

Saved or Uncertain: The Security of the Believer

Tim Conway | illbehonest.com

Question: This comes from Matthew. "Pastor Tim, this is no easy question to ask and requires a bit of a preface, so I beg that you would hear me." Now listen to him carefully. Again, one of the reasons I want to go through these is so that we would all think and seek to apply Scripture. Obviously, if people are asking questions it's because they're having some difficulty wrestling with these things. These things tend to not be so simple to people so they submit the questions. They're looking for light. One of the things that you have to do is you have to listen even to the way they present their questions because oftentimes there's inconsistencies in what they say. You kind of have to hear. What we're looking to do is try to biblically answer the question that's being posed.

He says this: "I have been a Christian for four years now." Now, I want to point out that he starts by making this assumption: I've been a Christian for four years. "I was saved..." That's how he starts this. Now when he gets to the end, he's saying, "Pastor Tim, will I be given over to sin like in Romans 1? Am I an earthen bottle like from Jeremiah 18 and 19?" He's basically wondering if it's impossible for him to be saved. I think he's wondering if he's apostate. So he starts by saying, "I've been a Christian for four years." He ends by asking whether I think he's apostate. Obviously there's an inconsistency in that. If he's starting this thing confidently saying "I've been a Christian for four years," obviously there's a change that takes place in the midst of three paragraphs here. "I've been a Christian for four years now. I was saved when I resolved in my heart to kill myself because of pain. And instead of following through with my plan, I got on my knees and asked Jesus to save me because I had remembered something in the moment." He doesn't say what he remembered, but he said, "It convinced me that I should at least try to give Jesus a chance..." And I don't understand this: "...and not persecute His church without really asking Him for help." Now he's going to kill himself. What that has to do with persecuting the church I'm not certain. "I received my help..." when he called out to the Lord. "...And all of that pain went away. And I was filled with joy uninterrupted for months and months, and I could no longer deny Jesus from that day forward. Sometimes I can't help myself but cry when I read Psalm 116."

Paragraph 2: "One day, I laid in bed and prayed. I asked for two things: peace and rest. Because I was restless at the time. And I asked to hear God's voice. It took about 15 to 30 minutes of asking, but starting from my head down to my feet, I felt like a literal wave came. It had a steady pace to it. I felt energized and rested. And then came an audible voice saying, 'you will do what you will do.' It sounded almost like thunder. I was terrified and shaken as though I had lost my balance even though I was laying in bed. I have cried to God and asked for what it means. I've asked other Christians. My terror comes because those words stand in direct opposition to what Jesus said. Jesus said, 'Not My will, Lord, but Yours be done.'"

Paragraph 3: "Pastor Tim, will I be given over to sin like in Romans 1? Am I an earthen bottle like from Jeremiah 18 and 19? I've asked God again and again about this, but I was unable to shake the idea that I am just going to be cast out. Although a woman once said that she saw it as my will aligned with God's." In other words, you will do what you will do and your will's aligned with God's so it's actually a good thing. He says, "But I'm unable to be certain."

Discussion:

Look, one of the reasons that I ran with this one is this: Matthew says, "I have been a Christian for four years now." "I was saved." He starts by saying that, and obviously as he works through this, well, he had this voice. Now, he's just totally uncertain. I guess the place that I wanted to start with this - I guess I feel like maybe we take this for granted, but it's interesting that lately, the Lord has brought it to me about just the reality of those who really seem to have difficulty perceiving the fact that true salvation can't be lost.

And here's the thing, "I've been a Christian for four years." I would ask somebody: based on what? What was your confidence based on? Did some voice cause you to lose whatever confidence you had in the very beginning? See, I'm not certain that the foundation was right with this guy. But let's say it was. I mean, the reality is that if God has started a work in me, that can't be lost.

Now look, I recognize that there are people in Scripture who start well but don't finish well. I recognize there are people who make shipwreck of the faith. But you recognize that that's looking at things from man's perspective. I want to talk about the reality that a truly saved person - a truly saved person - that it's for good. If you're saved, if your confidence was right in the beginning, what I'm saying is this: if there was any moment where true faith was exercised, you're going to be secure to the end. And I want to talk about several doctrines in the Scriptures that really solidify the reality - "once saved always saved" - yeah, that's a truth, but it's a cheap way to say it. Because what that does is that can undermine the reality of what Scripture says you'll find in a person's life as they persevere.

Too many people talk "once saved always saved," and they're just saying: Well, I believed at one time and no matter how I live between then and now, I'm still saved. And I can basically live any way I want to and I'm going to make it to the end. That's not what Scripture teaches. But I want to go through just a few doctrines.

The one I want you to look at - this is one of the primary ones that holds weight with me, but it's the promises of the New Covenant and precisely the one found in Jeremiah 32:40, and I want everybody to turn there. (Jeremiah 32:40) (unintelligible) (silence) Okay, does anybody have that? Jeremiah 32:40.

"I will make with them an everlasting covenant..."

Tim: Okay, here's the covenant. Here's the everlasting covenant. This is the New Covenant that God makes. If you're a Christian, this is the covenant - what's a covenant?

(from the room) An agreement?

Tim: An agreement. It's like a contract. It's basically the conditions of a relationship. God establishes the criteria or the basis upon which He is going to relate to His people, to the people that He redeems. What are the terms? Here's the terms. The Old Covenant: God gave laws. And He said: Do this and live. You know what? That was a weak covenant. The weakness was found in us because we didn't have an inclination to keep that law. But listen to the terms of the New Covenant. Somebody read that verse. There's three promises just in this verse. There's more in other places and in the context right there, but listen to these. Go ahead and read those. Read verse 40 again.

"I will make with them an everlasting covenant that I will not turn away from doing good to them..."

Tim: Okay, think about that promise. If God once saves you, listen to what He's promising. I'm not going to turn away from doing you good. If you were able to fall away, if you were able to lose what God started, is that doing good? That's not doing good. That promise would not be true. If God began to save anybody, if God imparted eternal life - for God to even call it "eternal life" and then it not prove to be eternal, God has bailed on doing good to somebody. What's the next promise there? "And I will put the fear of Me in their hearts that they may not turn from Me."

Okay, now that is what I wanted specifically for us to see. Notice that. If somebody is genuinely saved by God, God puts His fear in them so that they don't turn. What does that mean? Well, that means when you come to a passage in Scripture that warns, say, about sexual immorality - better to chop off a hand, gouge out an eye, than to go whole into hell - you know what, the true Christian looks at that and there's a healthy fear. There's a fear of God. There's a fear of offending Him. We get these warnings in Scripture and the Christian - isn't this what God said? - He said, "To this man I will look..." Humble, contrite, trembles at My Word. See, there is a seriousness about God's Word to the true child of God. There is a fear. It doesn't mean that we can't grow cold at times. It doesn't mean we can't grow distant at times. It doesn't mean we can't lose our first love at times. But do you know what happened even with people like the Corinthians? The Galatians? The Hebrews? The expectation is that when they received a warning like Paul sent in the Corinthian letter, the Galatian letter, the author of Hebrews wrote to those drifting Hebrews, the expectation is that they were brought to repentance through the fear - God's Spirit working through those letters. Those were inspired letters.

And that's what happens. It's like you go to the Grand Canyon and there's a warning sign. Do you know how many people have fallen off the edge of the Grand Canyon? Lots of people! What are they doing? People go sit on the edge and they fall over. There's warning signs. This is like the Christian life. The Christian life sees the sign and he's like I'm staying back from the edge.

The person that doesn't have the fear of God in them, they go dance around the edge and they fall over. So, what's my point? My point is this: This is a promise. I guarantee you this. If you are a partaker of the New Covenant, God puts His fear in you so that you will not turn away. That's a promise. None that God is at work in ever turn away. We could look at other promises there as well. But that's one reason that we can know a person who has this salvation can't lose it.

The next thing. Let's go to 2 Corinthians 5. And I know you know these verses. 2 Corinthians 5:17 is where it speaks about the fact that we're new creations in Christ. If somebody gets there, you can read that. 2 Corinthians 5:17.

"The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit. The desires of the Spirit are against the flesh. For these are opposed to each other..."

Tim: 2 Corinthians

(from the room) Oh, I'm sorry. I'm in Galatians. Anybody got it? You can read it.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come."

Tim: Right. Now think about that. You're a new creation if you're in Christ. You recognize what that means. A new creation. It means God has reconstructed you. You're new - altogether new. For you to be a new creation, it's like there would have to be a fall again. Like you would have to go back to being the old creation. There would have to be an un-creation. But if God has recreated you, unless there's a reality that somebody can be recreated and come back to the pristine state of Adam and fall again - are men falling back into sin? And that would be to say that if I sin as a Christian, I undo the new creation. Scripture doesn't teach that. What does Scripture teach? That the little children who are the new creations, if they sin, they have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous. (Incomplete thought) Doesn't Scripture say: what can separate us from Christ? What can? There's nothing that can. That's the whole point of Romans 8 there. Who can separate us from the love of Christ? There's nothing that separates.

Think about this reality. Think about the fact - this is closely related to the new creation - but somebody read 1 John 5:4. This talks about being born again or born of God. But I want you to see a promise in Scripture. The idea is this: if you were born, can you be unborn? I mean, it's crazy. To be born again, can you be un-born again? What does 1 John 5:4 say? Anybody that's got it. Read it out loud.

"For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world."

Tim: Okay, there you've got a promise. So who falls out? How many fall out?

(from the room) None.

Tim: Right. If you're born of God, you overcome. Overcoming the world is a way to say you win. You're victorious. Obviously that doesn't mean you make shipwreck. That doesn't mean you fall out. That doesn't mean that you're lost in the end. That means you make it. You endure. You overcome. You're a victor. You get the crown. You win the race. You make it. Right?

Okay, how about another one? John 17:12. We can read over this and maybe not think a whole lot about this. But you have to get the feeling of John 17:12. What is Jesus saying here? Because this has to do with the reason that no true Christian can fall out. No true Christian can be lost. What does it say? Somebody read it if you've got it.

"While I was with them, I kept them in Your name which You have given Me."

Tim: See, there it is. "I kept them in Your name which You have given Me." Now look, somebody's going to say, well, wait, He lost one. No, you have to read what it says there. Keep going. "I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost..." Now that's important. "I guarded them and not one of them has been lost." But keep going. "I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction that Scripture might be fulfilled." Now you have to hear what He's saying there. He's not saying I lost one and I was incapable of keeping them all and one got through My fingers. He is saying I kept all of them that You gave Me to keep. The one that was lost - he was the son of perdition. That was his title and his name from the very beginning. He knew from the very beginning who it was that was going to turn on Him. And it was according to Scripture. You have to hear what He's saying there. Scripture has been upheld. Old Testament Scripture speaks of Judas and the fact that he would betray Christ.

Let's think about another doctrine. Romans 8:28-30. Really just look at v. 30. Really what I'm interested in there is this: That whoever is justified is glorified. All you have to do is know that truth. What is justification? Justification is God declaring ungodly people righteous. It's a legal declaration. You have to recognize that. That is a courtroom declaration. Justification. We could prove that, but that's not the main reason that I'm wanting to deal with this right now. Look, justification is the opposite of condemnation. It is a legal declaration. If God declares somebody righteous, you know what God would have to do? He would have to come back to that same person and later declare them unrighteous. How do we know He never does that? Romans 8:30 says - read it. Somebody read Romans 8:30.

"And those whom He predestined, He also called. And those whom He called, He also justified. And those whom He justified, He also glorified."

Tim: There it is. Those whom He justified, He also glorified. What's glorification? What's glorified? Glory is to make it to the end. It's to be made like Christ. It's to gain heaven. Glorified. If He does the one, the other always results. Once somebody's declared righteous, they're never declared unrighteous.

How about another truth? Ephesians 1:13-14. There's just such certainty in Scripture. You can't get away from it. Here it's the nature and the ministry of the Holy Spirit that is at stake. Ephesians 1:13-14. Somebody read that.

"In Him you also when you heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit Who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of His glory."

Tim: I mean, just listen to that. If you believe, you were sealed by the Spirit, and the Spirit is a guarantee of our inheritance. Again, inheritance is another way of saying: You win. You get the prize. He guarantees it. The Spirit is put within a man or a woman and it's guaranteed. There is a guarantee of accomplishing the race and getting the inheritance at the end. It's for certain.

How about one more? John 6. I want somebody to read John 6:37, 38, and 39. John 6:37, 38, 39.

(from the room) Those whom the Father gives Me I will no way cast out.

Tim: That's not three verses.

(from the room) I'll read it. "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me..."

Tim: Okay. Okay, now listen to that. All that the Father gives Me... so there are people that the Father gives to the Son. Now, when they're given, what happens? Keep going.

"And whoever comes to Me, I will never cast out."

Tim: Okay, now say the whole verse again.

"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me, I will never cast out."

Tim: Now get that. If the Father has given somebody to the Son, they will go to Him. And if they go to Him, He never casts them out. Keep going.

"For I have come down from heaven not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."

Tim: And what's that will? To not lose any that the Father has given Him. Go ahead and keep reading.

"And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given Me, but raise it up on the last day."

Tim: Guaranteed. I will raise him up on the last day. If the Father gives him to Me, they will come to Me. If they come to Me, I will not cast them out. I will keep them. This is the Father's will that all that He gives Me, I'm not going to lose any. And I will raise them up on the last day. It's guaranteed. Now look, why am I going into this? I'm going into this because that's the first place that we want clarity. We want clarity on the reality that God's salvation is secure.

Now, the question comes to Matthew: So did he start secure? Did he start on the right ground? Now here's what concerns me about the way Matthew started. He doesn't say anything about sin. One of the great tests of genuine Christianity is this: Let's read this out of John 16:8. When we're thinking about the marks of true Christianity, or the hallmark - the genuine Spirit-wrought work of God - this is something that we want to begin with. This is something that we never want to forget. Somebody read that verse. John 16:8

"And when He comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment."

Tim: Now that's important. "When He comes..." - the Comforter. The Spirit of God - when He comes, He convicts men. He convicts the world. The Spirit is a convicter. He convicts men. Very uniquely and specifically, He convicts men in three areas. He convicts men of their sin, their wickedness - sin. Falling short of the mark. Falling short of the glory of God. Breaking the commandments of God. He convicts of sin.

You remember what Jesus said. I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners. He said those who are well don't need a doctor. You see, He came for the sick. And everybody is sick. What He means is those who recognize it. You know, the one who repents over the 99 who need no repentance. There are 99 out of a hundred - they need it. They just don't recognize they need it. And He's dealing with them based on how they see themselves. They're righteous. They don't need repentance. The Spirit when He comes He shows men their disease. They're sick when it comes to sin. He shows them with regards to righteousness. It's kind of the inverse - that they don't have any; that they need a righteousness outside themselves. They need help outside themselves. Judgment. I mean, the reality of judgment comes upon the conscience of a man under the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

This man says, "I was a Christian. I was saved." But you know what? He was at the place where he was going to kill himself because of pain. He doesn't really say what that pain is. But he said that what happened was the pain was taken away. You know, this is very common all over the world for people to have had some kind of healing experience and they equate that with salvation. He doesn't mention anything here about being brought under the conviction of sin. So I would just say his starting point - that's what you want to look for. If somebody is genuinely converted - we interview people before they become members of our church. And that's one of the things that you're looking for. Has God done the kind of deep plowing that He does in people? And that can look different. And people express it differently, but you're looking for some indication of the reality of that.

Then he says this, "One day I laid in bed and I prayed. I asked for two things: peace and rest and to hear God's voice. And after 15 to 30 minutes of asking," he says he heard this voice like thunder. "You will do what you will do." So you know, I would just ask Matthew what was your confidence based on in the very beginning? I mean, was it based on the fact that you were healed from the pain? Is that where your confidence comes from? Or was your confidence legitimately in Christ being your only hope of being healed of your desperate sin disease? I mean, that's the issue. And if that was the case in the beginning, you see, the thing is, when you hear a voice that says you will do what you will do, I can say this - that wherever that voice came from, if your hope is based on the blood and the righteousness of Jesus Christ in the beginning, and you hear any kind of voice that says you will do what you will do, I can say in humility, what I will do is I'm going to trust Christ. I'm going to cling to Him.

What I'm concerned about here is this: This man's life and this man's mind is gripped by what he doesn't even know came from God. You hear what I'm saying. He doesn't know that this voice was from God. But I'll tell you this, this voice is from God. And he is being gripped and held in the bonds and held in the fear of a voice that he doesn't know where it came from. He doesn't know who was behind it. We're told to test the spirits. And this is truth. This book. This is where Jesus said that if we're truly His disciples, His Word will abide in us. This is the Word that needs to grip us. This is the Word before which God says to this man I will look who trembles at this Word. You see what he's doing is he's trembling at a voice he doesn't know where it came from. It could have come from his own imagination. It could have come from the devil or one of his minions. And you know what I have found is when God speaks and He means for us to hear His voice, you remember how it was with Samuel? Remember when Samuel was called to from the Lord? Anybody remember that? Yeah. He was a child. What did the Lord say to him?

(from the room) Samuel?

Tim: At least that.

(from the room) Samuel, Samuel?

Tim: That's right. And what did he do? He thought it was Eli. So he went out. "Here I am." You called. And what did God do? What does God do when we're not certain? He brings clarity. This guy heard a voice. There's been no clarity. And so I guess that's a concern that he's gripped and he's controlled by that rather than what's in here. Thy Word is truth. He doesn't know whether that voice was truth. In fact, very likely, it wasn't. But here's the thing, if I hear a voice - it's kind of like Paul said - if an angel or even us, if we bring a message different than the one you've heard, even if it's an angel - he's being hypothetical. He's being hyperbolic in his approach there. But you get the drift. If something differs from this, it doesn't matter what the voice says.

And it doesn't matter how Godlike it sounds. If it is at variance to that Word, who cares if you hear a voice that says you will do what you will do? I can say this, that Christ still says to me if I

come unto Him, He won't cast me out. (incomplete thought) There are voices. There are many voices. There are many contrary voices. There are many devils and demons and demonic voices to say and to confuse and to drive to despair all who will listen to their voice. But how can you tell their voice from God's voice? Well, you test the spirits. How do you do that? You do that by Scripture. And so, he's thinking that he's perhaps apostate because of that voice.

But I'm concerned for him that probably he never began building on the right foundation in the beginning. Because here's the reality, you know what Scripture points to those who believe? They find Christ precious. It's like the man that's going through the field and he stumbles upon the treasure. And he goes and sells all that he might have that treasure. When you find Christ and you find that treasure and you find that salvation, it doesn't matter what any voices say. It doesn't matter what the devil himself says to you. Because you've found the Treasure. And for that voice to shake this guy, he's not embracing the Treasure. There's no joy there. And I'm afraid that he didn't start on the right foundation in the very beginning where he found Christ precious as a Savior of sinners and laid hold and embraced Him for that reason. I think he experienced something supernatural. He experienced some kind of healing, but I think he equated that perhaps with salvation. And then I think probably a spirit is seeking to deceive him.

Brethren, we just need to think. If we're genuinely saved in the beginning, that salvation that we're talking about - you know what else the Spirit's going to do? Right there in the same chapter. It not only says He convicts of sin, Jesus said He will glorify Me. And what the Spirit is going to do is drive men to despair in their sin, convict them of sin. But then what He does is He shows Christ. That's the work of the Spirit. He lifts up Christ as the only hope for that soul. He lifts up Christ as the only healing balm. And no matter what, when a person has seen that and they find their only hope there, though they encounter all manner of trials and like being on a wild stallion - that thing's trying to buck you like crazy - you're like Peter in the end. We're not letting go. Where are we going to go? You have the words of eternal life. I don't care what voice thunders at me contrary to that. A voice can tell me: you will do what you will do. But I'm not going to be driven to Romans 1 despair. I'm still going to come back to that reality that Christ said that if we trust Him, we'll not be put to shame. That's the hope. That's the confidence. My only hope of being saved is in Him. The next one... yes?

(from the room) Is there any application here - he talked about hearing a voice. Obviously I don't think this is an audible voice, but John 10:27 says, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them..." Is there any application to that verse for this question?

Tim: I think there is application. When Jesus says that My sheep - He does say His sheep hear His voice. He says His sheep know His voice. And I think there is something to that. Now of course, if this person is not saved he may not have ears to distinguish the difference. But it's true that when the Lord is calling, when the Lord is probing the conscience, when the Lord convicts us, when the Lord speaks to us, when the Lord is dealing with us every Christian in this room - you know it. You know. You may try to ignore that voice at times, but you know it. And He can be ever so gentle, ever so subtle, ever so small a voice - a still, small voice - He can come

like thunder. He's capable of thundering. But you know that it's a persistent voice. He has His ways of bringing us to that reality of when He's speaking. Okay. What time do we have?