

Sermon 87: Objections: Once saved always saved leads to antinomianism

INTRODUCTION

We are continuing with the various objections that have been raised against the doctrine of God's sovereign election. Today we will be dealing with one that was very close to my own heart, one that I often spouted as an objection to the doctrine of election. Because election ensures that all those who are elect will be glorified I would have said something like this: 'The teaching of 'once saved always saved' will lead to a false sense of security and antinomianism/unholiness.' The logic says, if Christians know that they can never lose their salvation, they will become lazy, they will stop evangelizing and will take advantage of grace and sin without impunity. My personal concern in the matter was I wanted all Christians to evangelize and I wanted to be able to use the blood on the watchman's hands texts to scare Christians into activity.

Let me surprise by saying, I agree, I also think that the once saved always saved doctrine has led to many abuses and is unbiblical. And it must be stressed that Calvinists have traditionally not taught a doctrine of once saved always saved, but rather a perseverance of the saints. Let me outline the once saved always saved teaching and how we differ from it.

Once saved always saved

The once saved always saved teaching has been taught in certain mildly Calvinistic often Dispensational thought. Bill Bright who started Campus Crusade taught a gospel that had two parts to it. First stage is you believe in Jesus for salvation. Stage Two you ask Jesus to be your Lord and repent of your sins. This strange separation of faith and repentance has created a situation where once you have exercised faith, even though you have not yet repented you are told that you have eternal life. This parachurch campus ministry would teach that after saying a sinner's prayer one was justified without repentance being necessarily present. This teaching of salvation that does not see faith as intertwined with repentance, and separates sanctification from justification, this is the teaching that creates a weird once saved always saved teaching. Being Reformed we reject this teaching as unbiblical.

As we understand the nature of the new birth which enables faith, there can be no faith apart from repentance. The same regeneration which aids our faith enables repentance. Both are gifts of grace and both flow necessarily from the new birth. One cannot cling to the saviour from sin while still holding onto ones sin, and one cannot let go of ones sin apart from clinging to the saviour. I see this two part approach to salvation as viewing salvation in terms of decisions and not in terms of the Spirit's regeneration. Faith does not flow from my fallen mind, but from the new heart given me by the Spirit. If were merely an issue of the mind repentance would not be necessary but since I am born of the Spirit, the same Spirit who enables faith enables repentance. 1 John 3:9-10, 'No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. 10 By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the

children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.'

For this reason we cannot believe that a person can be saved and live in sin, that a person can have genuine faith live in sin and still expect to go to heaven. We would say that that person has a false confession. If by once saved always saved you mean that one can get a cheap forgiveness, fire insurance that never eventuates in holiness, then of course we reject this teaching with you. And we would even agree that anyone who teaches this cheap grace would be encouraging unholiness. And we would argue vehemently that this is not what we believe.

Perseverance of the saints

Let me begin by saying that Paul's gospel was accused of encouraging sin. In Romans 3:8 we hear some of the slander poured out on Paul, 'And why not do evil that good may come?---as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.' The Jews who were obsessed with law, and could not stomach a Gospel of free forgiveness where the sinner receives forgiveness for all his sins past, present and future. The notion of justification apart from law galled the Jews and so they accused Paul of encouraging people to lawlessness. They forced the inference that if we teach a doctrine of full and free forgiveness, that removes all the incentives of earning salvation by obedience and being driven by fear, what then will keep us from abusing grace? Later on in Romans Paul anticipates this objection again to his statement that where sin abounds grace abounds all the more as an encouragement to sin. He answers this objection in Romans 6. He argues that the reason a Christian will not abuse grace is not because he is scared of hell, nor that we earn our way into heaven by being good. Instead Paul points to the objective change that occurred in us when we died and were resurrected with Christ; how dying with Christ removed us from the weak and captive place we were in Adam and placed us in a place of liberty where we can now make progress in holiness. He argues for the inward change wrought by the Spirit, who united us to Christ, as the insurance that we will now be holy. Like John, Paul cannot conceive of a new birth that does not result in holiness.

Let me address the issue of motivation because here was where I really had it wrong. I thought that the best way to get Christians to do their duty was out of a fear of punishment. Having been driven into my own obedience growing up by a fear of a hiding this was my inclination when becoming a Christian. Almost all of my obedience was offered to God from the fear that if I did not obey I was going to go to hell. This amounts to a view of salvation by obedience, that I keep myself going to heaven and from going to hell by being good. This is a radical denial of Christ's death as the only thing that can save me, and in insult to the Gospel seeing it as insufficient to secure my eternity and needing supplementing. I further made things worse by teaching other Christians that they too had to offer God obedience out of fear, and likewise taught them to trust in their ongoing efforts as the means that secures their eternity. Is God honoured by the notion that His children will be killed if they do not do His will? Is God honoured that we live for Him because we are scared of Hell? Is the gospel honoured by our needing to supplement it because God got us

in but we now need to keep ourselves in? This is law not grace! Law says do this and you shall live, disobey and you die, but we stand in grace not under the condemnation of the law, we are children who have been saved, adopted, justified, and will be glorified. Our motive should be one of joy, gratitude, seeking to glorify God for His generosity not attempts to satisfy His wrath. Christ's propitiation insures that God's wrath will not be poured out upon us, not our own obedience. God is now a Father who will discipline us but never a judge who will have His vengeance upon us. I dare never seek to be a slave driver who attempts to move God's children and church to my will with threats that God does not back up. I dare not hide the magnitude of God's grace out of a personal fear of God's people abusing His grace. God's grace is strong enough to ensure that we do what He asks that I don't need to supplement His commands with threats that we might not get to heaven. I don't have to feel the need to deny the teaching that God will secure His elect because I worry about holiness. This would be an overreaction to my fears and a distrusting of God to handle our sinfulness sufficiently. I must believe that God has provided in our salvation all that is needed for life and godliness so that I don't have to resort to picking up a whip of lies. The devil loves to arm Christians against each other this way. He loves it when we live in fear, when we forget God's grace and tremble at His wrath, when we do not have the joy of the Lord as our strength but are weak in doubt. We are at our most vulnerable to false teaching and manipulation when do not know the certainty of our salvation, we can be sent in almost any direction when teachers tell us that this or that is what is necessary to save ourselves.