

Free! Take one!

# That They all May Be One



John 17:21

Chapter five

## Once Saved, Always Saved?

Clarence W. Fell

## Chapter Five

# What Does the Bible Say?

The doctrine of *Once Saved, Always Saved* is popular among some religious groups. It is one of the issues that generates division today. If we are going to unite and stand together on a solid book, chapter, and verse foundation, then we must address this divisive doctrine. We can not let Satan use this doctrine to keep us apart.

Our goal is to learn the truth. With very little effort you could find a preacher willing to tell you whatever you want to hear. Preachers can preach anything they want, but they can't change the truth of God's Word. If you follow a false preacher you will suffer eternal ruin (Matthew 7:21-23; 15:14). In our search for truth the Bible is the only source that counts. In our restoration effort we do not want to defend family or denominational traditions. We want to stand squarely upon the Word of God. This means that we must set aside any preconceived notions and let the Word speak. We must love the truth above all else.

The *Once Saved, Always Saved* doctrine is not a harmless little doctrine that we can just dismiss as a curiosity. It has serious consequences. It contributes to the moral decay of our communities. It undermines the strength and welfare of our neighborhoods and families. Why should people spend their limited time and energy defending high moral values when their preachers tell them that they will go to heaven no matter how they live?

Even more tragic than the present problems this false doctrine can cause, is the tragedy that awaits those who build their eternal hope upon it. Many who place their hope in this doctrine live a lukewarm religious life. They place themselves under the condemnation of Revelation 3:16, "*So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.*" These people live their lives with a false hope. They are being misled by erring teachers. By the time most of

them come to understand this, it will be too late (Matthew 15:14). This false hope is cruel beyond description. It's demonic.

In our search for the truth our emotions do not count. Whatever we might feel deep down in our heart does not matter. Our deepest and most sincere feelings do not change the truth of God's word (Proverbs 3:5; 28:26). God's truth, as revealed in the Bible, is the only thing that counts.

Let's see what the Bible has to say.

## Endure to the End

While some preachers tell their members that they can relax, the Bible teaches us that we must endure to the end. The Christian race does not end at conversion but rather begins. Only those who compete by the rules will be crowned (II Timothy 2:5). The path of least resistance is condemned.

Throughout this chapter I have printed portions of verses in bold italics to emphasize the point. I encourage you to look up each of these verses in your own Bible and read them in their entire context.

Mark 13:13 *"...but **he who endures to the end will be saved.**"*

John 8:31 *"...**if you abide in My word, you are My disciples...**"*

I Corinthians 10:12 *"...let him who thinks he stands **take heed lest he fall.**"*

Hebrews 3:6 *"Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are **if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.**"*

Hebrews 3:12 *"...lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in **departing from the living God.**"*

Hebrew 3:14 “...we have become partakers of Christ **if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.**”

I Corinthians 15:2 “...by which also **you are saved, if you hold fast** that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.”

II John 9 “**Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine** of Christ does not have God...”

Revelation 2:10 “...**be faithful until death** and I will give you the crown of life...”

Revelation 2:26 “...he who overcomes, and keeps My works **until the end...**”

Revelation 3:15,16 “...because you are lukewarm...**I will vomit you out...**”

Victory is conditional. We must be faithful until death. Those people who believe that they can quit the race before they finish it and still receive the prize are in for a rude awakening. Hebrews 11:6 teaches that God, “...is a rewarder of those who **diligently seek Him.**”

## Warnings of Departures

While some preachers delight in giving their members a sense of comfort and assurance by teaching the doctrine of *Once Saved, Always Saved*, the Bible gives us many warnings against departing from the Christian way. A person has to wonder why such warnings exist if the doctrine of *Once Saved, Always Saved* is really in the Bible.

In Romans 8:12,13 Paul warned, “...brethren...**if you live according to the flesh you will die...**” Paul is warning them about spiritual death, the second death. We know that Paul has the second death in view because all people, regardless of whether faithful or sinner, die physically (Hebrews 9:27).

In I Corinthians 3:16, 17 Paul gives another stern warning, “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? **If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him.** For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.” Paul is simply saying that if Christians defile themselves with sin, then God will destroy them. That is certainly not the popular modern doctrine of *Once Saved, Always Saved*.

In Galatians 1:6-9 Paul warns, “...If we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, **let him be accursed.**”

In Galatians 5:1-4 Paul tells his readers, “...**you have become estranged from Christ...fallen from grace.**” How is this possible if the doctrine of *Once Saved, Always Saved* is true?

In Galatians 6:7,8 Paul taught, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; **for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.**” The truth of this passage is quite simple, yet the doctrine of *Once Saved, Always Saved* teaches that a man can sow one thing and reap another.

I Timothy 4:1 “...the Spirit expressly says that in latter times **some will depart from the faith...**”

II Timothy 2:16-18 “Hymenaeus and Philetus...**who have strayed concerning the truth...**”

In James 2:10 we read, “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet **stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.**” James emphasizes the need to carefully follow the Word. But the doctrine of *Once Saved, Always Saved* teaches that a man can willingly violate many Bible teaching and still not be held guilty at all.

I Peter 5:8 “...your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, **seeking whom he may devour.**” Why does Peter take the time to give us this warning if it is actually impossible for Satan to overcome a Christian? Obviously, we are not as secure as the doctrine of *Once*

Saved, Always Saved would have us believe.

Revelation 22:18,19, *“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, **God shall take away his part from the Book of life**, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”* This passage poses quite a problem for those who teach the doctrine of *Once Saved, Always Saved*. It teaches that a person can have a part in the book of Life, and then be removed from the book of Life because of sinful behavior. If John were with us today he would not be preaching the doctrine of *Once Saved, Always Saved*.

## Examples of Falling Away

While some preachers assure their members that it is impossible to fall away, the Bible gives us several examples of Christians that lost their hope of heaven, or were in danger of losing their hope. A person who is truly interested in the truth has to question the validity of the *Once Saved, Always Saved* doctrine, especially in the light of the following Bible verses.

Judas was a disciple and an apostle of Jesus (Matthew 10:1-4). In John 17:12 we read, *“...Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition.”* In Acts 1:25 we read, *“...Judas by transgression fell.”* Being one of the original twelve apostles did not guarantee Judas a home in heaven.

Ananias and Sapphira were liars and died because of their lies (Acts 5:1-11). Revelation 21:8 teaches, *“...**all liars** shall have part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”* Ananias and Sapphira gave up their hope of heaven for a lie.

In Acts 8:13 we read about the conversion of Simon the sorcerer,

“Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip...” Later on in Acts 8:20 we read where Peter said to Simon, “**Your money perish with you...for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you**” (see Acts 8:13-24). Simon was in danger of losing heavenly home.

In Luke 8:11-15 we find the parable of the sower. This parable explains that some will, “...*believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.*”

In I Timothy 5:8 Paul said that a Christian man who does not provide for his own family has, “...*denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*”

In I Timothy 5:15 Paul is sad because, “...*some have already turned aside after Satan.*”

In I Timothy 6:21 Paul observes that, “...*some have strayed concerning the faith...*”

In James 5:19,20 we learn that when one Christian turns another Christian back from sin that a soul is saved “*from death.*” How is it possible that a soul is saved “*from death*” if the doctrine of *Once Saved, Always Saved* is true? Obviously, James did not teach the *Once Saved, Always Saved* doctrine.

## Grace and Obedience

Part of the problem in resolving the *Once Saved, Always Saved* issue is that many people believe that God’s grace excludes effort on man’s part. If there is anything to be done, God does it, man exerts no effort. Consequently, they conclude that since man could do nothing to get himself to heaven, then man cannot do anything to lose his hope of heaven, either.

This popular idea of grace does not take into account some important scriptures. When we look at the Bible we see that God's grace does include something for man to do. We also learn that God's grace works with man's surrender and obedience. Let's look at some examples.

In Genesis 6:8 we read, "*But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.*" It is clear that Noah was saved by the grace of God, yet Noah and his sons still had to build the ark. Grace did not exclude obedient effort on their part, but rather grace revealed the efforts that they should exert.

Lot also was saved by the grace of God, yet Lot still had to put forth effort and obey God. When Lot's wife disobeyed God by looking back, grace did not keep her safe, she was turned to a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:19). Grace did not exclude effort and obedience on the part of man, but rather grace revealed the obedient efforts that God expected.

Later on in the Bible we read where God gave Joshua the city of Jericho. God said, "*...I have given Jericho into your hand...*" (Joshua 6:2). It was a gift from God, but Joshua and his men still had to march around the city just as God had told them to do. Just because God gave them Jericho as a gift did not exclude obedient effort on their part, but rather grace revealed what God expected of them.

In II Kings 5 we read about Naaman the leper. Naaman the leper was healed by the grace of God. It was a gift, yet he had to obey God's word and dip seven times in the river Jordan to receive this gift. Grace did not exclude effort on the part of Naaman, but rather told Naaman what to do in order to receive the healing he desired.

In Matthew 7:21 Jesus taught, "*Not everyone that says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, **but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.***" Jesus did not teach that man is passive. Jesus taught that man plays an important role in reaching that heavenly home.

In John 14:23,24 we see again the import role that man plays when



Jesus said, “*If anyone loves Me, he will **keep My word...***” (See also I John 5:3). God spells love, O-B-E-Y. Obedience is the effort that God requires of man.

Paul gives this warning in II Thessalonians 1:8 telling us that when Jesus returns He will take, “*...vengeance on those who...**do not obey the gospel...***”

Hebrews 5:9 teaches that Jesus, “*...became the author of eternal salvation **to all who obey Him.***”

These verses show us that the modern concept of grace that excludes effort on the part of man is out of step with the Bible. Grace does not exclude obedience, but rather grace reveals what we must obey in order to receive the crown of eternal life.

## Arguments Made in Defense of Once Saved, Always Saved

Some people hold to the doctrine of *Once Saved, Always Saved* no matter what. They simply refuse to give it up. They ignore all the Bible verses that we have looked at in this study. They insist that once a person is saved he is guaranteed heaven no matter how evil or wicked he might live after being saved. Several arguments are advanced in defense of the *Once Saved, Always Saved* doctrine. Let's take a look at these arguments and see how they stand up in the light of the Scriptures.

**1. A son can't be unborn. Once you are your daddy's child then you are always your daddy's child.**

This argument pushes the father and child comparison too far. It focuses on the facts of a physical birth and forgets that salvation is a spiritual birth. It also overlooks the fact that a child can be disinherited.

This argument also overlooks the fact that the scriptures teach that we are adopted into the family of God (Romans 8:15; Ephesians 1:5; Galatians 4:5). Paul said we were “*grafted in*” (Romans 11:17). He also said that we could be taken out again, “*For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either*” (Romans 11:21). Obviously, using physical birth to prove the doctrine of *Once Saved, Always Saved* is a mistake.

Another inconsistency with this argument must be pointed out. A person has no choice about which family he is born into physically, but he has a choice about his spiritual family. Adoption into the family of God is conditional. The condition is obedient surrender. This fact is not popular, but it is the teaching of Mathew 7:21-23, Romans 2:8, II Thessalonians 1:8, and Hebrews 5:9.

This argument also makes us ask, how then did Adam and Eve fall? If once you are your daddy’s child you are always your daddy’s child, then Adam and Eve could never fall, but they did. This argument gets even more bizarre when applied to Satan and the fallen angels for whom

## God’s Plan of Salvation

Hear the Gospel: Romans 10:14-17

Believe: John 3:16; Hebrews 11:6

Repent: Luke 13:3, Acts 17:30,31

Confess: Romans 10:9,10; Matthew 10:32,33

Be united with Christ in baptism: Romans 6:3-5

None of the above steps save in and of themselves. It is the grace of God that appointed these as steps leading to the saving blood of Jesus. To get to the saving blood each step must be taken just as it is presented in the Bible. These steps only have value because God’s grace has so granted. Without God’s grace these steps would be worthless. Have you followed these steps to the saving blood of Jesus?

hell has been prepared (Matthew 25:41). How did these fall from their position if it's impossible for a son of God to fall away?

**2. *The believer already has eternal life. It is a present possession!*** (I John 5:11-13)

The interpretation of a passage must be in harmony with the rest of the Scriptures. If an explanation of one passage contradicts another passage then we must look for another explanation that brings the verses together in harmony. This is what we must do with I John 5:11-13. The *Once Saved, Always Saved* interpretation creates a conflict with several other verses that are very, very clear in their meaning.

Jesus did not teach that eternal life was a present possession. He said that the straight and narrow way “*leads to life*,” not that the travelers already have it (Matthew 7:14).

Paul and Peter both taught that eternal life was waiting in Heaven (I Corinthians 9:27, Philippians 3:12-14, Colossians 1:5, II Timothy 4:7,8, and I Peter 1:4).

Today we have the “*promise of eternal life*” (II Timothy 1:1). We have the “*hope of eternal life*” (Titus 1:2), but we don't possess it yet. If we have it as a present possession, then Paul asks, “...*why does one still hope for what he sees?*” (Romans 8:24).

As long as we abide in Jesus we are assured of receiving eternal life, but if we stop abiding, God will cast us out (John 15:1-6).

When we read I John 5:11-13 we must not force an interpretation upon it that violates the clear teaching of Jesus, Peter, and Paul. When John spoke of believers having eternal life he meant it in the same “*reserved in heaven*” sense as the other verses listed above.

John also wrote, in the same letter, about the need to abide (I John

2:24). He wrote about the promise of eternal life (I John 2:25). He wrote about the hope that we have (I John 3:3). John even told us how to tell which Christians were faithful and which ones were not (I John 2:2-6). John does not turn around and contradict himself in I John 5:11-13 by telling us that we have already received our prize before we have finished our race. John also wrote John 15:1-6.

3. ***But Jesus said, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will in no wise cast out”*** (John 6:37).

Go back and read the entire text. The teaching of this text is that all who come to Jesus will be received. It does not teach that those who have previously come to Jesus and leave Him are still safe.

John 6:37 applies to those who are seeking Christ. John 15:1-6 applies to those who have wandered away from Christ. We could call one the “enrollment policy” and the other the “expulsion policy” of God.

Notice also that in John 15:1-6 it is God, not Jesus, who does the casting out. In John 6:37 Jesus receives all that the Father gives Him, but when the Father judges that it’s time to take punitive action, Jesus does not rebel against God. Jesus submits to the will of the Father. Paul said, “...*the head of Christ is God*” (I Corinthians 11:3).

4. ***“But Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment”*** (John 5:24).

The conditions that must be met to receive God’s blessings are stated in John 5:24. Jesus said that “***he who hears My word and believes***” would be blessed. Hearing and believing are not one time actions, but a continual way of life. If a person stops listening and

believing, then God will cast that person out (John 15:2,6).

We must resist the temptation to place an interpretation on this verses that would bring it into conflict with other verses. All the verses listed earlier in this study clearly state that the unfaithful will be punished. When our explanation is at odds with other verses, then we must seek an explanation that brings the verses together in harmony.

**5. But Paul taught that, "If anyone's work is burned, he will**

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***suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire”***

(I Corinthians 3:15).

The misuse of this verses is easily resolved by reading verses 16 and 17, “*Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.*”

Using I Corinthians 3:15 as a proof text for the *Once Saved, Always Saved* doctrine illustrates a common mistake. This mistake is the reason that many false doctrines get started. It is the common mistake of taking a verse out of context. In this text Paul is talking about teachers and their converts. His point is that if a teacher’s converts fall away the teacher will not be automatically punished too. Go back and read the complete text starting at verse 5 and Paul’s point will be clear.

#### **6. “*Sin interrupts fellowship but not the relationship.*”**

This is a rather humorous invention of man and shows how creative some people can become in their defense of a false doctrine. This idea is not taught in the Bible, but rather the exact opposite is taught in John 15:6 where Jesus clearly states that God will take away the unfruitful. He does not say that their fellowship will merely interrupted.

To see the humor of this argument imagine a man trying this line on this wife after he has been caught in adultery. Imagine, if you can, that the guilty husband tries to comfort his wife by assuring her that his adultery only interrupts their fellowship but does not interrupt their relationship. Will she agree? Neither does God.

Isaiah said that sin separates us from God, not that our fellowship is merely interrupted. Isaiah wrote, “*...your iniquities have separated you from God...*” (Isaiah 59:2).

Ezekiel 18:4, 24 also teaches that sin violates the relationship. Just because someone can create a clever little argument, that does not prove that God agrees with them. We must stand on the clear word of God and not put our hope in the clever inventiveness of man.

**7. But John said that, “Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God” (1 John 3:9)**

The misuse of this verse is easy to show just by referring back to 1 John 1:8 - 2:1 where John tells Christians what to do when they have sinned. John wrote, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”* Obviously, if it was impossible for a Christian to sin, then John would not have told Christians what to do when they sin.

So, what about the “does not” and “cannot” passage? This passage does not mean that it is impossible for a Christian to sin, but rather that such behavior is not acceptable for a Christian. For example, we might say that a soldier does not and cannot deny his country, yet that does not mean that it is impossible. It means that such behavior is unacceptable. In 1 John 5:18 he further explains, *“...but he who has been born of God keeps himself...”*

**8. Only the outer man sins, but the inner man remains free from the guilt of sin.**

This is another one of those clever arguments that sounds good to desperate people, but contradicts the Bible. The final result of this

arguments is eternal destruction. We must build our hope upon the clear statements of the Bible rather than on clever arguments. No matter how diligently man may try he will never design an argument that gets around the Bible truth.

Jesus taught that evil proceeds from the heart of man, from the inner man. Sin is not something that the outer man does independently of the inner man. Jesus said, *“For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man”* (Mark 7:21-23). Jesus is telling us that the outer man won't sin without the involvement of the inner man.

Paul taught that we will give an account of the deeds done in the body. He wrote, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad”* (II Corinthians 5:10). Paul says that we are accountable for the things done in the body. If our body does it, then we are accountable for it.

### **9. *Jesus blood is for past, present, and future sins.***

The question is not, will Jesus forgive sins? The question is, does He forgive sins automatically and unconditionally without man's confession and repentance? The idea of automatic and unconditional forgiveness is not in the Bible. Forgiveness is granted conditionally based upon repentance and confession.

In Acts 8:22 when Simon became guilty of sin, he was not automatically forgiven. He was told to, *“Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.”* The idea of automatic and unconditional forgiveness may be a pleasant idea to some people, but it is not in the Bible.



John wrote, *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (I John 1:9). The clear Bible facts show us that forgiveness is granted based upon our confession and repentance.

**10. *The unfaithful were professors of, but not possessors of salvation*** (I John 2:19).

It is true that some people were never truly converted. This fact does not change the teaching of John 15:2 where Jesus said, *"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away."* It does not change the teaching of I Corinthians 3:16,17 where Paul said, *"If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him."* It does not change the truth stated in Galatians 6:7,8, *"God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."* In some cases people are professors of faith, but not possessors of it. However, this does not prove the doctrine of *Once Saved, Always Saved*. It just explains why some professed Christians fall away.

**11. *The doctrine of Once Saved, Always Saved is a doctrine of love and compassion.***

The doctrine of *Once Saved, Always Saved* is a smooth and easy doctrine. It does satisfy many people, but Jesus said, *"Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it"* (Matthew 7:14). The *Once Saved, Always Saved* doctrine is actually a cruel doctrine that gives false hope and leads people into eternal ruin.

**12. *But the teaching that a person can fall away creates a yo-yo***

### ***kind of religion.***

In Ezekiel 18:21-27 God describes men changing from evil to good and good to evil. Paul said that we are to forgive one another as God in Christ also forgave us (Ephesians 4:32). Jesus said that we are to forgive each other 7 x 70 (Matthew 18:22). We see that God will forgive the erring child every time the child repents (II Peter 3:9).

If someone wants to call this yo-yo religion, then that is between them and God. However, I do not believe it is wise to use such disrespectful terms to refer to God's Word, His love, and His grace. The mere fact that a man can describe God's great forgiveness in such belittling terms does not prove the doctrine of *Once Saved, Always Saved* to be true. Such belittling descriptions do not change the truth of John 15:2,6, or I Corinthians 3:16,17.

**13. *But God promised that He would finish the work that He began*** (Philippians 1:6).

We can rest assured that God will do His part. God will not come up short and disappoint us. But let's not forget that this is a cooperative effort between man and God. In this same letter Paul also wrote, "*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*" (Philippians 2:12). God has provided us a plan of salvation that is guaranteed to work every time, but we must faithfully follow the plan that God has given us.

**14. *Do you mean to tell me that one sin, just one sin, could cost a Christian his hope of heaven?***

**Be faithful until death,  
and I will give you the crown of life.  
Revelation 2:10**

Isaiah wrote, *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts”* (Isaiah 55:8,9).

Paul wrote, *“If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are”* (I Corinthians 3:17).

James wrote, *“Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all”* (James 2:10). The Bible message may seem tough, but it is also very clear.

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**COMING NEXT CHAPTER**

**That They all  
May  
Be  
One**

John 17:21



Chapter six

**The Holy Spirit and Tongues**

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