

# What Does God's Word Say About Eternal Security And Falling Away

---

What Does God's Word Say

October 31, 2010

---

- I. What Does God's Word Say About Eternal Security and Falling Away?
  - A. Last Sunday, we began making our way through those scriptures that speak to the security we have in God and those scriptures that warn us of the possibility of falling away from the faith and being cut off from God's people.
  - B. All the scriptures used last Sunday were from the Old Testament which represents the old covenant. The old covenant was before the new covenant – which is not like the old. The old covenant was before the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It was before the Church age and the New Testament.
  - C. Today, we are living under the new covenant, in the Church age, and according to the scriptures, there is a difference between the old covenant and the new.
    1. Today, we will consider the differences and similarities between the two covenants as we make our way into the New Testament and bring this study to a close.
    2. In order to tie last Sunday to today, I am going to start with the same scripture we ended with last Sunday: “Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off” (**Romans 11:22**).
  - D. Prayer
- II. The difference between the old and new covenant was prophesied by Jeremiah way back in Old Testament days.
  - A. In **Jeremiah 31:31-34** we read, “Behold, days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. [It will not be] like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt – My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them, declares the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord, I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor

and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, declares the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

1. And so we see that in this new covenant God has made with us, one significant difference is that He writes His law on our hearts instead of tablets of stone. But there is one significant similarity as well – and that similarity is that He intends to be our God and us to be a people for His own possession. Now this similarity is important to take note of, for it connects the new covenant with the old and indicates two sides to the new covenant just like there was with the old.
2. The writer of Hebrews quotes this same prophecy from Jeremiah in **Hebrews 8:8-12**. Two of the truths He makes clear in referring to this prophecy is that:
  - a. First, God replaced the old covenant – as found in the Old Testament – with a new covenant,
  - b. Second, this new covenant is the covenant of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. No more are God’s people to rely on the sacrificial system that God established for His people under the old covenant to repair and maintain right relationship with God. Now we are to rely on Jesus Christ – his death, his resurrection, and his intercession before God on our behalf.
3. Jesus, himself, spoke of this new covenant on the night he was betrayed. While eating the Passover meal with his disciples, he took the cup and after giving thanks, He gave it to his disciples, saying: “Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins (**Matthew 26:27-28**). And Luke records Jesus as saying: “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood” (**Luke 22:20**).

B. So we see that Christ, our Savior, established this new covenant between God and all who put their faith and trust in Jesus for salvation – a salvation that, according to God’s Word, saves us from the penalty, the power and the practice of sin.

1. The apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, in writing to the church in Rome, said: “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (**Romans 6:23**).
  - a. And again Paul writes: “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ . . . For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. [Therefore], God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while

we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him (**Romans 5:1-9**).

- b. And so we see that those who put their faith and trust in Jesus for salvation are saved from the penalty of sin, that is, from eternal damnation and separation from God.
2. Though being saved from the penalty of sin is a marvelous gift of God's grace, He did not stop there. God also saves us from the power of sin, that is, from sin's rule or dominion over us.
  - a. Returning to the apostle Paul's words, we read: "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin (**Romans 6:4-7**).
  - b. And further on Paul writes: "For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace" (**Romans 6:14**). The apostle John says the same thing in similar words when he writes: "The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil" (**I John 3:8**).
  - c. Therefore, the scriptures teach that the salvation brought to us through Jesus Christ, not only saves us from the penalty of sin, but also from the power of sin's dominion over us – which means we no longer have to sin.
3. Added to our salvation from the penalty and power of sin is God's gracious work of saving us from the practice of sin. John, in his first letter to Christians of all ages makes it very clear that what he was writing in his letter was being written so we would not go on sinning. Yet he acknowledges that sin is a possibility for the new covenant believer when he says: "And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (**I John 2:1**).
  - a. Now when he says, "And if anyone sins," he is admitting sin is a possibility in the Christian's life while making it clear it is to no longer be a constant or perpetual or persistent or practiced part.
  - b. He further clarifies God's position on the practice of sin when he says: "Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. You know that [Jesus] appeared in order to take

away sins; and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in [Jesus continues to practice] sin; no one who [continues to practice] sin has seen Him or knows Him” (**I John 3:4-6**). And further on John says: “No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot [practice] sin, because he is born of God” (**I John 3:9**).

- c. And what kind of thoughts, words and deeds does God label as sin? Paul gives us several lists, but the one in **Galatians 5:19-21** is sufficient to make the point: “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”
  - d. Paul also speaks clearly about this matter of practicing sin, when he says: “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. Therefore do not let sin reign (*have sovereign power, dominate, prevail*) in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting (*submitting*) the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God” (**Romans 6:1-4, 12-13**).
  - e. And finally, Paul says of those who have been born again: “For the love of Christ controls us (*or compels us*), having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf” (**II Corinthians 5:14-15**).
4. The point of all these scriptures is that the new covenant saves us completely. How? By means of the redeeming work of Christ; by means of God writing the law on our hearts; and by means of Jesus bringing us into a reconciled and personal relationship with God. Paul summarizes this complete salvation, that is, salvation from the penalty, power and practice of sin when he says: “Therefore if anyone is in

Christ, he is a new creature; the old things [have] passed away; behold, new things have come” (**II Corinthians 5:17**).

- C. Now it is understandable that some consider the new covenant separate from the old covenant as if the two exist totally apart from each other. After all, the old seems to have been put to rest and the new established by the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
1. And this is true, the old has been put to rest, as the writer of Hebrews said: “When [God] said, ‘A new covenant,’ [it means] He has made the first obsolete. [And] whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear” (**Hebrews 8:13**).
    - a. But one covenant being put to rest so another can take its place – on the one hand, and being two totally separate covenants – on the other hand, are two different things.
    - b. To treat the two covenants as totally separate requires seeing them as having nothing to do with each other, and the scriptures seem to make it clear that that is not the case.
  2. In Luke’s record of Zacharias’ prophecy about his new son, John, we read: “. . . Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: ‘Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant; to show mercy toward our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to Abraham our father, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days’ ” (**Luke 1:67-69,72-75**). The point being made here is that Jesus and his new covenant are the fulfillment or the completion or, we might say, a revision of the covenant God made with Abraham.
  3. God, in speaking through the apostle Paul addresses this truth in the letter to the Galatians. Paul writes: “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the nations will be blessed in you.’ So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer . . . in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (**Galatians 3:6-9,14**).

4. Therefore, according to the scriptures, we can rightly say that God has connected the old covenant with the new. And in that the two are connected – and add to that that under the new covenant we are saved completely – it is reasonable to believe that the new covenant is two sided just as the old covenant was.
  - a. In fact, Peter affirmed the two sides of the new covenant on the day of Pentecost when, in his sermon, he quoted a prophetic word given by God to Moses.
  - b. Here is what Peter said: “And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord . . . [For] Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed to everything He says to you. And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among [God’s] people’ ” (**Acts 3:17-23**).

III. In speaking about fulfilling His part in the new covenant, God used language that sounds very similar to the language He used in speaking about fulfilling His part in the old covenant.

- A. Consider how clear and strong the language is when God tells us how secure our salvation is from His side in these words of Christ:
  1. “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day” (**John 6:37-40**).
  2. Yet should we think we can enter into this covenant of salvation with no other responsibility toward God than to believe in Jesus for salvation from the penalty of sin, God says through the apostle Paul: “But if some of the branches were broken off [i.e., unbelieving, unrepentant Jews], and you [Gentiles by birth], being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports

you. You will say then, 'Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.' Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off" (**Romans 11:17-22**).

B. Speaking of the security we have in our salvation, Jesus said: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will 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 the Father's hand" (**John 10:27-29**).

1. Yet this same Jesus warns us of what can happen if we do not remain steadfast in our faith, when he says: "The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away" (**Matthew 13:20-21**).
2. Now it is possible some may say that the rocky soil represents unbelievers who got ever so close to saving faith but were never really saved. To this we respond with Christ's words as recorded by Luke: "Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away" (**Luke 8:13**).

C. Jesus said: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (**John 5:24**). And the writer of Hebrews adds these words: "Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (**Hebrews 7:25**).

1. Surely it seems irrational or at the very least, misleading, to tell us we have eternal life if that life can be lost by falling away from the faith. How can something be eternal yet not be eternal?
2. Though this specific question is never specifically answered in the scriptures, this same Jesus said: "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the

branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned” (**John 15:2,4-6**).

D. The apostle Paul, in writing to the Christians in Rome said: “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (**Romans 8:1-4**).

1. Yet the writer of Hebrews warns us about not taking seriously the responsibility we have toward God as a result of receiving His gracious gift of salvation, when he writes: “For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.’ And again, ‘The Lord will judge His people.’ It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (**Hebrews 10:26-31**).
2. And a little further he says: “Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay. But My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul “ (**Hebrews 10:35-39**).

E. We find great encouragement and hope concerning the faithfulness and love of God – toward all who belong to Him – in these words from the apostle Paul: “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us,



who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, 'For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (**Romans 8:31-39**).

1. There are those who say that the phrase, "or any other created thing" must include the believer, signifying that once a person is born again he cannot remove himself or separate himself from the love of God which we have in Christ Jesus.
  - a. Whether that be true or a misapplication of those words, I cannot say. What I do know is that the writer of Hebrews said: "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end" (**Hebrews 3:12-14**).
  - b. "Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, 'As I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest,' although His works were finished from the foundation of the world" (**Hebrews 4:1-3**).
2. And Peter, addressing this same issue says: "For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment

handed on to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, 'A dog returns to its own vomit,' and, 'A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire' " (**II Peter 2:20-22**).

F. Paul, in writing to the Christians in Ephesus, says: "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation – having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory" (**Ephesians 1:13-14**).

1. Yet to Timothy, Paul writes: "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons" (**I Timothy 4:1**).

2. And Jesus adds his own words of warning when he says: "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved" (**Matthew 24:9-13**).

G. And finally, all who come to faith in Jesus are recipients of the grace and mercy of God. The apostle Paul in speaking about this great truth speaks of it in light of both sides – God's side and our side. In **Romans 2:4-11**, Paul says: "Do not think lightly of the riches of God's kindness and tolerance and patience, for it is the kindness of God that leads you to repentance. But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.

IV. What does all this mean?

A. Certainly it does not mean we can, in any way, earn or secure our salvation, for there is only one way we can personally pay the penalty for our sin – die physically and spend eternity separated from God in the depths of hell.

Without Christ paying this debt in our place, we have only ourselves to pay it.

- B. And just as certainly, it does not mean that our responsibility to God or our participation in God's new covenant begins and ends with believing on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation from the penalty of sin. As the apostle Paul says: "So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh – for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by [obligating yourself] the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (**Romans 8:12-13**).
- C. And though we are warned of God to be on our guard against falling away, it does not mean we cannot live each day with a spiritually healthy, God-ordained assurance of our salvation.
  - 1. Here again, the apostle Paul speaks to us about this when he says: "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (**Romans 8:14**).
  - 2. Now when he says, "all who are being led by the Spirit," he is clearly inferring there must be willful and persistent following on our part to the leading of the Spirit. And we can gauge or even test this willful and persistent following of the Spirit's leading. With a good dose of self-honesty coupled with self-examination, we can know if we are or are not willfully and persistently following the leading of the Holy Spirit. If we are, our hearts will not condemn us and we can live in the assurance of our salvation – as well we should.
- D. And finally, presenting these scriptures to you this way does not mean you must agree with what I have presented. As I have said from the beginning of this study, sincere, faithful Christians have disagreed and will continue to disagree about eternal security and falling away from the faith. My goal has been to show you the value of dealing with any topic, and especially any controversial topic through a search of all the scriptures related to that topic as opposed to using a select few or turning to innovative reasoning to explain away those that disagree with your position.
- E. May God and His word be glorified in all things. And in regard to issues like eternal security and falling away, may we esteem Him and His word more highly than our theology or the culture and leanings of any denomination or popular teachers.