

## When Does Salvation Occur?

*By Norman E. Jones*

When trying to answer this question, it depends on who you ask. The Calvinist would say salvation occurs at regeneration. That is, when one is “born-again,” or converted. And; they say, a person cannot be unborn-again because God Himself causes the person to continue in belief.

Managed Cooperation Theology says salvation occurs at the end of life if you have been found faithful. When you are converted, you get the conditional *promise* of salvation if you remain faithful to the end. And God influences you by helping you to remain faithful.

This is another battle of theologies. What is the real truth. What does the Bible really teach.

### Once Saved, Always Saved

Calvinism is the popular orthodox view of salvation. It suggests that salvation is imparted at the time of regeneration (being born again).<sup>1</sup> That would be at the beginning of the christian walk. Calvinism suggests you cannot lose that salvation.

The suggestion that a saved person cannot lose salvation comes from at least, two ideas. One, that people are saved at regeneration. And the other, truly saved people are never lost.

### Once Saved Part

Boettner, speaking about regeneration, explains it like this.

“It is referred to in the scripture by various terms: ‘regeneration,’ a ‘making alive,’ a ‘renewing,’ a taking away of the heart of stone and giving the heart of flesh, etc., which work is exclusively that of the Holy Spirit. As a result of this change a

man comes to see the truth and gladly accepts it.”<sup>2</sup>

What Boettner is actually saying: God does something to the man which causes a paradym shift in his point of view. Beforehand, the man could not see the truth. Afterward, the man could see the truth and then could gladly accept it.

The problem here is this is not strict Calvinism. This is not God working alone. This is God working *with* man. This is Managed Cooperation Theology.

Unconditional Election says God alone saved people before the foundation of the world, and He foreordained others to Hell.<sup>3</sup> For God alone to do that, without help, He would have to give the saved something that the unsaved did not possess. He would have to make them different in some way.

For example, at regeneration, one becomes saved by some unknown power of God which makes a difference in the saved persons life which God withholds from the unsaved person. This unknown factor, bestowed by God, would have to be responsible for regeneration.

Boettner is not describing an unknown factor. He is actually describing a paradym shift in point of view. Managed Cooperation Theology suggests a point of view change is the result of seeing a contrast between “good” and “evil.” And seeing both, one can compare, and the choice becomes obvious.

In order to see the contrast, one must have God’s input on that which is “good.” “Good” is God’s love, His grace, forgiveness, peace with God, and seeing the need for God’s management, of ones life.

The side of “good” comes from the teaching of God and godly men. The evil-side view comes from life. Viewing the two together provide a contrast which can be discerned.

This is not God working alone. This is God,

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1. “Spiritual baptism takes place at salvation, when the Lord places the believer into the body of Christ by means of the Holy Spirit (I Cor.12:13), and purifies the believer by the water of the word (Eph. 5:26; cf. John 15:3).” The Gospel According to Jesus, p.41.

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2. The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination, p.68.

3. The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination, p.84.

the Holy Spirit, working in cooperation with man to convict him of sin, righteousness and judgement. This is Managed Cooperation Theology.

Since Calvinism theorizes God working alone, but actually works with man to make regeneration happen, Calvinism is inconsistent and flawed.

Anyway, Calvinists theorize this "regeneration" causes salvation to be imparted by God alone.

## Always Saved Part

The other half of once saved, is always saved. Under the auspices of Unconditional Election, God defines who is saved before the foundation of the world. It makes sense that if once saved is true, it would be forever. The reason it is "always saved" is because God defined the salvation of the saved, before the foundation of the world. And, the saved can do no other.

Sometimes, Calvinists may say, people destined for Hell might appear to be saved temporarily, but ultimately would fall away and be lost forever.

If this is true, God is not honest. This seems to be a very cruel joke. God defines, before the foundation of the world, that this person will go to Hell and cannot do other than that.<sup>4</sup> Then later, during life, the person finds God, lives awhile in faith, and falls away. Then God says, its this persons fault because he was a sinner whose faith didn't last.

The truth is this person never had a chance. This person did not go to Hell because he was a person who sinned. He went to Hell because God created a sinner who could do no other from the foundation of the world. Then later, God says He went to Hell because he did not believe.<sup>5</sup> This makes God out to be a liar<sup>6</sup> and very unloving.

## Promise of Salvation

I believe the proper view is that we have *not* been given salvation at the time of regeneration but only a *conditional promise* of salvation.<sup>7</sup> The Condition is that one must be found faithful until the end of life. (See footnote # 11)

The promise of salvation has been explained like this. It is like buying a house. When you buy a house, you are commonly known as a home owner. But you are not technically a home owner because you haven't yet finished paying for the house. What you have is a promise that if you finish making payments, you will, in fact, *become* a home owner.

Because of Calvinism, it is commonplace in our spiritual culture; at the time of a profession of faith, to say we have been "saved." But technically, we have the promise of salvation. Just like we have the promise of house ownership. If we don't make the payments, the bank will repossess the house.

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## 7. Salvation is based on a conditional Promise

Acts 2:39 - For the *promise* is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself.

Rom 13:11 - If salvation is nearer now than when we first believed, salvation cannot come at regeneration. Therefore, salvation must be a future *promise*.

Gal.3:14 - "... in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the *promise* of the Spirit through faith."

Gal. 3:22 - "... But the Scripture has shut up all men under sin, that the *promise* by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe."

Gal.4:28 - "... And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of *promise*."

Eph 1:13 - "... 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*.

Eph. 3:6 - "... to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the *promise* in Christ Jesus through the gospel, ...."

Phil 3:11-12 - Paul says he lives that he *may attain* to the resurrection (future); not that he has *already* attained it. Therefore, he must be waiting for the fulfillment of a *promise*.

II Tim. 1:1 - "... Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the *promise* of life in Christ Jesus, ...."

Titus 1:2 - "... in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, *promised* long ages ago, ...."

Titus 3:7 - "... that being justified by His grace we *might* be made heirs according to the *hope* of eternal life.

Heb. 10:23 - "... Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who *promised* is faithful; ...."

Heb. 10:36 - "... For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was *promised*."

James 1:12 - Blessed is the man who *perseveres* under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has *promised* to those who love Him.

James 2:5 - "... Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He *promised* to those who love Him?"

I John 2:25 - "... And this is the *promise* which He Himself made to us: eternal life."

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4. The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination, p.84.

5. Mark 16:16

6. Hebrews 6:18 and James 1:17

Similarly, if one is not a person of faith at the end of life, God will not give you salvation. He does this because Heaven is promised, and made for, people of faith. No faith means no love for God, which means no Heaven. It defeats the central purpose for the creation<sup>8</sup> to give salvation to one who does not love God enough to be faithful to end of life. God wants people to love Him forever.

Thus, the *promise* of salvation comes at the beginning of the faith walk. Actual salvation comes at the time of the glorification of the saints; at the end of life.

## Gain or Loss of Salvation

The reason God made salvation a conditional promise is that faith is variable. Faith increases and decreases with respect to relationship to Jesus. The more one thinks about God, the greater the relationship, and with that comes increased faith. The less one thinks about God, the lesser the relationship, and with that comes less faith.<sup>9</sup>

Let's say a person responds to the call to be a Christian at a Billy Graham Crusade. He makes a confession of sins, and professes belief in Jesus. He starts his walk with God and grows.

Under the promises of salvation, he will receive salvation if faithful. But right now, he only has a promise.

This means he or we do not have anything to lose; but only have something to gain. After all, nobody can lose something they have not yet gained. Its like the house, you cannot lose ownership when payments are not made because you do not yet own it. You may lose some investment, but you don't lose ownership. As a home buyer, you must qualify for ownership by *faithfully* making payments until the end of the contract. Then, the ownership title will be given to you.

As a christian, you must qualify for salvation by believing that Jesus Christ is God's Son, that the Father raised the Son from the dead, and you must have confessed Jesus as Lord (Boss / Manager) of your life.<sup>10</sup> As a christian, you must be found faithful to that belief and confession, for your whole life, in order to own salvation.<sup>11</sup> That is Jesus giving you the crown of life.

It is just like Peter said when talking about the qualities we should be learning about, (II Peter 1:4-

8. God desires a people that He can love and who will love Him forever.

9. Romans 8:5-7 with John 15:7

10. Romans 10:9-10

11):

4 “. . . He has granted to us His precious and magnificent *promises*<sup>12</sup>, in order that by them you might become partakers of the devine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

5 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge;

6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness;

7 and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, Christian love.

8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

9 For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten

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11. One must be found faithful at the end of life.

Psalms 101:6 - My eyes shall be on the *faithful* of the land, that they may dwell with me; . . .

Ezek.33:18-19 - When the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, then he shall die in it.

Mark 13:13 - And you will be hated by all on account of my name, but it is the one who has *endured to the end* who will be saved.

Luke 19:17 - And he said to him, ‘Well done, good slave, because you have been *faithful* in a very little thing, be in authority over ten cities.’

I Cor.4:2 - In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found *trustworthy*.

Col.1:22-23 - . . . if indeed you *continue in the faith* firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel . . .

I Tim 4:16 - Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will *insure salvation* both for yourself and for those who hear you.

Heb.3:14 - For we have become partakers of Christ, *if* we hold fast the beginning of *our assurance firm until the end*; . . .

James 1:12 - Blessed is the man who *perseveres* under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has *promised* to those who love Him.

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

his purification from his former sins.

10 Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble;

11 for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom or our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.”

There is no cause for concern about your salvation as long as you practice *these things*.<sup>13</sup> *These things* are a summation of the whole christian curriculum we must learn. But what if you don't practice *these things*?

Isn't the opposite of verse 10 also true . . . if you don't practice *these things*, you might stumble? And in verse 11; if you don't practice *these things*, the entrance of the eternal kingdom wouldn't be abundantly supplied to you?

If one doesn't practice *these things* mentioned by Peter, wouldn't that constitute neglect of ones salvation?<sup>14</sup> And where does that lead?<sup>15</sup> The bottom line is if you continue in the faith, you gain the reward; if you don't continue in the faith, you don't gain the reward. That is why the Bible, and especially Hebrews, is replete with encouragements to go on with God. Be close to Jesus.

The context of Heb.3 and 6 is the *promise* of salvation . . . if we hold fast our assurance firm until the end.<sup>16</sup> Abraham, the ultimate man of faith, only got *promises* of a heavenly city<sup>17</sup>. Abraham was *promised* a country but it didn't happen . . . yet.<sup>18</sup>

Ephesians 1:13 says, “. . . 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 (glorification of our bodies) . . .” We don't have the redemption now; it is a promise for the future. When Abraham gets his, we get ours.

If a person were to fall away, how would that happen? He might become dull of hearing.<sup>19</sup> He might not have grown to be a teacher but remained a babe<sup>20</sup> and therefore subject to deception by the

deceitfulness of sin.<sup>21</sup> Over time, with less and less relationship with Jesus, one becomes more and more influenced by the flesh, the world, pride and the demons. After awhile, the beliefs of christianity become dim, and the concerns of the self become super important.

A persons heart, which is hard enough, could cause him to turn away from God. Since this person has experienced being a christian and not liked it, and experienced being a pagan, he has an opinion about both worlds. Since, he has the perspective of both sides, you can't convince him that God is good once he has experienced otherwise.<sup>22</sup> So his faith is dead; he renounces his faith. No faith, no salvation.

So, I conclude Hebrews 6:4-6 is trying to teach us to be diligent about growing in christ so we won't be vulnerable to the deceitfulness of sin. This coupled with realizing that God likes us despite our sometimes sinful actions,<sup>23</sup> is a formula for dependance on the Holy Spirit. Thus, we are free to love God and serve Him.

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12. Emphasis is mine.

13. II Peter 1:5-7 ie: faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, christian love.

14. Heb.2:3

15. Heb.3:12-14

16. Hebrews 3:6; 3:14; 6:11. See also II Peter 1:4-11,

17. Hebrews 11:13

18. Romans 4:13

19. Heb.5:11

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20. Heb.5:13

21. Heb.3:12-13

22. Heb.6:6

23. ibid