever and ever, putting everybody into misery?

I thought in light of the many sermons I have given touching on God's sovereignty, and the fact that this day [the Feast of Trumpets] memorializes the return of Jesus Christ and the completed work of God in the life of those called, that it would be helpful to

Sovereignty and 'Once Saved Always Saved' by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>) touch on this issue of the certainty of salvation.

I didn't realize it until I was preparing this sermon, but it too fits into the main theme of last week's sermon. One of the themes in last week's sermon was: "*Yes, young people, you can lose your sanctification.*"

In like manner, this sermon asserts that **we** can lose **our** sanctification. I am giving this sermon to prove to you that we **can** lose our salvation. I am giving this sermon to prove to you that if we do not bring forth fruit that is fitting for repentance, if we do not bring forth much fruit and give God pleasure in our growth and overcoming, we will be in the lake of fire.

That may not be pleasant to think about, but as we heard this morning, there are good aspects to this day, and there are bad aspects to this day. In an overall sense I am giving this sermon in order that we might be able to **avoid** the bad aspects that might fall upon us because we didn't fully prepare for what God clearly says is going to occur.

Let's reason together. We're going to begin in Revelation 20:10. I think that first of all, as we begin, we need to consider this question: If everybody is going to make it, why even have a lake of fire?

Revelation 20:10 And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are, [or *are cast*, as it really should read, because they were cast into this thing a thousand years before] ...and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

In one sense that ought to be the end of the sermon, because already we see that at least two people are cast into the lake of fire. As we continue, I want you to turn back to the Old Testament to Numbers 23:19 where a succinct and very meaningful statement is made.

Numbers 23:19 God is not a man that he should lie; neither the son of man that he should repent: has he said, and shall he not do it? Or has he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

Brethren, there are **no** extraneous thoughts in the Bible. The Bible was written, by inspiration of God, with an economy of words, and every word was very carefully weighed before it became part of His book. God does not tell tales out of school, nor

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does He needlessly threaten. If He threatens it is because there is a candid and straight-forward reason for Him doing it. There is going to be a lake of fire in which the evil and rebellious are going to be cast.

God is immutable, meaning that His character is unchangeable. In this case, regarding His warning of a lake of fire to be used to consume the disobedient, it is not a hollow and empty threat used merely to intimidate and give Him pleasure in seeing His creation squirm. He says what He means, and He means what He says. "Has He said, and shall He not do it?" "Or has He spoken, and shall He not make it good?"

In regard to this doctrine of "Once Saved, Always Saved," I think that you can begin to see, that as Satan did with Adam and Eve, Satan is lying about God's word. From the very beginning he has been a slanderer. A slanderer is one who destroys through malicious words. Satan twists by saying or implying that God says *this*, but He really means *that*. God said to Adam and Eve, "In the day that you eat thereof, you shall surely die." Satan said, "Ha! You shall not die," implying that God really didn't mean it. The same pattern is followed regarding this doctrine.

God says that if we do not measure up to what He expects of His children, we **will** be cast into a lake of fire. Satan says, "If you believe in Jesus Christ, that is all it takes, and you will be in His kingdom." In so doing, Satan can effectively destroy the production of works by blurring the necessary incentive to overcoming human nature's self-centeredness. The necessary incentive, in this case, is at least some measure of fear of being thrown [into the lake of fire], of not measuring up. In addition to that, what I think may be far more serious is that he destroys faith and trust in God's word, and salvation is by grace **through** faith.

As we continue this sermon, we're going to consider as a primary witness (example): Israel's wilderness experiences. We have long used this as a pattern we can safely follow to learn lessons important to *our* pilgrimage. God gave them human leaders—men like Moses and Aaron, Joshua and Caleb. He broke the grip on Egypt, which is a symbol of sin. He parted the Red Sea, killed off their enemy, and He safely got them across into the wilderness.

From that point on, unfortunately, it was all down hill for a very large number of them even though He faithfully provided for them every day for the entire way to the promised land. But the entire first generation of those above twenty, so liberated by Him, perished, except for Joshua and Caleb and their families. Pay attention, because everyone in that first generation—male and female—had already made the covenant with God at Mount Sinai, and *they didn't make it* into the Promised Land, which is a type

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of the Kingdom of God. That ought to give all of us pause for sober reflection on what we are doing with our lives. This morning, in the closing prayer, Bill asked that we be able to work in order that we be prepared for His kingdom. These people did not do it. They fought God the whole way.

Let's go back to Exodus 6, because there is something additional to learn here that is sobering to thing about.

Exodus 6:5-8 And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I have remembered my covenant. Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the **LOORD**, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments: And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and you shall know that I am the **LOORD** your God which brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you in unto the land concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the **LOORD**.

I want us all to notice that God **solemnly** promised to do all these things, culminating in Him giving them the land, bringing them to it. Put into other words, God **predestined** them to make it, and **they didn't make it**, even though He solemnly promised to do so.

The record is given throughout the Bible, but most extensively in Exodus and Numbers, and a little bit in Deuteronomy—God didn't fail. **Israel** failed! I will read you just briefly a verse in Romans 8:3. Paul said, "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh." The weakness in this whole operation was not God. The weakness was in Israel.

By the time Israel got into the period covered by the book of Numbers, they reached a very critical event in Israel's journey. It was here, following on the heels of Joshua, Caleb, and ten other men going in to spy out the Promised Land and to report back to the people the kind of land it was and the kind of people that were there, that ten of the men came back with an evil report. Only two of those who spied out the land felt that with God's help they were up to taking over the land. And so we find that Israel refused to go into the land on the basis of those ten men they agreed with who failed God. By the time we get to Numbers 14:22, God had had it up to here with the Israelites.

Numbers 14:22-23 Because all those men which have seen my glory and

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my miracles which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice; surely they shall not see the land which I sware unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it.

Numbers 14:27-34 How long shall I bear with this evil congregation which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me. Say unto them, As truly as I live, says the LOORD, as you have spoken in my ears, so will I do to you: Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me, doubtless you shall not come into the land, concerning which I **sware** to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. But your little ones, which you said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. But as for you, your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness. And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness. After the number of the days in which you searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall you bear your iniquities even forty years, and you shall know my breach of promise.

God went back on His word. Now how could He do this? We shall continue to see why He could do it. Don't forget that I am going through this in order to help you understand that even as He has likewise promised to bring us into the Kingdom of God, it is not unconditional.

Numbers 14:35 I the LOORD have said, I will surely do it unto all this evil congregation that are gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.

Why didn't they make it? As a people, Israel tempted God ten times. God specifically mentions complaining, murmuring against His provision for them, and He outright called them *evil*. Now to tempt is to provoke or entice Him to do something wrong. But there is strong basis and just cause for God's judgment of them, because no sin stands alone. Murmuring is not a simple stand-by-itself sin, especially in regarding that the murmuring is against God. I want you again to consider that Israel entered into a covenant with God shortly after leaving Egypt. Let's go back to Exodus 19 and review that, and then in a

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little bit we'll get back to this murmuring again.

Exodus 19:4-8 You have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then you shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine. And you shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak unto the children of Israel. And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LOORD commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LOORD has spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LOORD.

Here, in these brief four or five verses, the covenant is stripped bare of everything except its most essential parts. Those most essential parts are that God would be their God, and that He would provide for them. That appears in verse 4. Those are examples of how He provided. He would be their God, and He would provide for them, as He had already demonstrated that He could do in bringing them out of Egypt.

Very briefly, Israel's part was to obey Him. More specific terms are spelled out beginning in Exodus 20:1 and going all the way through Exodus 21, 22, into chapter 24 and up to verse 8. So in Exodus 20 through Exodus 24:8 are the specific terms of the agreement between the two.

A covenant is an agreement. It is a contract binding both parties to its conditions, or its terms. If one party does not hold up its end of the deal, the other party is not obligated to follow through on its part because of fraud. The other party in this agreement happened to be the holy, sinless, perfect-in-character Creator God.

Now parties entering into a contract do so in order that the partnership created by the agreement will be mutually beneficial. Contracts have clearly-stated terms, and each party agrees to fulfill those terms. Israel did not come anywhere *close* to fulfilling the terms of this agreement. Ten times they rejected Him, provoked Him. God was justified in His judgment of them.

The reason God specifically mentioned murmuring is because murmuring also involves presumption. This is bad. The complainer against God presumptuously regards his view as to how things ought to be as superior to the holy, sinless, perfect-in-character God, as if God is unaware what is going on in His family. Murmuring against God is

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presumption. God plainly says in Numbers 15 that this will not be forgiven. In one sense you could almost say that Israel committed the *unpardonable sin* in their complaining because of the presumption that is in it. That's how serious it is.

Secondly, murmuring involves ingratitude. It deprecates blessings received, and any inconvenience is exaggerated. Ingratitude easily forgets past kindnesses. That person is always operating on the idea, the approach, the concept of "What have you done for me lately?" Murmurers think that everything done by themselves is too much, as if they're being put upon, and that they should not be required to do this. The other side of that coin is everything done for them is too little, that it's never enough. Finally, murmuring is *active* antagonism against the holy God.

Let's continue this by going back into the book of Hebrews, chapter 4, verses 1 and 2.

Hebrews 4:1-2 Let us therefore fear lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

It's interesting that the author here says, "any of you should seem to come short of it." There is no doubt at all that he was thinking about the Exodus experience, and especially the experience of the children of Israel in the wilderness. Those who died in the wilderness came short of it. It's another way of saying that if we act like they did, we're not going to be there either.

The point is this: God, without doubt, made the solemn promise. He admitted that. However, Israel entered into the Old Covenant with God, and they did not hold up their end, and thus God was freed from the obligation of His promise. He did not fail. They did. The author here summarizes why they failed.

There are many kinds of sins that were committed in the wilderness similar to the murmuring mentioned in Numbers 14. However, underlying all of them was the breakdown of their trust that God would follow through. The message to you and me who have made the New Covenant with God is that the promise of God is still valid for us. That's the message. However, if we fall short through unbelief as Israel did, then like them, it means that we will not make it. Israel's refusal of God was not just a momentary reaction in one incident, but ten times they tempted Him, showing that their rejection of Him was a continuous stretch of unbelief over the two years up until the time of Numbers 14.

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One of the interesting aspects of the "Once Saved Always Saved" issue is that the "no law" people are essentially saying that God has entered into an agreement with them in which they are held to no terms, except that they believe in Jesus Christ. That gets rid of the rest of the covenant. What a convenience! They are essentially saying that God requires nothing productive of His partners.

Let's go back to those very well-known scriptures in Deuteronomy 30:15. Listen to this carefully in the light of what I have said up to this time.

Deuteronomy 30:15 See, I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil.

Now consider this. This is exactly what He did with Adam and Eve. He said, *"See, I have set before you this garden with all of this being yours except for this over here. As long as you forsake this, you will live. If you choose this one, you will die."* There's nothing hard about that. It's as simple to understand as it could possibly get. He's saying the same thing to you and me. *"See, I have set before you this way which is good and right and which will produce the good things. This other way is death."*

Deuteronomy 30:16-20 In that I command you this day to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that you may live and multiply: and the LORD your God shall bless you in the land whither you go to possess it. But if your heart turn away so that you will not hear, but shall be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day that you shall surely perish, and that you shall not prolong your days upon the land whither you pass over Jordan to go to possess it. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both you and your seed may live: That you may love the LORD your God, and that you may obey his voice, and that you may cleave unto him: for he is your life, and the length of your days: that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore unto your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

God invites us to choose, ...and we can choose death. He exhorts us, and encourages us to make the right choices in life, but we are free to choose death. Do we understand that if we choose death, it legally absolves Him of any blame? He didn't make the choice. We did. We enter into this covenant, which is a legal agreement [stating that]

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God will do this, and we will do that. Our responsibility is to choose life. If we choose not to choose life and instead choose to choose death, then He is not bound by His promise.

We're going to leave that example and we're going to go back into the New Testament to make note of something that Jesus said in Luke 14. This is a different point altogether, but in some ways it involves the same general principles.

Luke 14:25-27 And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever does not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

If all one has to do is believe, why would Jesus warn us that we had better count the cost of salvation to us? Is merely believing something costly? The answer to that is "no" unless one intends to do something about what one believes.

Notice that Jesus mentions family members in this teaching. He is establishing the possibility that if one follows Him, it may cost one a good relationship with those related through blood, and because they are family, a multitude of shared experiences.

We have to consider in counting this cost that other family members may not "come to Christ," and because they don't come to Christ, a separation occurs between you and them. Therefore the number of shared experiences you have with them begins to dwindle, and because you are receiving teaching that they are not receiving, perspectives (the way we look at things) begin to change. Some things become important that were unimportant before, and are still unimportant to them, but have become **very** important to you, and the drifting away becomes wider. There becomes broader areas, and a wider number of places of disagreement.

We're going to go back to a scripture that I mentioned this morning in the sermonette in II Samuel 24:24 to something that David said. I just want to pick the thought out of this.

II Samuel 24:24 And [David] the king said unto Araunah, No; but I will surely buy it of you at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LOORD my God of that which does cost me nothing. So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.

This little principle that is here presents the crux of what Jesus was teaching in that illustration in Luke 14. The way that God has called us is very frequently costly in terms of sacrifice. Jesus charged the young ruler that came to Him in Mark 10 to get rid of his material wealth at the very beginning of their possible relationship. That young ruler could not do it, and the relationship never got off the ground because he was unwilling to make the sacrifice.

One of our problems is that we never know when a major sacrifice is going to hit us and possibly hit us very hard—so hard that the relationship with Him may be destroyed because of our unwillingness to trust God through thick and thin right up to the end. Very, very often, the sacrifice happens between family members in which one is in the church and the other, or others, is not, and then the cost of our conversion might go sky high if we're unwilling to make that sacrifice.

Continuing this thought, we're going to go back to Deuteronomy 13:6.

Deuteronomy 13:6-11 If your brother [a family member], the son of your mother, or your son, or your daughter, or the wife of your bosom, ... [It's really getting close here.] ...or your friend, which is as your own soul, ...[somebody like the kind of relationship that David and Jonathan had] ...entice you [to tempt you to do wrong] secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which you have not known, you, nor your fathers; namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, near unto you, or far off from you, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; you shall not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall your eye pity him, neither shall you spare, neither shall you conceal him: But you shall surely *kill* him; your hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. And you shall stone him with stones, that he die; because he has sought to thrust you away from the LOORD your God which brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you.

Wouldn't this be a difficult test of loyalty? What have we then lost? Is God going to take someone into His kingdom that cannot be trusted to respond in the correct manner? I think not! Think back to that example in Mark 10. The Bible doesn't show Jesus chasing after that rich young ruler, lowering the cost for him to come to Christ. "I don't mean all of it, just half of it." No. That man's god was money. Jesus would have been in violation of this principle had He lowered the cost for that man in order to have his friendship. No

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wonder Jesus was saddened, because, as it says, He loved him.

I am sure that God is going to endeavor to work with us, even as He shows us there with Jonah. How many times did He intervene in Jonah's life, even to the extent of creating a special fish to swallow Jonah and dump him up on the shore, and then to put up with all his griping and grumbling? Even though Jonah did the job, the book leaves off with the story incomplete, and it just makes you wonder what happened to Jonah.

God patiently worked through things with David, who was a man just like we are. He went through it "thick and thin" with David. David is going to be in God's kingdom. God says that He will never leave us nor forsake us, and that promise is good. If there is any forsaking that is going to be done, it's going to be done on our part because, even as it says of the Israelites, "that the law was weak through the flesh." That's where our problems lie as well. There comes a point where God has to accede to our will, because His will not permit anyone not dedicated to His way to be in His kingdom. His justice for all concerned, including the sinning person, demands that He put that person to death in the lake of fire.

Let's look at another place, to another familiar scripture, but we're going to reason together about it.

Matthew 24:12-13 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax [grow] cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

The word "endure" gives me a picture of a long wearying period of intense pressures brought upon by our desire to live this way—please God—combined with world conditions, about which we can do nothing. They happen. They impact upon us, and we have to live through them.

Why would Christ give us a warning like this—that only those who would endure to the end would be saved—if there was not in Him the thought that some, or maybe even many, would lose out on their salvation because they were found to not have the vision, the will, and the loyalty to hang in there despite the pressures? Christianity has never been a cakewalk. We're not walking through Central Park somewhere. We're following a rough road that is getting rougher as the days go by, and more difficult as things (about which we can do nothing and over which we have no control) are impacting on us.

Jesus said His way is difficult. In Matthew He called it *narrow* and difficult, meaning that

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there are times when it is demanding, that the requirements are high, and they must be met in order for us to remain a part of it. One of those times (especially hard times) is right now—the end time. Besides Jesus, the Apostle Paul warned that we were going to go through **perilous** times at the end.

Jesus stipulates here that the times would be perilous because a massive amount of lawlessness would pressure us to cave in and just go along with it. What we need, He says, is endurance to keep one from losing one's way—the way of salvation. Patient burden-bearing endurance is a work created in us through God's gift, but it still remains necessary for us to choose to use it when the long and the hard times arise.

II Peter 1:2-4 Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as his divine power has given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness through the knowledge of him that has called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these you **might** be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

It's interesting that I just noticed here he said "you *might* be partakers of the divine nature."

II Peter 1:5-11 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance [or self-control]; and to self-control, patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacks these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things, you shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

From the beginning to the end the Bible contains a broad stream of exhortations for us to rise above the circumstances we find ourselves in so that we can maintain the course that God has called us to. These exhortations are usually a mixture of facts—advice about what to do and what not to do—and encouragement to do the right. This one is no

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different. This exhortation is urging us to build upon what we begin our course with in order that we do not fall, or stumble, as some translations say.

The first thing to notice here is that this exhortation, this formula, is given for the purpose of assuring *ourselves*. This is important. It's not God that we are attempting to assure. It is ourselves. God does not need to be made sure of our calling. He knows. He did it. We are the ones that are filled with doubts from time to time, and as a result we are not very convicted about what we need to be doing, about what we are, and what our goals ought to be in life. God knows. We are the ones that need to be convicted. This whole exhortation, containing all of these points, is intended—as we progress from one to the other—to make **us** sure that we have been called. It deepens and strengthens our conviction. This is what enables us to endure, to hang on, to not cave in to all the lawlessness that is going on around us.

It is important to our faith that we be assured, because if we're not assured God has really called us, we surely will be immobilized into inaction. I guarantee it. If we don't **think**, if we don't **believe**, if we don't **know** (that we know) that we are the children of God, it's going to be hard for us to do anything, because we are going to be operating on doubt rather than conviction, and we won't grow, we won't endure.

We have to **know** who we are, and that we are a very special people, not better in any way, just special because God has called us and given us this opportunity now. That is why Peter reminds us in this exhortation that if we are lacking in these things, ...(lacking in virtue, which is courage; that if we are not increasing in the knowledge of God, in knowing God; if our self-control is lacking so that we're always giving in; if we are impatient and not longsuffering; if we are not godly in our actions; if we aren't filled with brotherly kindness and loving one another) ...and if these things aren't in us, Peter said that we are not only unfruitful, but we are **blind**. We just don't get it.

We are on a pilgrimage. We are headed toward the Promised Land. Think about this. If we're blind, how much progress are we going to make? How much progress can a blind man make compared to someone who can see? It begins to become so clear the things we need to be able to endure so that we don't fail. Peter is saying that the fruit of this formula is to give us assurance that we're going to be able to stand in the day of trial.

The picture here is that one who is on the ground in battle is easy pickings for the enemy. We have to be on our feet, standing to be able to fight the good fight of faith. That's why the word "stumble" is used. When you're on the ground, your enemy Satan, symbolically, figuratively, has every advantage.

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There is a second picture here too as well, and that is that if you are on the ground, you are not on your feet. Even if you can see a little bit, how much progress are you going to make crawling to the Kingdom of God, rather than on your feet walking and running? These are good lessons in the imagery that is given within God's word.

Just because one stumbles does not mean that one will stay down. It does not mean that God will not stoop to help, but there is always the possibility that the fallen one will resist God's efforts to get one to run, but instead stay down, following one's own desires that still exist. That is why the warning is given here by Peter, who very much wanted everybody to be able to make it into God's kingdom.

I think you can see that the apostles learned a great deal, not only from their own lives and from the teachings of Jesus, but from all the things that are written in the Old Testament. They knew that those people who entered into the agreement with God (who had solemnly promised to take them there) failed. In their case it may not be a permanent failure. You know about the second resurrection, but you see, it's really on the line for you and me. It's not like it was for the Israelites. If we aren't careful, we can make ourselves candidates for the lake of fire, and I don't want to see that happen.

Go now to II Peter 2:3. The subject here is false ministers—people who have turned away from the truth of God.

II Peter 2:3-11 And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you whose judgment now of a long time lingers not, and their damnation slumbers not. For if God spared not the angels that sinned [Think about God's judgment.], but cast them down to hell [*tartaroo*—a place of restraint], and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment: And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an example unto those [us] that after should live ungodly; and delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds): The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished: But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before

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the Lord.

Now whether these people were fellowshiping with the [true] church or not, the issue is always how people are conducting their lives, and what their relationship with God is like. Those two things might be revealed in a number of different ways. What these scriptures are doing is pointing out the *certainty* of God's judgment, and destruction, because of their rejection of Jesus Christ and His way, regardless of whether they were ever converted.

The people described here, for whatever the reason, whatever the circumstances, have made themselves enemies of God, His people, and His kingdom. To whom that is pointed might be a little bit fuzzy. But now I'm going to take you to a place in Hebrews where it is not fuzzy at all. Turn to Hebrews 10:26. The possibility is there that this was written to *many* congregations—the Hebrew people.

Hebrews 10:26-31 For if we [Christians] sin willfully [which brings it into the area of deliberate and *presumptuous* sin] *after* that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins. But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation [meaning the lake of fire] which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment suppose you, shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and has done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that has said, Vengeance belongs unto me, I will recompense, says the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

This is aimed *directly* at the converted, but it too includes the unconverted who have rejected and despised the Son. He even says they are going into the lake of fire. "Once Saved Always Saved?" It is an absolute lie.

I said we were going to get back to the book of Numbers again, to chapter 15, because this is what the author of Hebrews drew upon for what he wrote there. Remember this is the next chapter after what happened in Numbers 14, and so we even need to consider the placement of this statement.

Numbers 15:30-31 But the soul that does ought presumptuously, whether

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he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproaches the LOORD; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the LOORD, and has broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him.

These words—"his iniquity shall be upon him"—means that he cannot be cleaned up. There is no sacrifice for sin for that person. This is directly referred to in Hebrews 10, from what we just turned. There is no forgiveness for deliberate and defiant sin. What is kind of interesting here is that the very next paragraph, beginning in verse 32 and going on to verse 36, appears to be *deliberate and defiant Sabbath breaking* as an example.

Numbers 15:32-36 And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day. And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation. And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him. And the LOORD said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp. And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died: as the LOORD commanded Moses.

Look also at Deuteronomy 17:2-7. This parallels Deuteronomy 13:6. This particular sin we call in the New Testament *apostasy*, and there is no forgiveness for that.

Deuteronomy 17:2-7 If there be found among you, within any of your gates which the LOORD your God gives you, man or woman, that has wrought wickedness in the sight of the LOORD your God, in transgressing his covenant, and has gone and served other gods, and worshipped them, either the sun, or moon, or any of the host of heaven, which I have not commanded; and it be told you, and you have heard of it, and enquired diligently, and, behold, it be true, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought in Israel: Then shall you bring forth that man or that woman, which have committed that wicked thing, unto your gates, even that man or that woman, and shall stone them with stones till they die. At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death. The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So you shall put the evil away from among you.

There are a number of things that we could consider here. Let's just briefly touch on one more. What about predestination? Does that guarantee that we will be in the Kingdom of God? I think you can see already that it doesn't, because it is very clear from the book of Hebrews that those people who were Christians were predestined to be in the Kingdom of God, but they aren't going to be there. That's why that warning is there. Let's go to Ephesians 1:3-5, and we can give a brief explanation here.

Ephesians 1:3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.

There is nothing in this context that absolutely guarantees anything except that we will be called and chosen to become His children in Christ Jesus. We are predestined, and God follows through. This will **absolutely** occur, because it is impossible for God to lie, and so He will do that part. But from then on, another factor is added to the mix—you and me—and we are not God in our character, and **that** He wants to bring us to.

Romans 8:29-30 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

These two verses come much closer to stating what we might think of as being a *guarantee* that one will be in the kingdom once one is called and has accepted Jesus Christ, but there is a simple and true explanation that this thought is wrong. The explanation involves understanding what is meant by *predestination*. Predestination means **pre-determined**. What pre-determined (or predestination) describes is what God's **intent** is. It is His intent. He has predetermined that we will be in His kingdom.

But I hope, if there is anything we are learning, [we understand] that no scripture stands alone. Though no scripture can be broken, all scripture is subject to modification by other scriptures. In other words, the whole package must be put together before we can arrive at the truth of a doctrine. If these two verses stood alone, one could honestly say that we are guaranteed to be there. We have already seen earlier in this message, that

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in order to be in God's kingdom, one must enter into a *covenant* that has conditions that must be met to God's satisfaction before entrance into His kingdom is provided. We saw this clearly expressed by Peter in II Peter 1:10-11.

II Peter 1:10 Wherefore the rather, brethren, give **diligence** to make your calling and election sure.

It takes **diligence** to make it sure. But what if a person isn't diligent?

II Peter 1:10-11 For if you do these things, you shall never fall. For so an entrance shall be ministered [supplied] unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

The pattern that is shown with the Israelites is that they failed because they committed fraud. They didn't live up to the agreement that was made with God, and they choose death rather than life. We can do the same thing, but there is less reason for us to do such a thing. We won't go into it in any great detail, but the writer of the book of Hebrews stated very clearly that the New Covenant is built upon **better promises**, and those better promises are given to us by God in order to ensure that we have every opportunity to choose life rather than death.

I'm going to name a couple of things that the Old Covenant did **not** have as part of the agreement. (1) God **nowhere** promised them the Holy Spirit. (2) God **nowhere** promised them the forgiveness of sin. He did it, but it is not part of the agreement. There are others, as well, that are given in order to give us **far** more opportunity to make it into the Kingdom of God than Israel ever had.

The Bible gives clearly-stated reasons why we can fail and be cast into the lake of fire, but it gives far more abundant reasons why we can make it. None of us should fail because, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" That's another promise. Jesus said they—both the Father and the Son—will live **in** us. That was never given to Israel under the Old Covenant. If God be for us, who can be against us? Can we believe this strongly enough to take action upon our responsibilities?

There are two very clear parts of the salvation equation. On the one side is God, armed with His grace and all of the gifts that He is so willing to give us in order that we make it. On the other side is us, greatly in need of His grace and His gifts. But the question arises: Are we **humble** enough to accept them, and then **loyal** enough to use them?

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Herbert Armstrong said a number of times that the issue of **our part** in salvation can be summed up in just a few words. He said that, from the very beginning, the issue has been one of government. Are we willing to submit and allow God to govern us so that His creative efforts can effectively work within us? Will we submit to God's creative efforts that will produce works in us that are in the similitude of Him, because "*we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God has prepared aforehand that we should live in them*"?

I like the description in Revelation 19:11 that is given Jesus at the time of His coming.

Revelation 19:11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he does judge and make war.

I cannot think of anything better to strive for, to insure that we will be in His kingdom—raised at the return of Jesus Christ. Jesus is **Faithful and True**. He is everything that the Beast and the False Prophet (who are also subjects of this book of Revelation) are not. Here Jesus is not called by His name, but rather by His outstanding attributes.

Just as surely as the Bible says "God is love," it says that "Jesus is Faithful and True." He is faithful and true to His Bride, to His Church, faithful and true to His word. He is loyalty, dependability, integrity, truth and genuineness personified—whether in marriage, as an older Brother, as a Son, as a King, as Savior, as a Priest, or as a Friend.

Everything that He embodies is what a father looks for in a child, and this describes what God is looking for in you. Are you faithful and true? Are you the **real** thing? Are you willing to obey regardless of what it costs you personally? "Faithful and true." This is what we should strive for. I am confident that if we achieve it, we will never be like the Israelites. We won't die on the way there. We will make it because we have these characteristics.