

## *Eternal Security?*

Ephesians 1:13 - “In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard [more correctly, having heard – there is no intent to show a sequence of events<sup>1</sup>] the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed [having believed – again, no sequence], ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise ....” The *in whom* refers to Christ, and what follows is the result of being “in Christ,” a very specific theme of the earlier part of Ephesians. We have something else revealed here that is accomplished through faith in Christ: we are sealed, or marked, with the Holy Spirit as promised by the Lord (John 16:13; 2 Corinthians 1:22). Jesus said that the Spirit would “guide [us] into all truth”; this involves a process of guidance (it is not a single event) into rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15). We are sealed by the Holy Spirit; therefore, the presence of the Spirit must be evident in our lives (Romans 8:4). In earlier times, the seal was used to confirm the authenticity of an item, to affirm its approval under the authority of the owner of the seal; even so, we have been given the Holy Spirit by God to affirm that we are His: “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ [the Seal of God], he is none of his” (Romans 8:9).

The question, which arises, is this: “Can this seal be removed?” Is it possible for the Spirit of God to depart from our lives? Is our eternal destiny eternally secured by this Seal? There are many, within Evangelical and Baptist traditions, who strongly insist that our eternal destiny is secured and cannot be lost. Calvinism promotes the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints (what they actually mean is the preservation of the saints), with the idea that the elect (by which they mean those who have been chosen by God from eternity past) are eternally secure – but that is a totally different application of a similar sounding teaching.<sup>2</sup> Within Evangelicalism, the loudly acclaimed success of evangelist Billy Graham is founded upon a belief in the eternal security of those who come forward at his crusades and pray a simple prayer for salvation. They build their understanding upon passages like Acts 16:31, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved ....” However, no time is taken to qualify this so as to lead the potential converts to a proper understanding of what it means to *believe*. “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19). Clearly, we must hold a proper understanding of what it means to *believe*. We may hear the pope, Robert Schuller, and George W. Bush all say that Muslims worship the same God as Christians, yet the Muslims’ god excludes both the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ. The Muslims believe in one god, but, unlike the devils, they do not tremble, for they do not believe in the same God as the devils; the devils recognize the God of all creation, whereas, the Muslims’ god was chosen by their leader, Mohammed. Obviously, belief in God is not sufficient to bring salvation to the soul, for it must be the *right* belief in the *right* God. On the other hand, you have the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses who believe in Jesus Christ – yet they, too, are not saved for they have skewed Who Jesus is. We must use discernment in determining what it means to be a Christian, and not paint a picture that is contrary to what the Bible teaches.

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<sup>1</sup> Strong’s Online and Robert Young’s Literal Translation.

<sup>2</sup> Calvinism promotes the perseverance of the saints in support of their doctrine of election (by which they mean that God has selected some for glory and some for damnation); therefore, within their thinking, the elect have to persevere and be saved, otherwise their doctrine would unravel.

When Evangelicals speak of being saved, they like to look back to a time when they prayed a prayer accepting Jesus into their hearts. It matters not if they recognized their sin, which destines them for hell; it matters not if they repented of those sins and turned to a life lived in obedience to the Word of God. As a matter of fact, it has come to the point that if someone simply says that they are a Christian, then that is sufficient evidence to never question their faith, no matter how they live. For the most part, Christianity has become a subjective reality that we dare not question, lest we be construed as being judgmental, which is far worse (in the eyes of the average Evangelical) than to live in the cesspool of the world.

Praying a prayer to “receive Jesus” is what some term *easy-believism*, or, as David Cloud likes to call it, *easy prayerism*.<sup>3</sup> In essence, a prayer is uttered that is not based upon a complete understanding of what it means to be a child of God, and that is deemed to be sufficient to secure eternal life as a child of God. There is seldom a complete explanation of the fact that we are born in sin, separated from God by our inherited sin, and there is definitely no admonition to count the cost of following the Lord before praying the prayer. There is a cost to being a disciple of the Lord Jesus, and unless that cost is taken into consideration, the belief expressed in a moment of appeal may well be ill-founded. Counting the cost is very clearly advocated by the Lord in Luke 14:26-33, and we would do well to heed His warning; a failure at this point could lead to a faith that fizzles under pressure, or is choked-out by life’s temptations (apostasy).

Consider an illustration from Billy Graham’s work as an evangelist. Regarding a crusade in Houston, Texas in 1965, Curtis Mitchell writes, “Finally, the flood [of people coming forward] ceased and the closely packed mass stood silent, with faces upturned, waiting. Graham led them through a short prayer of repentance and confession. They repeated it, two thousand voices so soft they could hardly be heard. Then, as Graham turned to depart, the battalions of converts changed into a new formation ... [of] twosomes and threesomes ...”<sup>4</sup> Notice that after Graham had led this massive group in a short prayer, they were all considered to be *converts*. Yet the reality is that a large portion of these people would have had no idea of what it was that they were supposed to have done, other than respond to an emotional appeal. The authenticity of their conversion would depend, not on the prayer that they repeated, but on what took place within the twosomes, threesomes, or, more importantly, within their own hearts as they permitted the Spirit of God to open their eyes. Those genuine, lifetime commitments, which have taken place as a result of Graham’s work (there is no denying that some have been saved under his work), would be, to a great extent, despite Graham, rather than because of him. The emotional response generated through his crusade tactics is not a solid basis for making such a costly commitment. Consider some documented reflections on the experience that some people had at his crusades (and these are from 1966 documentation): “There was a wrenching and a tearing, and then there was a flood of warmth that was overpowering ... so very much happiness filled me that I did not feel I could contain it all”; “When the Holy Spirit entered my heart, He heightened every aspect of life, like a sixth sense”; “I can never forget the indescribable ecstasy of that moment.”<sup>5</sup> Notice that all of these reflect an emotional response: “flood of warmth,” “heightened every aspect of life,” and “indescribable ecstasy.” Jesus spoke of just such a response, “They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and

<sup>3</sup> David Cloud, “Easy Prayerism or Bible Evangelism,” <http://www.wayoflife.org/fbns/easy1.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Curtis Mitchell, Those Who Came Forward, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.

in time of temptation fall away” (Luke 8:13). There is an immediate and evident response to the Word (the seed), but when a trial comes their way, their newly found faith disappears. Jesus very clearly calls us to count the cost before we commit to following Him, therefore, we cannot simply respond emotionally; counting the cost of following the Lord is part of the process of preparing the soil of our hearts so that the Word of God can take root and flourish. Unless we have a change of life and a fresh love for His Word, there is no basis for claiming to be born-again.

What we have today, within the Evangelical circles, is an over-simplification of what it means to be a Christian, to the point that many leave it up to the individual to decide. It is considered to be inappropriate to look for a changed life, either for separation from the world and its allurements, or for obedience to the clear instructions of Scripture. The emphasis is placed on a prayer having been uttered – after all, it is reasoned, what’s on the inside is far more important than what is on the outside. Incredibly, this is the reverse error of the Pharisees of Jesus’ day, but the results are quite similar. “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also” (Matthew 23:25-26). The Pharisees made a great show of appearing to be righteous, yet Jesus condemned them because inwardly they were corrupt and undisciplined; His admonition to correct their problem was to “cleanse first that which is within” so that the outward may be clean also. The Pharisees thought that they had the outward down pat, and were irreproachable; but the Lord saw through their façade, and condemned both the inward and the outward (the former for being a den of corruption, the latter for being hypocrisy). Today the emphasis is exactly reversed: the Evangelical tries to focus on the inward with absolutely no regard for the outward. However, they have compromised what it means to be cleansed inwardly, to the point that inward cleansing is no longer possible based solely upon their inadequate understanding of God’s Word; therefore, their assumed inner sanctity is in jeopardy of having never existed. What they fail to recognize (and this is something that Jesus clarified for the Pharisees) is that the outward is a reflection of the inward. When the Evangelicals boast of their freedom in Christ to live like the world, they only confirm their lack of understanding of the Word of God; the work of God in the heart not only creates a fundamental inward change, but that change, when it is genuine, also leads to an outward renewal (Romans 8:4; Ephesians 4:24).

Evangelicals have torn the heart out of what it means to be a Christian – it has been downgraded to the point where thousands of people repeating a prayer in a stadium are automatically considered to be converts, or changed people. Yet how many have walked out of the stadium in a new life with Christ, walking according to the calling that Christ has placed on their lives, namely, a commitment to being obedient to His Word? The counselors who would make up the “twosomes” and “threesomes” are appointed by the “pastors of cooperating churches”;<sup>6</sup> in other words, they are appointed from among those who, in many cases, no longer hold to the unalterable truths of Scripture. As early as 1968, Graham is quoted as saying, “A great part of our support today comes from Catholics. We never hold a crusade without priests and nuns being much in evidence in the audience” (emphasis in the original).<sup>7</sup> Therefore, it is only logical that a “great part” of their counseling force would also come from this Roman Catholic support. For some reason, Graham’s associations with the liberals and unbelievers has been downplayed and/or ignored within the

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<sup>6</sup> Mitchell, p. 40.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.rapidnet.com/~jbeard/bdm/exposes/graham/general.htm>

Evangelical community; I would suggest that Graham bears considerable responsibility for the accommodation of Catholic theology that has infiltrated the modern Evangelical scene.

In 1952 Graham is quoted as saying,

Many of the people who reach a decision for Christ at our meetings have joined the Catholic Church and we have received commendations from Catholic publications for the revived interest in their Church following our campaigns.... After all, one of our prime purposes is to help the churches in a community. If after we move on, the local (sic) churches do not feel the efforts of these meetings in increased membership and attendance, then our crusade would have to be considered a failure.<sup>8</sup>

There is absolutely no concern expressed that his campaigns were helpful in bolstering the Roman Catholic Church. Graham hired Willis Haymaker to go ahead of his crusades to prepare the cities for the event. In his autobiography, *Just As I Am*, he says that Haymaker would “call on the local Catholic bishop or other clerics to acquaint them with the Crusade plans and invite them to the meetings .... This was years before Vatican II’s openness to Protestants, but we were concerned to let the Catholic bishops see that my goal was not to get people to leave their church; rather, I wanted them to commit their lives to Christ.”<sup>9</sup> From very early on, Graham very deliberately worked with any religious group that would see fit to join him; in his mind, what he was calling people to do would not violate their faith, no matter how contrary it was to the Word of God. Clearly, Graham did not understand what it means to be committed to Christ, or else he would not have considered the Catholic’s commitment as being acceptable. There is also evidence that he was courting Catholic favor even while he was still trying to convince Fundamentalists that he was opposed to Catholic doctrine.<sup>10</sup> “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways” (James 1:8); Billy Graham, that pope of the Evangelical community, has proven his duplicity, without a doubt. His ministry was fraught with compromise and accommodation from its earliest days – he has never been a friend to the truths of Scripture.

We have within Evangelicalism a deadly combination. We have a watering down of what it means to be a Christian, combined with a belief in the eternal security of the believer. When the Lord God drove Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden, it was for the express purpose of denying man access to the tree of life, lest he should eat thereof and live forever in his sinful state (Genesis 3:22-24). God’s purpose was to implement His eternal plan of salvation so that man might live forever in a redeemed state. What have modern Evangelicals done? They have created a doctrine of salvation that leaves man in his sin (yet under the delusion that he is saved), and they attach to it the concept of eternal security, thereby instilling the thought of possessing eternal life no matter what. What God expelled man from the Garden of Eden to prevent, Evangelicals have created through a skewed understanding of God’s Word – pray a little prayer and your place in heaven is eternally secured. God says, “NO, it won’t happen like that.” Evangelicals say that it doesn’t matter how you live; as long as you have “asked Jesus into your heart” sometime during your life, your key to heaven has been secured; they think that they have laid hold of the tree of life, when in reality they have been duped by the master liar, Satan. It is no wonder that a day is

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<sup>8</sup> Cathy Burns, *Billy Graham and His Friends*, p. 34.

<sup>9</sup> Billy Graham, *Just As I Am*, p. 163.

<sup>10</sup> David W. Cloud, *Evangelicals & Rome*, p.81.

coming for them when our Lord will declare, “I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:23).

We could look at men like Bill Hybels, Robert Schuller, Rick Warren, Joel Osteen, and the list goes on, to further demonstrate the serious diluting that the Gospel has received at the hands of Evangelicals today; however, touching on the crowned king of Evangelicalism should suffice. The question still stands: is it possible, even with a proper understanding of what it means to believe, to have the Spirit of God depart? You would think that since so many Evangelicals and Fundamentalists would respond with a vehement “NO” that there must be a wealth of Scriptures upholding this teaching. Let us move on to look at some of the passages that those who promote the concept of eternal security look to for support.

1. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father’s hand. (John 10:27-29).

This is a popular passage, and, at first reading, it would seem to definitely pick up on the theme of being eternally saved, for we read that “They shall never perish.” However, there are two things that stand in the way of this becoming the truth of this passage. First of all, the words *hear*, *know*, *follow* (verse 27) and *give* (verse 28) are all in the present tense in the Greek, which means that they are declaring a “fact or reality viewed as occurring in actual time”;<sup>11</sup> the hearing, knowing and following are present, continuing activities (not a present condition due to a past action). Therefore, the phrase *they shall never perish* can only refer to those who are continually hearing and following (living in obedience to) the Lord, and as long as those conditions remain active, then the phrase describes their promise of eternal life – in other words, this is a conditional promise. The word *perish*, even though it bears the subjunctive mood in the Greek (which generally means a possibility but not a certainty), is used in conjunction with two Greek negatives (*ou* and *me*) to make this a strongly emphatic negative.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the sheep of the Shepherd who are hearing His voice and following Him faithfully will **never** perish, but that is a promise that is conditional, not unconditional.

Yet the question will be raised: what about the rest of the passage that indicates that we are secure in the hand of Jesus and the Father? It is easily recognized that the security, of being in the hand of God, is from external attack (no one can *pluck* them *out* of His hand) – neither anything, nor anyone, is able to remove us from the protective hand of God. That is a precious promise to those who are abiding in Christ, but it cannot be construed to say that we are eternally secure in the hands of God. We will see the significance of this later.

2. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39).

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<sup>11</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.ntgreek.org/pdf/subjunctive\\_uses.pdf](https://www.ntgreek.org/pdf/subjunctive_uses.pdf)

These verses simply declare that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God. God has a love for all of mankind, for we read: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16). There can be no greater love; there is nothing in heaven or in earth that can separate us from that great love, which was demonstrated by the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is what this passage clearly states. God’s desire is that all men would be saved (1 Timothy 2:4), which is confirmed by the provision of His Son to be our Savior and Mediator, but that does not mean that all men will be saved. Note that all of these forces listed are external to us, and it is definitely comforting, for those who are continually abiding in Christ, to know the reality of this security. However, this passage really does not speak to the eternal state of our salvation.

3. And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:39-40).

It is the Father’s will that the Lord Jesus should lose *nothing*. It is evident from the Scriptures that the price that Christ paid on the cross is sufficient for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2), and that it is the will of the Father that all men should be saved (1 Timothy 2:4); however, by looking about us today, it is equally clear that all of mankind will not be saved, even though the debt of their sins has been paid in full. First of all, *lose* in verse 39 is in the subjunctive mood, which introduces a possibility of not all being kept (the English word *should* is correct, and includes the element of possibility but not certainty). Secondly, the translation is correct that everyone who believes on the Son “MAY have everlasting life” (the word *have* also bears the subjunctive mood). Those who are not lost, and some of those who now believe will be raised up by the Lord at the last day.

4. In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:13-14).

This is the verse with which we began our deliberations. It speaks of being *sealed* with the Holy Spirit. The word *seal* does not mean preservation, as in canning fruits or vegetables, but rather it is a mark of ownership (Romans 8:4). The Spirit is given as the *earnest*, or down payment, of our inheritance – now, clearly, a down payment does not prove that the transaction thus sealed, or marked, will come to fruition.<sup>13</sup> It is a sign of intent, but does not include the certainty of follow-through – the mortgage company disaster in the US is a present day illustration of this fact; many down payments had been made, but clearly not everyone came to realize the ownership of the house that they intended to buy. What we must not lose sight of, even within a position of not holding to eternal security for the believer, is that God has done everything to fulfill His responsibility in the redemptive transaction. “If we believe not, *yet* he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself” (2 Timothy 2:13).

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<sup>13</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

The words “after that ye heard” and “after that ye believed” do not suggest a sequence of events (as we said before), but rather, more accurately should read, “having heard” and “having believed,” respectively.

5. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. (John 5:24).

Once again we are faced with a tense disparity between the original and our English translation. The tense for *heareth*, *believeth*, *hath* and *come* is present in each case. As the hearing and the believing is presently active, so the promise of everlasting life is a reality. Again, this is a conditional promise, not based on a single action in the past, but on a present living state.

We live in a day when many recognize that there is a present “falling away”; we speak of the apostasy that is taking place among Evangelicals and Fundamentalists alike, yet the common explanation for this is that these people were never truly born-again. Indeed, there are many within these broad groups who are not born-again, but they will not be *falling away* when they leave Christianity behind – they will simply be acting according to their faith (really, the lack thereof). It makes no sense for me to say, “I’m no longer an American,” since I’ve never been an American; in the same way it makes no sense to view someone as no longer a Christian (or as being apostate), when they were never a Christian to begin with. Even John MacArthur fails to grasp this simple reality. He defines apostasy as “abandonment, a separation, a defection,” yet goes on to say that people who are apostate “never genuinely embrace[d] the truth.”<sup>14</sup> To fall away from something, or to leave something behind, demands that you must have been a part of it to begin with. So, when we read, “Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a falling away first” (2 Thessalonians 2:3), this cannot be referring to those who have never been born-again (yet this is what Evangelicals of all stripes would have us believe). Even a Fundamental Baptist group holds that “the salvation of every believer is secure for all eternity from the moment of salvation.”<sup>15</sup> Hidden within this doctrine is the **impossibility** of apostasy, yet they will, at the same time, proclaim that we are living in a day of apostasy (they have subtly redefined the term in order to prevent a contradiction).

To this point, we have dealt with some passages that, at first glance, might seem to indicate that we are eternally secure, yet careful exegesis reveals that this is not a proper understanding of them. It is now time to consider several significant passages that clearly teach against eternal security. Before we begin, consider the “Gospel in a nutshell”: John 3:16. If we look at it carefully, we will recognize that even it does not promote eternal security. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him **should not perish**, but have everlasting life.” Yes, the word *perish* carries the subjunctive mood, which makes the *not perish* only a possibility. It is interesting to note that most modern translations have changed the word *should* to *shall* or *will*, thereby removing the thought of possibility, and inserting the false concept of certainty. As many Evangelicals as there are who have memorized John 3:16 from the King James Version, it seems that very few recognize that it does not promote the doctrine of eternal security.

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<sup>14</sup> John MacArthur, *The Truth War*, p. 43.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.foundationbaptistchurch.com/about-us/what-we-believe/convictions.html>

Let us now consider several passages that provide further evidence against the teaching of eternal security. These are by no means an exhaustive listing, but are several that provide ample evidence that the doctrine of eternal security is not Biblical.

1. Romans 11:13-22 – <sup>13</sup>For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office: <sup>14</sup>If by any means I may provoke to emulation [jealousy or envious rivalry] *them which are* my flesh, and might save some of them. <sup>15</sup>For if the casting away of them *be* the reconciling of the world, what *shall* the receiving of *them* be, but life from the dead? <sup>16</sup>For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump *is* also *holy*: and if the root be holy, so are the branches. <sup>17</sup>And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; <sup>18</sup>boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. <sup>19</sup>Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. <sup>20</sup>Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: <sup>21</sup>For if God spared not the natural branches, *take heed* lest he also spare not thee. <sup>22</sup>Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in *his* goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. <sup>16</sup>

The passage is clear, if we desire to continue as members who have been grafted into the spiritual root of Israel, then we must abide in the faith that saw us grafted in the first place. Unbelief is the one action that can see this flow of life cut off. The word *continue* (verse 22) is in the subjunctive mood, which means that it carries the possibility of not continuing, (the KJV correctly includes the word *if*), but the Greek word for *cut off* (at the end of the same verse) is not in the subjunctive mood; this is a sure result for not continuing in the life of the root.

This is not a passage with which modern Evangelicals care to deal. Not only does it bring their doctrine of eternal security into question, but it also casts a shadow over their doctrine of the “Church.” As we have seen, most hold to the “church” as being an entity entirely separate from Israel, and a passage such as this shines a spotlight on the error of such teaching. Yes, there are promises made by God to Israel as a people, but we have been grafted into the Lord Jesus Christ (the Olive Tree; consider John 15:4-6 in light of this) according to the pattern of the faith of Abraham (Romans 4:16). However, what is noteworthy for our discussion is that we are warned (Romans 11:20) not to be *highminded* or proud (this is in the imperative mood – a command), but we are to *fear* (again an imperative), which means that we are to exercise a “reverential obedience” to God.<sup>17</sup> It was through unbelief that the natural branches (Israel) were broken off, and the warning is that through unbelief there is a real possibility that the grafted branches will also be removed. Belief, or faith, is the key to being grafted into the spiritual Root of Israel and also to remaining in Him; unbelief, or faithlessness, is the means to being cut off from that spiritual relationship.

It is also noteworthy that the grafting is an individual-by-individual project. You will note that verse 17 uses the singular pronoun *thou* – “thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them.” This is not a case where all Gentiles have been grafted into the spiritual root of Israel, and they will be broken off as they demonstrate unbelief; those who are individually born-again by the Spirit of God are grafted into the spiritual Root of Israel (they are *in Christ* – Ephesians 2:13), and if they turn away in unbelief, then they will not be spared (verse 21). This also flies in the face of

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<sup>16</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

men like Donald McGavran who promote group acceptance of Christianity within cultures that have strong interpersonal connective ties: “The individual does not think of himself as a self-sufficient unit, but as part of the group. . . . Peoples become Christian as this group-mind is brought into a lifegiving relationship to Jesus as Lord.”<sup>18</sup> Although he gives a passing acknowledgement of the need for personal conversions, his focus is on Christianizing nations in broad terms, and so he goes on: “It is important to note that the group decision is not the sum of separate individual decisions.”<sup>19</sup> McGavran sees the group movement toward Christian values and lifestyle as being the most important thing to strive for. Yet Jesus said, “Every [a word which speaks of individuality] branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth it [singular], that it may bring forth more fruit” (John 15:2). The connection of the branch to the Vine is individual, not group; “He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit . . .” (John 15:5) – notice the use of singular pronouns to describe the abiding that is required.

2. Matthew 18:23-35 – <sup>23</sup>Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. <sup>24</sup>And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. <sup>20</sup> <sup>25</sup>But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. <sup>26</sup>The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. <sup>27</sup>Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. <sup>28</sup>But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence:<sup>21</sup> and he laid hands on him, and took *him* by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. <sup>29</sup>And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. <sup>30</sup>And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. <sup>31</sup>So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. <sup>32</sup>Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: <sup>33</sup>Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? <sup>34</sup>And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. <sup>35</sup>So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

This is not a popular text for sermons today because it does not fit with today’s theologies. Nevertheless, these are Jesus’ words and we would do well to heed them in light of the rest of Scripture. This is clearly a case of complete forgiveness extended, for the king “loosed him and forgave him the debt” (v. 27). However, when the king heard that this servant did not extend the same compassion to a fellow servant, he was recalled to stand before the king. The king reminds the servant that he had been forgiven all (*I forgave thee all that debt*), but he lost that forgiveness and was required to repay all that he owed. This metaphor follows Jesus’ instruction to Peter that he is to forgive his brother until seventy times seven, or time without number. Although this metaphor may be beyond understanding from the perspective of eternal security, it is easily understood if we accept the fact that a heart of unbelief can undo what God has done for us. We are told that the king had compassion on his hopelessly debt-ridden servant, and *loosed him* or set

<sup>18</sup> Donald A. McGavran, *Bridges to God*, p. 325.

<sup>19</sup> McGavran, p. 325.

<sup>20</sup> One day’s wages was about one drachma; 6,000 drachmas equaled one talent. In today’s terms, this servant owed his master about 60,000,000 day’s wages or about \$4 billion dollars (at minimum wage).

<sup>21</sup> This would be about 100 day’s wages, or about \$7,000 (at minimum wage).

him free, and *forgave him*.<sup>22</sup> When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He included the words “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,” and He went on to explain, “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:12, 14-15). The word *forgive* that is used here comes from the same Greek word as used by the king in freeing his servant from his great debt.

There can be no doubt that the servant was forgiven by the king; he was freed from the huge debt that he was unable to pay. Yet because he was unwilling to extend a similar forgiveness to a fellow servant, the king withdrew his forgiveness and reinstated the debt from which the servant had been freed. Drawing this together with the Lord’s words in Matthew 6, there can be little doubt about the significant warning that is issued here.

3. Luke 8:4-15 – <sup>4</sup>And when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable: <sup>5</sup>A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. <sup>6</sup>And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. <sup>7</sup>And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. <sup>8</sup>And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. <sup>9</sup>And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be? <sup>10</sup>And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand. <sup>11</sup>Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. <sup>12</sup>Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. <sup>13</sup>They on the rock *are they*, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. <sup>14</sup>And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of *this* life, and bring no fruit to perfection. <sup>15</sup>But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep *it*, and bring forth fruit with patience.

This is the parable of the soils and Seed, the Word of God. The Seed that fell by the wayside is snatched away by the devil “lest they should believe and be saved.” The word *saved* carries the subjunctive mood, which simply means that if the devil had not snatched the Word away there was a possibility of salvation. Next, there is Seed that falls among the rocks, which we have already likened to those who come forward at a Billy Graham crusade (or any other such venture). These receive the Word with joy and believe for a while. The indication is that if the trial (temptation) had not come along, they would have continued to believe, but because of the trial, they fell away (withdrew, became apostate).<sup>23</sup> It is obvious that there is life, for unless there is life, there is no need for a root, and it would simply remain as a seed. Although there is life and growth, the plant fell away and died; you cannot fall away or withdraw from something to which you have never been a part. Unfortunately, once the seed has sprouted and then its life fails, it cannot be revived again; this fits with both the metaphor that Jesus is using and with the rest of Scripture. These are those who have failed to count the cost of following the Lord, and they apostatize when they face any opposition.

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<sup>22</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>23</sup> Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

Some Seed also fell among thorns. These are those who hear the Word, and “go forth,” or begin the journey of walking with the Lord only to face the cares, riches, and pleasures of this world. When excuses were raised to Jesus for not following Him, Jesus said, “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62). Once again we are faced with the necessity of counting the cost of discipleship, lest we fall short of enduring to the end. Notice that these who were growing in the Lord were choked by anxieties (“Be careful [or anxious] for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” [Philippians 4:6]<sup>24</sup>), by riches or wealth (“For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” [1 Timothy 6:10]), and by pleasures (“...lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” [2 Timothy 3:4]). The result is that they are cut off and do not grow to maturity; they fail to endure, and their end is the same as the seed that grew quickly in the rocky soil, but died. Finally, there is Seed that falls upon good ground that has been prepared – the cost of discipleship has been evaluated and the commitment has been made with a full understanding that difficulties will come, even as Jesus promised that they would (John 16:33).

What cannot be missed in this is that there was life in the plant upon the rocks, and there was life in the plant that was eventually choked out by the thorns; the Word of God brought forth life within the stony heart and within the heart that was filled with weeds. However, that life did not bear fruit; it did not endure because of the condition of the heart. Making a commitment to follow the Lord demands more than a superficial assent; the Spirit of God must be an active participant in establishing the heart as a favorable place for spiritual growth. Through compromising the clear doctrines of the Word of God and embracing ecumenical error, Evangelicals have virtually strangled the working of the Spirit of God. Their carefully-crafted, light gospel is a perversion of the Biblical message that Paul so carefully defended to the Galatians; it is a different gospel that bears no resemblance to the original (Galatians 1:6-7).

4. Hebrews 6:4-6 – <sup>4</sup>For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, <sup>5</sup>And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, <sup>6</sup>If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame.

This is a very difficult passage to deal with if you hold to eternal security, for it seems to plainly present a contrary doctrine. Let’s go through it carefully to ensure that we have a proper understanding of what the Lord is trying to tell us in this passage. Once again, it is important to permit the Word of God to speak for itself, and not to impose on it the constraints of our polished theologies. Theologies are merely man’s attempt to understand what God has said to him; the Scriptures are what God has truly said to man. Our primary focus needs to be God’s Word, not man’s words.

The word *impossible* means just that, the Greek word means simply, “not able.”<sup>25</sup> *Enlightened* is a very potent word that means, “to enlighten, spiritually, imbue [or fill] with saving

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<sup>24</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>25</sup> Vine’s “impossible.”

knowledge.”<sup>26</sup> Therefore, when this first phrase speaks of those who were once enlightened, it is speaking specifically of those who have been born-again; they had received a saving knowledge. These have also *tasted of the heavenly gift*. The word *tasted* is interesting, and those seeking to support eternal security will use this word to discount the overall thrust of this passage. However, this comes from the same Greek word as used in Acts 20:11 and Acts 23:14 where it is translated as *eaten*; the same word is also used in Hebrews 2:9, “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should **taste** death for every man.” This word is also used to describe the ruler of the feast tasting the water turned to wine (John 2:9), and of Jesus tasting the vinegar on the cross and refusing to drink further (Matthew 27:34). Although it is easily recognized that *taste* is definitely less than to eat a full meal, it must also be accepted that it is sufficient to provide a full awareness of what has been taken. Jesus tasted death, even though His death ended in resurrected life after three days and three nights; whereas man dies either with the hope of resurrection when Jesus comes again, or with no wish for resurrection (but a resurrection will take place for them to stand before the throne of God in judgment). However you slice it, this tasting is great enough to know the heavenly gift.

What is the *heavenly gift* that has been tasted? “For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23). “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). The *heavenly gift* can be nothing less than God’s gift of salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord, which carries with it eternal life. This is speaking of those who have tasted of the salvation that God offers to all of mankind; perhaps not unlike the Word of God falling on the rocky soil, or into the midst of the thorns and thistles (Luke 8:13-14).

Those who were once enlightened were also *made partakers of the Holy Ghost*; they became sharers in the Holy Spirit. We are told, “ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you” (Romans 8:9). As partakers in the Spirit of God, they cannot simply be “professors,” but are clearly “in the Spirit.” As partakers of the Spirit of God, they would have had spiritual life; “For to be carnally minded *is* death; but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace. Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Romans 8:6-7). There is little room for movement here; if you have the Spirit, you are no longer in the flesh.

However, there is more, for these have also *tasted the good word of God*. They have heard the excellent Word of God, it was spoken and they heard it; not only heard it, but they have taken it in. Finally, they have also *tasted the powers of the world to come*; they have experienced the power or inherent might of the age that is coming (this is present tense, so the power of the age to come is coming even now; what will be pervasive in Christ’s Kingdom is coming now in an individual application). This could be nothing other than the power of our resurrected Lord at work in their lives, a power that will see its ultimate fruition in the new world to come. “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).

Now consider for a moment who is being referred to here; this is someone who has been filled with saving knowledge, they have taken of God’s gift of salvation, they have shared in the Spirit

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<sup>26</sup> Strong’s Online.

of God, they have heard and understood the Word of God, and have seen the power of God at work in their own lives. This is no casual “sip” taken from the New Covenant that was implemented by our Lord; there is sufficient here to have a very good idea of what it means to be a Christian, and what it means to live the life that God has called us to live by the power of His Spirit. The seed of the Word of God has fallen on a heart that has permitted the seed to grow, it has been received with joy; the journey with the God of the Word has begun. God does not offer a table of produce where the world can sample His Spirit, or inhale the aroma of His salvation to see if they really like it. The Psalmist said, “O taste and see that the LORD *is* good: blessed *is* the man *that* trusteth in him” (Psalm 34:8). The Hebrew word translated as *taste* is also the word for *perceive*; the call is to perceive or discern the Lord – count the cost! The words *taste* and *see* are both commands; the seeing is not a result of the tasting; it is a separate call to ponder the Lord. This is a call to consider the Lord and cannot be construed as merely sampling Him. Our passage speaks of someone who has embarked on a walk of faith with God. However, we are warned by Jesus to count the cost of being His disciple, and as we have learned from the parable of the soils, there will be those who will receive His Word (the Seed), go forth in new life, but then fall away when the pressures and allurements of life press in.

The next statement must be considered very carefully: *if they shall fall away*. The Greek for this phrase is simply: “and having fallen away.”<sup>27</sup> Let’s back up and put the sentence, so far, into our minds. We begin with the thought of impossibility, then we have sketched for us someone who is saved, and now that someone *falls away*; we will now learn what is impossible about this situation. Before we go on, we need to ponder this reality that the Spirit of God has laid out for us; this is someone who has truly been born again and then fallen away. The Spirit of God does not frame hypothetical situations, but has given this reality to guide us into all truth (John 16:13). The Lord used parables in His teaching, and they are clearly laid out as parables for us – there is no mistaking them for anything other than parables. This is an instructive passage where the Spirit of God is laying out a truth for us, which is – it is possible to be truly saved and yet fall away.

Now, what is the impossible situation? It is impossible (this is speaking of someone who was saved and has fallen away) to “renew them again unto repentance.” In other words, you can be saved once, and only once. If we recall the parable of the soils, the rocky and weedy soils produced genuine life, but in each case that life was snuffed out either through trials or pleasures; however, note in both cases that the life that was there is gone and it will not return. The branch of the vine, when it is removed, withers and is burned (John 15:6). “And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners *shall be* together, and they that forsake [abandon, apostatize] the LORD shall be consumed [come to an end, vanish, perish, be destroyed]” (Isaiah 1:28).<sup>28</sup> This is another promise from God to which we must give attention.

However, our passage does not end with this pronouncement but goes on to provide a reason for this judgment: “seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame.” “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was **once offered** to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Hebrews 9:27-28, emphasis added). “By the which will [the New Covenant] we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once for**

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<sup>27</sup> Stephanus 1550 NT.

<sup>28</sup> Strong’s Online.

*all*” (Hebrews 10:10). “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit ...” (1 Peter 3:18). What is clear is that Christ suffered one time; He made only one offering for the sins of mankind. For someone to fall away from God (an established possibility) and then to seek the cleansing of Christ’s offering again, would be to crucify Christ the second time, something that cannot take place. When the salvation of Christ has been experienced and then turned away from, there is no further offering available for that person; they have disdained the only offering made for them. Not only would such a person be seeking to crucify Christ a second time, but they would be putting Christ to *open shame*, or exposing Him to public disgrace.<sup>29</sup> Being an apostate holds Christ to public disgrace; here is someone known to be saved, who had a testimony to the unsaved, and now they are fallen away and become like the world. The world will recognize the disgrace of this, and Satan will be sure to make it known. We all know the shame that is born by the Christian community when a high profile Christian leader stumbles morally; how much greater the impact of someone turning away from the Lord completely?

4. Exodus 32:33 – And the LORD said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book.

You will recall that when Moses went onto the mountain to meet with the Lord, the Israelites grew weary of waiting for him, and Aaron built for them a calf of gold and caused them to worship it (Exodus 32:4). When Moses came down from the mountain and saw what the people had done, in his anger at the people, he broke the stone tables upon which God had written the Commandments. Moses then returned to meet with the Lord again, and to plead for mercy for the people of Israel; his petition was that if God would not forgive their sin, that God should blot his name from His book (Exodus 32:32). What we have here is God’s response to Moses; He will not blot Moses’ name from His book, but rather the name of whoever sins against Him. The Hebrew word translated as *blot out* means, “to *stroke* or *rub*; by implication to *erase*.”<sup>30</sup> What is evident is that a person’s name in God’s book can be removed by sinning against Him.

The Psalmist in Psalm 69:28 pleads with the Lord, “Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.” This is a Messianic Psalm, and, just before this, reference is made to the suffering that the Messiah would endure; the Psalmist’s plea is that those who inflicted the suffering would have their names *erased* (same Hebrew word as above) from the book of the living.

Revelation 3:5 “He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.” Jesus makes this declaration in His letter to the messenger of the *ekklesia* at Sardis, who had a good reputation but was dying spiritually. To those who would overcome or gain the victory, Jesus promises that He will not *blot out* or “smear out” their name from the book of life.<sup>31</sup> The same Greek word is used in Revelation 7:17 and 21:4 where it says that God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. Just as the Lord will remove all tears, so He will remove from the book of life the names of those who fall away (do not overcome or endure).

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<sup>29</sup> Strong’s Online.

<sup>30</sup> Strong’s Dictionary, *ESword*.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*.

Revelation 22:19 “And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book.” This is a promise; if anyone will take away from the words of this prophecy, God will remove his part from the book of life.

We do not know all that is meant by the book of life. However, of what we can be sure is that if our names are not in the book, then our sure destination is the lake of fire – “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15). Of what we can be equally sure is that it is possible to have our names removed from the book of life by sinning against God (Exodus 32:33), by failing to hold fast to the truths of Scripture and by failing to overcome or gain the victory (Revelation 3:3-5), and by dealing carelessly with the word of prophecy given in the book of Revelation (22:19). If we consider this in the light of John 15 and Romans 11, then it becomes clear that there will be a falling away, and names will be erased from the book of life.

The importance of being *in Christ* must not be missed or minimized; yet Jesus made it clear that the responsibility to abide in Him rests with us; we are commanded to abide in Him – it is something that we are to do (John 15). Jesus’ words in John 15:4 are: “*You* abide in me,” this is a command (imperative mood) on which we are to take action (active tense where the subject [you] is to carry out the action [abide]), and this is not a one-time action, hence Jesus words, “he that endureth to the end shall be saved” (Matthew 10:22). “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments” (1 John 2:3). One of His commands is that we are to abide in Him. However, we are not alone in our obedience, for He has promised that He will abide in us (John 15:4) – this in no way minimizes our responsibility of abiding in Him; it only secures the relationship for it could never be secured through our own efforts. If we seek to obey His command to abide in Him, then He is abundantly able to keep us, and promises that nothing outside of us will ever be able to snatch us out of His hand (John 10:27; Romans 8:35-39). If we do not abide in Him, then His Word will be to us like the seed that fell among the rocks or into the weeds – being either dried up or choked out. If we are obedient and abide in Christ, then He has promised to abide in us – this is the perfect situation in order to be a part of this holy dwelling, this *ekklesia* of the Lord, a Building and a Body made up of the saints of all of the ages!