

PROPHETIC STUDY SERIES

**ONCE SAVED**

**ALWAYS  
SAVED?**



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On occasion, I have inserted italics and brackets in Scripture quotations to enhance understanding, not to change the meaning.

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# Once Saved – Always Saved?

## Eternal Security

Some Christians believe that once a person is saved, he cannot be lost. How do people get the idea of eternal security? Does the Bible teach that once you have given your life to Christ and professed that Jesus is Lord, you are saved and can never backslide?

The rationale underlying “once saved – always saved” involves two steps.

First, this rationale maintains being born again is a punctiliar event, like the birth of a baby. In other words, salvation comes to a person the moment he is born again, not at the end of a lengthy qualifying process called sanctification.

Second, the rationale also maintains that once a person is saved, he becomes a child of God forever. The parallel offered is simple enough: Nothing can change the identity of our biological parents; therefore, nothing can change the identity of our spiritual Father. The conclusion is that once we become a child of God, we are saved, no matter what!

Advocates of eternal security use three Bible texts to support their position. First, Jesus said, “**My sheep**

listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; *no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.*"<sup>1</sup>

Second, Paul wrote, “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, *will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”<sup>2</sup>

Third, Paul penned, “That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that *he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.* What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. *Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.*”<sup>3</sup>

If these three passages were the only verses in the Bible written about salvation, there might be some legitimacy to the doctrine of eternal security. However,

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1 John 10:27-29, italics mine

2 Romans 8:38-39, italics mine

3 2 Timothy 1:12-14, italics mine

the Bible reveals much more about salvation; aligning all the Bible documents into one harmonious truth is a challenge.

The Bible teaches that long ago, Lucifer (the devil) lived in heaven. Lucifer lived in a perfect place with perfect beings. He served a perfect God – a God of love. Lucifer was blameless, the model of perfection and perfect in beauty. He had everything that a created being could be given – his beauty was exceptional, he had a sinless nature, and the highest position a created being could have!<sup>1</sup> He was a guardian cherub who stood beside God's throne. Unfortunately, Lucifer had a change of heart. He had it all and still, he fell into sin. Even worse, prior to being thrown out of heaven, Lucifer led one-third of God's angels to unite with him in rebellion against God!

Adam and Eve were also created as perfect beings. They were sinless and served a perfect God of love. They had everything that created beings could desire. They had happiness, holiness, and the Garden of Eden and yet, they fell. Lucifer deceived Eve; when Adam realized her fate, his love for Eve caused him to deliberately eat the forbidden fruit.

I have briefly reviewed these two failures to make a profound point. God's children have the power of

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<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel 28:12-18

choice – they always have; they always will. This means that God’s children, with the power of choice throughout eternity, can choose to rebel against the laws of God.

The fall of Lucifer and one-third of the angels proves that sinless beings can choose, and did choose, to sin. The fall of Adam and Eve proves that sinless humans can choose, and did choose, to sin. Because God’s children can choose to sin, what will prevent angels and humans from sinning at some point in the future? The answer to this question is amazing!

God has permitted sin to exist for thousands of years so the nature of sin can be fully understood. God has carefully documented the course of sin so that throughout eternity, endless generations can study the drama caused by sin. Earth has served as a theater for the universe.

This is the only place in all the universe where death, sorrow, suffering, disease, broken relationships, and hatred exist. This drama has been recorded in real time with technology that exceeds any technology man has produced. At any time in eternity’s future, if any hint of rebellion should arise, God can put out the fire by calling upon the redeemed from Earth, a host of ex-sinners who know all about the wages of sin and the

heartache it brings. The saints will meet with any person who is about to sin and there will be a show and tell presentation.

The redeemed will also remind the person who is contemplating sin that if he insists on sinning, there will be no rescue because God will not provide redemption for defiant sin. This is why God did not offer salvation to Lucifer and his angels.<sup>1</sup> The bottom line will be made clear: Sin has been proven to be an awful cancer that eventually turns sinners into predators. Therefore, the day you choose to sin, you will die.<sup>2</sup>

The drama of sin has important elements connected with eternal security.

First, we have a few million examples of holy angels who were eternally secure, but are now lost. They will be consumed by fire at the end of the 1,000 years.<sup>3</sup>

Second, Adam and Eve are two examples of holy people who were eternally secure, but fell.

Both instances, one in heaven and one on Earth, prove that eternal security is based on eternal submission to God's will. Consider these two texts: ***"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left,***

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1 Matthew 12:31-32; Hebrews 10:26

2 Genesis 2:17

3 Revelation 20:10, 15

**but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.”<sup>1</sup>**

The Bible also reveals that it is possible to fall away! **“It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, *who have shared in the Holy Spirit*, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age and *who have fallen away*, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.”<sup>2</sup>**

So, there is eternal security but it is conditional. **“If a righteous person turns from their righteousness and commits sin, they will die for it; because of the sin they have committed they will die. But if a wicked person turns away from the wickedness they have committed and does what is just and right, they will save their life. Because they consider all the offenses they have committed and turn away from them, that person will surely live; they will not die.”<sup>3</sup>**

Being born again is not a one-time event. There is a beginning moment to a spiritual life, but the way to success is to be spiritually renewed each day or our

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1 Hebrews 10:26-27, italics mine

2 Hebrews 6:4-6, italics mine

3 Ezekiel 18:26-28

carnal natures will quickly separate us from the Lord.<sup>1</sup> The apostle Paul knew that salvation belonged to those who finished the race! He said, “**Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.**”<sup>2</sup> “**I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.**”<sup>3</sup>

### **Are Children Born Lost or Saved?**

For twenty centuries, Christians have debated the question of how God deals with the death of children. In ancient times, infant mortality was high, so to make sure that infants would inherit eternal life, some Christians began baptizing infants as soon as possible after birth.

In fact, Catholics and a few other Christian groups currently believe that baptism is a requirement for eternal life; so they apply the sacrament of baptism to infants as

1 Romans 12:2-3; James 1:23-25

2 1 Corinthians 15:1-2, italics mine

3 2 Timothy 4:7-8, italics mine

soon as possible.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, most Protestants do not accept the idea that sacraments are necessary for salvation. Protestants believe that salvation comes through faith in Christ alone and baptism is regarded as an ordinance. An ordinance is an action a believer performs to show publicly that he or she is a follower of Christ, but it is not a requirement for salvation.

Christians differ on the meaning of baptism, but the question still remains “What happens to children who die before reaching the age of accountability?” Are they saved because they were baptized, condemned because they were born into the curse of sin, or does God deal with them as though they never existed?

I believe all children, in all religions and cultures, are born in a “saved” state. The Bible teaches all human beings are born with fallen natures. We come from the womb having a natural tendency toward selfishness, sin, and rebellion; however, I believe God does not impart guilt to children for their sins until they reach the age of accountability. Accountability means knowing the difference between right and wrong and having the ability to follow through with a conscientious decision to do right or wrong. For normal children, the age of accountability varies somewhere between the ages of 7 and 14.

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<sup>1</sup> John 3:5

In other words, God does not condemn a child to eternal death because Adam sinned, the child's parents are sinners, or the child is a natural-born sinner. If the blood of Jesus can justify an adult who has willingly sinned, then the blood of Jesus can also justify a child whose ability to reason is limited and knowledge of right and wrong is incomplete. A child is a living trust given to parents until he or she is intellectually and emotionally prepared to bear the responsibilities of adulthood or age 18, whichever comes first.

Because children's emotions can be easily swayed, they cannot reason adequately, and they do not have a well-defined understanding of right and wrong, they do not have accountability during their first years of life. In fact, this is why we call them "minors" until they are 18 years old. Minors do not have the same rights as adults. Minors cannot enter into legal agreements, own property, vote, or get married without parental consent. Because children generally lack good intellectual and emotional judgment, they are not held to the same standards of conduct as adults. Occasionally, there are cases in juvenile courts where minors are charged and sentenced as adults because the court proves that the minor knew the difference between right and wrong and chose to willfully do wrong.

If, in our fallen state, we realize the insufficiency of minors, surely God does, too. Notice how God deals with the insufficiency of Gentiles (those who do not know God). **“Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.”**<sup>1</sup>

Paul makes the point clear that when Gentiles follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, God accepts them as His children even though they do not know Him! God justifies Gentiles who do not know Him because He sees the hearts of Jews and Gentiles alike. A person’s salvation is not based on the purity of his beliefs about God. Instead, it is based on his response to the Holy Spirit. Our response to the Spirit reveals our faith.

God called Abraham to leave his homeland. The Bible says, **“By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.”**<sup>2</sup> When God called Abraham, one could say that Abraham was a Gentile!

<sup>1</sup> Romans 2:14-15

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 11:8

God tested Abraham's faith by asking him to leave his family and home and Abraham passed the test because Abraham loved God! Similarly, God knows that many Gentiles are honest in heart and they would gladly do all that He commands if only they had knowledge of His commands! Therefore, since God is willing, through the blood of Jesus, to justify Gentiles who do not know His ways, God also justifies insufficient minors with the same blood!

Carefully consider this passage:

**“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people [that is, death was imposed upon all mankind because of sin's curse], because all sinned – To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given [at Mount Sinai], but sin is not charged against anyone's account [that is, God does not impart guilt] where there is no [knowledge of the] law [right and wrong].”<sup>1</sup>**

**“Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, [the curse of sin was passed along to the offspring of Adam through his sin], so also one righteous act [Jesus living a perfect life for us, without sin] resulted in justification and [eternal] life for all people.**

<sup>1</sup> Romans 5:12-13, insertions mine

**For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man [Jesus Christ] the many [sinners] will be made righteous [before God].”<sup>1</sup>**

In Romans 5, Paul affirms three important facts which every Christian should know. First, Adam’s offspring inherited Adam’s fallen nature. Thus, everyone, but Christ, has sinned because we have Adam’s sinful nature. Second, even though a person will eventually die due to the consequences of sin, God does not impart guilt to a person who sins ignorantly. God is more than fair. He does not hold a person accountable for what that person does not or cannot know. However, God does hold a person responsible for refusing to learn. Third, God reconciled the world to Himself through the blood of Jesus. Jesus voluntarily came to Earth and died in our place so God could legally save sinners through the process of covering our life’s record with the perfect life of Christ. This process of covering our sinful record with Christ’s sinless record is called "justification."

The effect of God’s love is truly beautiful. In spite of Adam’s failure and our sinful nature, each child starts out in life "saved" through Christ’s perfect life until a time comes when as an adult, that person chooses to rebel against the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 5:18-19, insertions mine

Ponder these verses: **“For if, when we were God’s enemies [that is, when we were in rebellion against God, nevertheless], we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life [the gift of His sinless life which covers our sins]! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”**<sup>1</sup>

### **The Holy Spirit Has Two Objectives**

When a baby is born, the Holy Spirit begins working with that baby. The Holy Spirit understands the sinful nature which the baby has inherited. The Holy Spirit understands the rebellion that is in each human heart. The Holy Spirit also understands the language and culture of the baby.

He also understands the religious training which the baby will receive. The Holy Spirit knows all this, but He has two persistent objectives. First, He wants to impress on the child the importance of honesty and truth; that is, firmly standing up for what is right and good, and abhorring whatever is wrong and evil. Second, the Holy Spirit works on people to bring them into submission with the will of God. For some, this happens in childhood and for others it occurs in adulthood.

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 5:10-11, insertions mine

Obviously, the Holy Spirit has many obstacles to overcome such as arrogance and ignorance, but the greatest obstacle for the Holy Spirit is man's natural rebellion toward God's authority! For example, God says to love your enemies. Human beings do not naturally love their enemies.

God says do not steal, commit adultery, covet, or lie. He says to take care of your parents and do not commit sexual immorality, take His name in vain, worship idols, or forget to rest on the seventh day as He did. So, what is the problem with doing all that God wants?

**“Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.”<sup>1</sup>**

The Holy Spirit may work on the heart of a person for many years, attempting to bring that person into a “born-again” state. Being born again means starting all over in life; Paul says it is a whole new beginning, a new life!<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 8:5-8

<sup>2</sup> Romans 6:4

Finding submission to God's will as a joyful experience is only possible after being born again. Some people have "on again – off again" experiences with the Holy Spirit for years. Fortunately, the Holy Spirit does not give up until He sees our rebellion cannot be overcome.

I have known people who have resisted the Holy Spirit for most of their lives, and then at the end of their lives, they finally relinquished their rebellion and surrendered their will to the Lord before it was too late. I have also seen people resist the Holy Spirit and die without appearing to have any interest in God or spiritual matters.

Of course, I am not in a position to read the mind or heart of anyone, but I maintain the hope of salvation is lost when we grieve away the Holy Spirit. Once the Spirit leaves, there is no return and in His absence, there is no further interest in spiritual matters or a desire to glorify God. **“If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.”**<sup>1</sup>

### **Justified by God's Grace**

From birth, everyone has a sinful nature. Therefore, a minor will sin, but a minor is guiltless in God's sight because he or she is intellectually and emotionally in-

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 10:26-27

sufficient. Jesus has reconciled the whole world to the Father through His perfect life and sacrificial blood.

This means that God is permitted to legally wrap every minor and every submissive person in the perfect record of Christ's life (justification). Salvation is a gift from God for everyone. Salvation does not come through sacraments, rituals, or observing ordinances. What matters to God is our response to the demands that the Holy Spirit imposes on us. If we are honest hearted and love "the light of truth," we will embrace the truth, and then upon experiencing rebirth, we will make every effort to conform our lives to Christ's gospel through His power.

If we remain self-centered and rebellious and we allow our fallen nature to control us, we can be sure the Holy Spirit is not making headway in His struggle to bring us into submission. Obviously, the Holy Spirit tests individuals differently to see if they are willing to obey God.

Remember the story of the rich young ruler.<sup>1</sup> He failed the test of selling his material wealth for Christ's sake. He loved his religion and his money more than he loved God. He could not walk away from his wealth and his status in Israel to follow Jesus. On the other hand, King Nebuchadnezzar is an example of a rich

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 18:18-24

ruler who was tested with humility. After being humiliated by God's Spirit for seven years, the king finally became a believer.<sup>1</sup>

**“Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’ ”**<sup>2</sup> If you can accept the idea that minors are freely justified by God's grace, this text will make perfect sense just as it reads!

### **Church Life is Not Spiritual Life**

Many people think that church participation provides the route to salvation. If a person believes “once saved-always saved,” there is a risk of being complacent. Consider this illustration about complacency. As far as the United States is concerned, a new world order was born on September 11, 2001. U.S. citizens were asleep; caught by complete surprise. That Tuesday morning was a defining moment in U.S. history.

The U.S. is a different nation now. Its thinking and ways of doing business will never be the same. Americans do not like the new world order, but they have no choice. Terrorism has arrived and they have to face it and deal with it. A demonic genie has been let out of the bottle. Terrorists prey on the unsuspecting; their purpose is to intimidate through fear and anxiety. The

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel 4:35-37

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 19:14

demonic power within terrorism is spiritual. This is why terrorism and religion can be bedfellows.

To address internal problems of terrorism, Congress passed The Patriot Act shortly after September 11 and later created the Department of Homeland Security. These well-intentioned efforts may seem reasonable, but our nation has become like the burglarized homeowner who covers his doors and windows with steel bars only to discover during a subsequent house fire that he has no possibility of escape.

### **Wake Up Christians!**

The U.S. government was asleep on September 11. Similarly, most Christians will be sleeping when God initiates the Great Tribulation, because Christians have not made serious study of Bible prophecy a priority. Religious leaders have lulled millions of people to sleep with "sweet promises" of events that will not happen. Further, many Christians are complacent because they believe they have already been saved and do not need to worry about salvation.

Church leaders are promoting prophetic schemes that have nothing to do with what the Bible predicts. Millions of people will be disappointed when they discover there is no pre-tribulation rapture. Millions more who do not believe in a pre-tribulation rapture

will also experience bitter distress when they discover their church leaders have also misguided them. Christians are asleep! They have been lulled into substituting church life for spiritual life and this substitution can prove deadly. Every Christian should know the important distinction between church life and spiritual life.

Church life is social interaction with a group of people having similar religious views whereas spiritual life is the process of maturing in God's truth under the firm, but loving, discipline of Christ. Church life can be a real joy, for nothing is sweeter than genuine fellowship with like believers.

Unfortunately, the basis for church life should not be the joy of fellowship, but a love for truth. Many Christians think church life is synonymous with spiritual life, but attending church services and listening to inspiring music and preaching is no substitute for personal study, meditation, and prayer. In other words, spiritual life requires time with God for which there is no substitute. For many people, worship is a social occasion and they go to church to be entertained with a good sermon and told what to believe.

However, walking with God and obeying His Word at any cost is the worship that God seeks. Jesus said,

**“God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the spirit and in truth.”<sup>1</sup>**

If church life does not systematically put worshipers through the essential truths of the Bible; teach worshipers how to study the Bible; produce Christians who love the Lord with all their heart, mind, and soul, and their neighbors as themselves, the result will be a congregation that seems active and alive, but in reality, it is spiritually dead! This was precisely the condition of the church at Sardis.

Notice Jesus’ words, **“To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.**

**“Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in**

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<sup>1</sup> John 4:24

**white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”<sup>1</sup>**

The church at Sardis was known for its religious zeal. Events were occurring at the church all the time. They met several times each week. The church was growing and, like many churches today that have concerts, dramas, potluck dinners, revival services, church school, and community programs, they had it all. They prayed, worshiped, worked, and played as one big family, but Jesus identified a serious problem. He told the church, **“I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up!”<sup>2</sup>**

Jesus said, **“Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent.”<sup>3</sup>** The church at Sardis was on the wrong track. An active church life is not a substitute for spiritual growth. It takes a trained eye and the spirit of discernment to distinguish between the two. The devil was at work in Sardis. The church was active and busy, but it was dead spiritually because it was focused on the wrong components.

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1 Revelation 3:1-6

2 Revelation 3:1-2

3 Revelation 3:3

The Christian church has two objectives: Soul winning (the preaching of justification) and soul building (the teaching of sanctification). The carnal nature does not mind hearing about justification, but it hates to hear about sanctification. Applying Jesus' Sermon on the Mount into daily practice is the hardest exercise to do! When the doctrines of justification and sanctification are out of balance, church life is out of balance.

The church at Sardis was sure of its salvation. Its members accepted the gospel of justification. They loved the freedom in Christ which justification offers. They were happy to hear that Jesus had paid the price for their salvation. But they were not maturing spiritually, that is, becoming Christ-like. So, Jesus reminded them of the necessity of sanctification saying, **“Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent.”** Ouch! I can almost hear church members in Sardis saying, "But Lord, we have been saved! What is with this repentance and obedience business?"

Just like the church of Sardis, churches today have disconnected the gospel of justification from sanctification. Churches like Sardis are everywhere! Many Christians deceive themselves with self-assured salvation even though they are spiritually dead! How deadly! On the other hand, when sanctification is dis-

connected from the gospel of justification, Christians stop living by faith and follow a destructive course of legalism and self-righteousness.

The narrow road leading to heaven has two big ditches on each side and the devil is constantly trying to push Christians into the ditch of legalism or the ditch of presumption. The result in both cases is the same – spiritual death. Jesus warned the dead church at Sardis, **“But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.”**<sup>1</sup>

### **To He Who Overcomes**

There were some faithful members in Sardis. Jesus said, **“Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”**<sup>2</sup>

There is a hidden message in these words and it is different than what you might think at first. The faithful people in Sardis knew that church life was no substi-

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation 3:3

<sup>2</sup> Revelation 3:4-6

tute for spiritual life. Throughout history, people who have had an intimate fellowship with God understand the rigors of discipleship.

Jesus described these people as having unsoiled clothes. In other words, the faithful saints in Sardis were clothed in His righteousness because they submitted to God's will every day. They were willing to go, be, and do as Jesus directed them. Therefore, Jesus told the "dead" members at Sardis to wake up or they would be caught by surprise!<sup>1</sup> Here is the problem: left unchallenged, the carnal nature will separate us from God.

We have to be willing to overcome beliefs and behaviors that separate us from God to sustain justification. The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 7 and 1 Corinthians 15:31 that overcoming sin takes determined effort and this is why Jesus demanded that all seven churches overcome their deficiencies!

Jesus also made another statement to the church at Sardis that is widely misunderstood today. He promised He would never blot out the names of the overcomers from the Book of Life. Most Christians interpret Jesus' words in one of two ways: First, "If a person receives Christ as Savior, he or she cannot be lost because Jesus will not blot any name out of the Book of

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 24:42-44

Life – meaning once you are saved, you are forever saved,” or second, “If a person overcomes every besetting sin, his or her name will not be blotted from the Book of Life – meaning salvation belongs to those who achieve perfection.” There are several problems with both views.

First, the doctrine of "once saved – always saved," or the reciprocal of this doctrine, "some people are destined to be lost," is disputed by the text itself. The Bible teaches salvation belongs to overcomers. **“For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.”**<sup>1</sup>

The Bible also teaches a person can walk in the assurance of salvation and then lose it by turning away from the Lord and doing wickedly!<sup>2</sup> Consider the fall of Lucifer and the fall of Adam and Eve. At one time they were perfect, they were "saved," but they turned away from righteousness and fell from God's favor. Jesus made a promise to the overcomers in Sardis. He promised their names would never be blotted out of the Book of Life. In other words, once overcomers enter heaven, their names will never be blotted from the Book of Life.

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1 1 John 5:4

2 Ezekiel 18

Take a moment to reflect on the rewards God offered to the overcomers in the seven churches. As you evaluate each reward, reflect on when it will be implemented.

Ephesus: The right to eat from the tree of life.

Smyrna: The second death will not hurt you.

Pergamum: The right to eat hidden manna and the receipt of a white stone.

Thyatira: You will receive authority over the nations and the Morning Star.

Philadelphia: I will write on you the name of my God, the new name of Jesus, and the name of His city.

Laodicea: I will grant you the right to sit with Me on My throne.

In these six churches, the rewards to overcomers will be implemented after the Second Coming. The same timing applies to the church of Sardis.

The names of the overcomers in Sardis will not be blotted out of the Book of Life after they are in heaven. The problem for most people with Revelation 3:5 is timing. Jesus was not talking about entering or blotting people's names from the Book of Life at the time He spoke to the church at Sardis. Rather, He promised the overcomers in Sardis that He would never blot out

their names from the Book of Life after they arrived in heaven. This means overcomers will live forever with Jesus!

This brings me to the second problem. Many people misunderstand God's function and purpose for the Book of Life; according to Revelation 20:12, the Book of Life is not opened until the thousand years are over. (<https://wake-up.org/seven-seals/god-already-knows.html>) In fact, the Father wrote the Book of Life and sealed it with seven seals before any life was created! This means the names of overcomers and sinners were entered into the Book of Life before life was created.

This is why the Book of Life remains sealed until the end of the thousand years. God does not want the information in the Book of Life disclosed until the drama of sin has ended. At that time, God will open the book and reveal what He knew before any beings were given life. When God shows what He foreknew, He will eliminate every accusation against His government and He will remove all doubt about His love for His children.

The third problem concerning the Book of Life centers on the fact that the Book of Life has nothing to do with man's salvation. The Book of Life contains a pre-recorded history of the world which the Father wrote

and sealed with seven seals before any life was created.<sup>1</sup> Books of records, recorded by angels as events transpire, are used to judge humanity,<sup>2</sup> but the Book of Life remains sealed until the end of the thousand years.

The last problem with the Book of Life is that the message to Sardis does not mandate sinless behavior. No one other than Jesus has lived a perfect life and no one can live a sinless life until the sealing occurs! John tells us there is a sin that does not lead to death. This sin is accidental sin.<sup>3</sup>

If we say we are without sin, the Bible says we are liars.<sup>4</sup> So, the promise Christ gave to the overcomers in Sardis has to be kept within the context of His words to Sardis and the other churches. The problem the church at Sardis needed to overcome was they had substituted church life for spiritual life and as a result, they had become spiritually dead. Jesus insisted they wake up so that He might walk among them and make disciples of them! Everyone who overcomes this temptation will never have his name blotted out of the Book of Life. I cannot think of anything better than this. Can you?

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1 Revelation 17:8

2 Daniel 7:9-10

3 1 John 5:16-17; Romans 7:19

4 2 Chronicles 6:36; 1 John 1:10

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