



**Can A Sheep
Of Christ
Ever Perish?**

Compiled by E. C. Hadley

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Can A Sheep Of Christ Ever Perish?

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and My Father are one”(Jn. 10:27-30).

These words of our Lord Jesus give us full assurance that His sheep cannot perish. But one must be a *sheep* – a *true believer* in Jesus Christ. One who *claims* to be a Christian but has little or no thought for *God’s claims* on his life may not be a sheep at all. The Shepherd thinks too much of His sheep to lose even one. The Father gave them to His Son and He gave His life for them. They have eternal life. It would not be eternal life if they were saved for only a period of time and then lost again; it would be temporary life!

It is true that the child of God might fail the Lord who bought him, but that is a dis-

cipline matter between the Father and His child. The “believer-sheep” is a child of God whom He loves. He deals with His children as sons and daughters, “because the LORD disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son” (Heb. 12:6 NIV).

Fellowship versus Safety

When a child of God sins, his *fellowship* is broken but not his *relationship*. Is a child of earthly parents afraid of losing his relationship if he is disobedient? Do parents say, “If you don’t behave yourself, you are not my child anymore”? Must parents threaten their child with a broken relationship to obtain obedience? The heavenly family is not unlike an earthly family: the more a relationship is experienced and enjoyed, the greater will be the communion and desire to please our loving God and Father and the Lord Jesus Christ who bought us and to whom we belong.

We should not think we must work to *keep* saved any more than we must work to *be* saved. The security of the believer does not depend upon himself, but on the per-

fect work of the Savior. It is not a question of our *holding* on to *Him* but *His holding* on to us. All believers are equally saved, although not all have equal peace and spiritual and emotional contentment. Our prayer life and our right response to His words are essential to a life of communion with Him. But our eternal safety is the Good Shepherd's responsibility. With His persistent love He seeks, preserves and finally presents to Himself every believer spotless and glorified (Jude 24). We must carefully distinguish the truths about **fellowship** and **safety**.

Indwelt by the Holy Spirit

When a person becomes a child of God he or she is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you" (Jn. 14:16-17).

The Apostle Paul tells us that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit upon believing

(Eph. 1:13; 4:30), and no Scripture in the New Testament indicates that the Holy Spirit ever leaves a believer. We read in Ephesians 4:30 that He can be grieved: "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." This is a reference to the redemption of our *bodies*. Our *souls* have already been redeemed by the blood of Christ, but our bodies will be redeemed when we are raised or changed at the Rapture: "And not only they, but we also who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body" (Romans 8:23).

When writing to the Corinthians, Paul based his plea to practical holiness on the fact that the Spirit of God was dwelling in them. We find here two strong motives for a holy walk: their bodies were the temple of the Holy Spirit; and they were bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

Born-again believers are "sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26). You cannot be naturally born twice, nor can you be spiritually born twice. The new birth is never repeated. Natural birth makes

you a child of your natural parents and spiritual birth makes you a child of God. This relationship with God is an eternal relationship.

As stated before, when a Christian sins, he does not forfeit the relationship of a child with his father, but he does forfeit the joy of it. After his sin, David did not pray for restoration of *salvation*, but for restoration of the *joy* of salvation (Ps. 51:12).

Peter versus Judas

What about Judas Iscariot, the disciple who betrayed Jesus? Here we must point out the important difference between a backslider and an apostate. Peter, in self-confidence yet real love for his Master, vowed that he would face prison and death for his beloved Lord. Yet at the accusation of a servant girl he denied his Master with oaths and cursing. Peter sinned, but his faith did not fail (Lk. 22:31-34, 61-62). How easily we can commit such sins! However, in the darkest hour, in moments of the fiercest temptation, the weakest faith always clings to Christ even while the lips may cruelly deny him. A true believer may go down

into terrible depths of evil and thus lose his joy and usefulness, but there is one thing he cannot do: he cannot, like Judas, give up Christ. The new nature which God gave us when we were born again will not allow it.

Judas in his apostate condition *sold* his Master; Peter *denied* his Master. Judas was never born again; he never had the new nature within him. He merely followed the Lord outwardly. He never had a change of heart. In speaking of Judas in John 6:70-71, Jesus told the disciples plainly, "one of you is a devil." Judas was ready and willing to sell his Master for a little earthly gain.

Sad to say, many new-but-true believers needlessly worry about being lost. They sometimes use the sin of Judas and his tragic end as an example. Many believers have followed in the steps of Peter in *denying* that they know Christ. But no true child of God has ever gone, nor can go, in the way of Judas, the apostate, and *give up* Christ. Backsliding is not renouncing Christianity, but failing in that holy separated walk which God desires of His children for their blessing.

Peter was a backslider for whom the Lord prayed and on whom the Lord looked

(Lk. 22:32,61). That touching look of grieved and injured love broke the heart of the poor backslider: "Peter went out and wept bitterly" (v. 62). Soon he was restored to fellowship with the Lord. His true repentance showed that he was a real believer and follower of Christ. Provision is made in the advocacy of Christ with the Father for the restoration of backsliders (1 Jn. 2:1). But of apostates it is written: "For it is impossible ... if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance" (Heb. 6:4-6). A true believer is one who has not only "tasted," but in a spiritual sense has gone on to eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man in real appropriating faith (Jn. 6:53). One may *taste* and *perish* (Heb. 6), but to *eat* is to *live forever* (Jn. 6:51,58).

The sheep of Christ may stray, but the Shepherd of the sheep will bring him safely to Himself. Judas was not a true sheep of Christ; he was a wolf in sheep's clothing. He willfully sinned and so brought upon himself the awful judgment of fiery indignation recorded in Hebrews 10:26-29, a judgment which cannot overtake even the weakest believer.

In one sense Judas was sanctified (set apart), just like all who profess Christ share in that general sanctification. It embraces all who are outwardly separated to Christianity, the only "religion" which provides a Savior. When there is no real change of heart this outward separation to God is given up. This is the sanctification referred to in Hebrews 10:29. To sin "willfully" (v. 26) is to deliberately with heart and mind renounce Christ and become His adversary, which effectively tramples the Son of God under foot (v. 29). This is what Judas did when he sold his Master into the hands of those who hated Jesus and tried to destroy Him.

We see an example of this general sanctification in 1 Corinthians 7:14. The unbelieving partner is in a special place of blessing (set apart) because of his or her relationship with a believer. The believing partner prays for the other one and is a testimony as well. These are blessings for the unsaved partner even though he or she may not realize it. Each one must take the step of faith individually and receive Jesus Christ as Savior for salvation.

Safe in His Hands

God's ultimate control of our lives, His dealings with us and our eternal security are entirely in His hands, the hands of our Lord and Savior, our mighty, everlasting Friend. He wants to impart confidence and His own holy calmness to the weakest of His children. We are with Him and He is with us in the storms of life and in times of calm. We are as safe as He is.

The One who controls winds and waves, the armies of heaven and men on earth – is Jesus. He died to *make us* His own; He lives to *keep* His own and He will come again soon to *take* His own. His death on the cross secures our *salvation* as sinners and His life in heaven secures our *deliverance* as saints, for “He ever lives to make intercession” for us (Heb. 7:25).

Again, the strength of our security lies in the fact that God's character and our eternal safety are vitally connected and stand or fall together. “I rest on the justice of God,” said a dying Christian. The righteous character of God is inseparably bound up with the salvation of the weakest believer. The

eternal loss of a soul who trusted in Christ is awful to contemplate, but more awful still would be the tarnishing of God's character in the sight of the universe. To think that God could fail to keep one who had turned to Him from sin – that is impossible! Believers – young and old, weak and strong – are kept for salvation by a power outside themselves, “kept by the power of God” (1 Pet. 1:5), and declared just by God.

Justification

“It is God who justifies” (Rom. 8:33). Justification is an act of the Judge – a sentence of declared righteousness pronounced by Him in favor of the one He justifies. Justification is not something that happens in the heart of a sinner, but a change in his standing before the Judge. Once guilty and awaiting the sentence of eternal banishment from the face of the Judge, the sinner is now justified (declared not guilty) and received into eternal favor with God. This is what God does for the repentant sinner who puts his trust in the work of Christ on the cross.

God is, in fact, a just Judge who applies the law with justice. God is the Sovereign Judge of all. Although He is full of mercy and love, yet He also must be just in order to be consistent with Himself. The justice of God demands death for sin: "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

Justified by Blood

So how can He show mercy in saving a guilty sinner from eternal death and judgment to come? How can we reconcile His justice with His mercy? We get the answer in Romans 5:8-9: "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified *by His blood*, we shall be saved from wrath through Him."

God does not want the death of the sinner; He would like all to be saved (Eze. 18:23; 2 Pet. 3:9). But it would be incompatible with His character as a just Judge to save sinners simply because of His love for them. He would be violating His own law if He did so. Suppose the Judge, after pronouncing sentence on the guilty, proves His love by sending His own Son to undergo

the death sentence that the guilty one deserved. Would not the Judge then be just in setting the guilty one free? That is exactly what God has done; He justified us by the blood of His Son. His well-beloved Son has "appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. 9:26). "Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24).

Justified by Grace

Now we come to another side of justification. In Romans 3:24-26 we are seen as "being justified freely *by His grace,*" yet he still remains the just Judge. We see how God can apply His free grace (or unmerited favor) "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation (covering) by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness ... that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

God's grace provided the means by which sinners justly doomed to hell can be saved and have eternal life because of what our Redeemer suffered on the cross. God's justice is fully met and satisfied by the Redeemer whom He has provided.

Justified by Faith

How then can the guilty sinner apply this justification that the death of Christ has secured for him? It is by faith, which is another facet of justification. Romans 5:1 and 10:10 tell us: "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," and "with the heart one believes to righteousness."

So then God is just in pardoning the sinner who comes to Him through faith in Christ. We could think of Him as saying, "Your guilt is fully recognized; you certainly deserve judgment, but I love you. You are free because My Son paid for your sins. He paid your debt. In justice to what He has done on the cross for you, I set you free."

In view of this, what does the law have to do with justification? Absolutely nothing. "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:28). Faith is the opposite of law. "But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for 'The just shall live by faith.' Yet the law is not of faith, but 'The man who does them shall

live by them' " (Gal. 3:11-12). The sinner needs life but the law can only condemn him to death. Faith recognizes that "the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

What is the purpose of the law? "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:19-20). Its purpose is definitely not justification: "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified ... Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith"(Gal. 2:16; 3:24).

Completely Justified

Justification is complete and eternal. "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin" (Rom. 4:8). "Their sins and

lawless deeds I will remember no more” (Heb. 10:17). “Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies” (Rom. 8:33). “By Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39).

God’s justification of us is complete and perfect because Christ paid for all of our sins, not just part of them – not just the sins committed before we believed. When Jesus Christ gave His life, all our sins were in the future; but God who sees the future as well as the past laid them all on Christ (Isa. 53:6; 1 Pet. 2:24). Therefore God will never bring any sins to the charge of those He justifies. God has justified them according to the merits of Christ and will remember their sins no more.

The justified sinner has nothing more to do with judgment: judgment is past for him. John 5:24 says that he “shall not come into judgment.” This is his judicial standing before God as Judge of all.

Of course a child of God will experience the discipline of his holy Father, which is a proof of relationship. It is “child training” to teach His own to hate and avoid all that

is inconsistent with His holiness (Heb. 12:1-11; 1 Pet. 1:14-21). The Lord said, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten" (Rev. 3:19). "If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned (judged) with the world" (1 Cor. 11:31-32).

Clothed with His Righteousness

All such judgment or chastening has to do with this life and never brings in question the believer's eternal acceptance before God. The sheep of Christ is clothed in the "Robe of righteousness" and is enabled to stand in the presence of God. "Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them" (Gen. 3:21). God made these coats and dressed them both with His own hand. So He has also in His grace provided for us a robe of righteousness. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself is that Robe of righteousness. He is "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS," "who became for us wisdom from God – and righteousness," (Jer. 23:6; 1 Cor. 1:30). God can declare the sinner "righteous"

because His righteousness has been fully and perfectly met in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus told a parable about a lost, rebellious son in Luke 15:11-32. Upon the son's return and confession the father gave him the "best robe." That "best robe" is a picture of Christ, the Robe of righteousness which displaces the filthy rags of self-righteousness (Isa. 64:6).

Christ's resurrection is the proof of our justification: "Who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification" (Rom 4:25). We see the Lord Jesus seated at God's right hand after having "by Himself purged our sins" (Heb. 1:3), so we know God is satisfied with the work of His dear Son on the cross. By one act of righteousness in obedience to the will of God, Christ offered Himself up without spot, glorified God and purged away our sins. God puts that righteousness to the account of all who believe in Jesus (Rom. 5:18-19; 4:5-6).

The believing sinner is clothed by God in all the merit and value of Christ's work on the cross. He is accepted into favor with God, the righteous Judge, because of that

beautiful Robe. God “made Him (Christ) who knew no sin to be sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21). In love for us He judged Christ there on the cross as though He were (in His sinless nature) what we are (in our sinful nature). The believing sinner is accepted by God in righteousness and so receives justification that brings life. “Much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ ... Even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of (or “that brings”) life ... So that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 5:17-18,21).

The Judgment Seat of Christ

Another thing to consider on this topic is the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10).

Sometimes the judgment seat of Christ is misunderstood, causing fear or confusion to a believer as to his eternal safety and reward. Although this verse is part of a letter addressed to the church at Corinth, it

has a much wider application. When the Apostle Paul said, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ," he meant all who belong to the Lord. The judgment seat of Christ is the ultimate tribunal before which believers must stand. There each one will receive his reward for the good done during his life on earth.

Paul recognized the seriousness of this and never lost sight of his responsibility to his Master. He thought it a small thing to be judged by men. "He who judges me is the Lord," he said, and when He comes He will "bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts; and then each one's praise will come from God" (1 Cor. 4:4-5). We should be greatly concerned about this because the things done here on earth will be revealed at the judgment seat of Christ – whether good or bad – and valued at their true worth.

We will see our life as God sees it now. "Then I shall know just as I also am known" (1 Cor. 13:12). We will remember God's patience with us in our unconverted days and his tender dealings with us during our lives on earth. We will remember how he guarded, guided, restored, forgave

and led us step by step to an ever-growing knowledge of Himself. This should cause us to adore Him now and so much more when we are there where all is fully known! The riches of God's pardoning grace will be better known then, as will the richness of Christ's atoning blood that covered our sins.

The thought of the judgment seat of Christ should not cause fear unless we have drifted away from God. But it should make us serious: it is intended to do so. It reminds us that our lives should be lived and spent in a way that we may receive the "well done" of our Master in that day when He will come with His reward. It certainly will be no trivial thing to stand before the judgment seat and have the Lord point out our works that were not worthy of reward: works done for selfish reasons or from other wrong or impure motives.

What a contrast it will be for those who reject the gospel! They will experience the judgment of God on the basis of their works (Rev. 20:11-12), since they have rejected God's love, grace and the way of salvation provided through His beloved Son. Paul, knowing this, was compelled to

persuade men. He begged them to be reconciled to God. The terror of the Lord was very real to him. He knew nothing about the recent theories that God's love would merely overlook all wickedness and rebellion of man. Paul declares that there will be "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil" (Rom. 2:8-9). The great white throne, the opened books, the impartial trial, the terrible sentence and everlasting punishment of the wicked were great realities to the Apostle Paul. They should be to us also if we love the souls of our fellow men and women.

Only believers will stand before the judgment seat of Christ, where their works will be evaluated. All unbelievers will stand before Christ at the great white throne, where their works will condemn them (Rev. 20:11-15). A millennium (1000 years) stands between these two events. It will not be decided at the judgment seat of Christ whether or not the one who believes in Jesus will be welcomed into heaven. This matter is settled on earth the moment we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. At that instant our sins are forever forgiven and

eternal life begins in our hearts, since we have responded to the love of God and have become a child of God, a sheep of Christ.

Can you say with the Apostle Paul, “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 created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39)?

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