**Foundations (45 of 60) Perseverance of the Saints- RC Sproul**

Can a person give up or lose his salvation? Or are we once saved, always saved? We'll discover what Scripture has to say on this important issue today on Renewing Your Mind. Welcome to Renewing Your Mind with Dr. R. C. Sproul. On this weekend edition of the program, we're going through a helpful series called Foundations, an overview of systematic theology.

As the title implies, we're looking at the essential doctrines of the Christian faith in order to see how the truths of Scripture relate to each other in perfect harmony. In today's message, Dr. Sproul explains the doctrine of perseverance. We'll discover how God sustains us.

He promises to bring us safely home. Here's the founder and chairman of Ligonier Ministries, Dr. R. C. Sproul. In years past, I used to spend a lot of time with Young Life leadership and taught at the Young Life Institute in Colorado Springs.

And I can recall from those days that one of the questions that I would get perhaps as frequently as any question from Young Life leaders was, well, how do we deal with this problem of tubing it? Now, that was the Young Life expression, not for rubber raft trips down the Colorado River. What they meant by tubing it was they were describing something that happened all too often in Young Life clubs where kids would be involved in Young Life in their high school years, very active in the group, singing the songs, saying the prayers, and going to the meetings and so on. And then when they would go to college, they would not only drop out of Young Life, but they would repudiate the Christian faith.

And so the question they were asking me was this, can a person who is truly converted lose their salvation? Can they tube it once and for all, go down the tubes? And, of course, the position that I would teach Young Life at that time and which I would teach today is that those who are genuinely converted will not tube it, will not lose their salvation, because we believe that if you have it, you never lose it. And if you lose it, you never had it. As John said, those who went out from us were never really among us.

Now again, this does not preclude the possibility of people making an excited profession of faith, become deeply immersed and involved in the life of the church or in some Christian organization, only later to leave the church and disavow their Christian faith and stay that way until their lives end, because it's very easy for people to become converted to institutions and miss a genuine conversion to Christ. In fact, I used to teach at the Young Life Institute. I'd say, you know, your greatest strength is your greatest weakness.

I don't know of any organization that has been more effective on the face of this earth in reaching young people with the gospel of Christ than has Young Life. I said, you've made a science of making the gospel attractive. That's your strength.

It's also your weakness, because you make Christianity so appealing that you can have people join your clubs and embrace this faith without ever dealing with their sin, without ever dealing really with Christ. And that can be true of any vital church, that it can be so sensitive to people's needs, so inviting and so appealing that people will come for a season to that. Jesus told the parable of the sower and told about the seed that fell among thorns or that fell upon the shallow ground that sprang up quickly, but as soon as the sun came out, it withered and died or was choked out by the thorns.

And the point of that parable, I believe, is that the only seed that lasts is the seed that is sown in the good earth. And that good earth is the transfigured or transformed soul that has been regenerated by God the Holy Spirit. Now, again, we understand the doctrine of what's called the perseverance of the saints speaks directly to this question, can we lose our salvation? I remind you that in historic Roman Catholicism, the answer that the Roman church gave to the question was, yes, people can lose their salvation, and in fact, people do lose their salvation.

And when we looked at the doctrine of justification, we went over that quickly when we saw that the instrumental cause for justification according to Rome was in the first instance, baptism, wherein the person received the grace of justification, but that that grace could be lost through mortal sin. And you recall, mortal sin is defined by Rome as being mortal because it kills or destroys the justifying grace that is in the soul, making it necessary for a person to be justified afresh and having a completely new sacrament to that end, namely the sacrament of penance, which I defined as Rome did as the second plank of justification for those who have made shipwreck of their faith, and so they do acknowledge the ability of people to have shipwreck and never be restored. They can commit mortal sin, and even after they have been baptized and professed faith and even been in a state of grace, can still go to hell.

They can lose their salvation, and in many semi-Pelagian circles, the idea persists that people can indeed lose their salvation. The Reformed faith believed not only in the perseverance of the saints as a logical deduction from the doctrine of election, which indeed it is. If God elects people from all eternity, then certainly the elect will remain elect forever.

But of course, that raises the question, can a non-elect person come to a state of faith? And the Reformers would say, no, that only the elect come to faith in the first place, and so as a corollary to the doctrine of election, there would be the doctrine of perseverance. But it's dangerous business, I think, to construct a theology just on the basis of drawing logical inferences or conclusions from one doctrine and then build a whole system in that way. We want to see whether the Scriptures have anything to say about this matter.

And there's where people seem to hear a mixed message from Scripture. On the one hand, Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians, if I can refer you to that for a moment, the very first chapter of his letter to the Philippians, Paul says this, I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine, making requests for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that he who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. Here Paul expresses his apostolic confidence that what Christ has started, Christ will finish.

And he is called the author and the finisher. We are the craftsmanship of Christ, and to put it bluntly, if not crassly, Christ doesn't make any junk. When Christ crafts a person for conformity to His image, He doesn't have to throw away the product at the end of the crafting labor.

But again, there are passages in the Scripture that seem at least at first glance to indicate that people can and do lose their salvation. Paul himself said that he pummels his body to subdue it, lest after winning others he himself might become a castaway. But the most important text in all of the Scripture that relates to this question of the possibility of losing salvation is found in the highly controversial and complex issue set forth in the sixth chapter of the book of Hebrews.

Chapter 6 of Hebrews begins with these words, an exhortation to growth, therefore leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits. Now listen to this, for it is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

Now here we have a very serious solemn warning saying that it is impossible to restore a second time to salvation those people who have crucified Christ afresh. And this is, as I say, caused no small amount of consternation because what is taught here in the sixth chapter of Hebrews seems to go against the grain of everything else that the New Testament teaches that would give us confidence that God is going to preserve us and bring our work of redemption to its completion in heaven. So there have been all kinds of attempts to get around this sixth chapter.

For example, many believe that what the author is describing here is not a truly regenerate person but rather is describing merely a church member. Remember that Jesus speaks of His church as being a place where there is an abundance of both wheat and tares, that it's a mixed body. And we do know that in the past that people can join the church and repudiate the church and never come back, just as we mentioned earlier with young life, and in that sense they become apostate.

They fall away from their original profession of faith. But the question was, was that original profession genuine? Or is this simply describing here people who are inside the visible covenant community, members of the church who have never really been converted? Well, listen to how these people are described. It is impossible for those who were once enlightened.

Well, we would ask, enlightened to what degree? A person who sits in church on Sunday morning every week, hears the gospel, hears the reading of the Scripture, it could be said of that church member that that person is enlightened, not necessarily converted, but they've at least heard the light of the gospel. They have tasted the heavenly gift and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good Word of God. Now, it could be said of anyone who's present in church on Sunday morning that they've tasted it.

They participate in the sacraments. They've literally tasted the sacraments, and they hear the Word of God, and they've been immersed, as it were, in the ways of the Christian faith. And these things could describe people who were members of the covenant community of Israel in the Old Testament who were never converted.

And so, as I say, people say that these people, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance. Now, what makes me think that the author of Hebrews is not describing mere church members but actual believers is that a person who repents in the true sense is a regenerate person. Now, there is a false repentance like the repentance of Esau, we understand that, but genuine repentance that brings genuine renewal is a fruit of regeneration.

And so, if the apostle is saying here that it's impossible to renew these people again to repentance, that clearly indicates that there was a time when they had been renewed by repentance, and so I think, there's no doubt in my mind, that he's speaking here about believers. Well, if I take that position, doesn't that demolish the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints? I don't think so, for a couple of reasons. The first question I want to know is, why is the author giving this solemn warning? Now, one of the problems we have with the book of Hebrews is, first of all, we don't know who wrote it, and secondly, we don't know for sure to whom it was written, and thirdly, and in this case, more importantly, we don't know why it was written.

We know that there was obviously a serious matter confronting this congregation, and the scholars have speculated that it was persecution, and that what people were doing were they were denying Christ in the face of being persecuted or being executed for their faith, possibly. We also know that perhaps the most widespread heresy that the nascent church had to face in the first century was the heresy of the Judaizers that tore the early church apart. Paul's whole letter to the Galatians addresses this issue, and it's addressed in other books in the New Testament.

The Judaizers were those who insisted that converts from the Gentile world to Christianity had to embrace full-oared Old Testament Judaism, including circumcision as a sacred sign. And you recall how Paul fought so boldly against that, and how that thing was settled at the Council of Jerusalem, and Paul said in his letter to the Galatians that if you have been redeemed from the curse of the law, and then go back and place yourself under the curse of the law again by virtue of having circumcision as a religious right, you are in effect repudiating the cross, because Christ has fulfilled the curse of the law. He was circumcised for us on the cross, is what Paul is saying in Galatians, and so if you believe that, why would you go back and put yourself in that same indebtedness that you had before the cross? Now one of the things that the apostolic community did well was argue in an ad hominem fashion.

I don't mean ad hominem according to the fallacy where you attack and abuse people instead of the argument, but the classic ad hominem argument was where you argue to the man. That is, you took your opponent's position and took it to its logical conclusion so that you assume the premises of your opponent and show that if you embrace those premises, it will lead you to absurdity. Now if, for example, the heresy in view here in Hebrews is the Judaizer heresy, I can see the author of Hebrews writing to them, what's the matter with you people? Don't you understand the significance of what you're doing here? That if you want to go back to circumcision, that you are in effect repudiating the finished work of Christ? And if you embrace that and have in fact repudiated the finished work of Christ, how could you possibly be saved? You'd have no way to be saved, because after you've been enlightened, you've tasted the heavenly gift, and now you go back, and you go back into Egypt, and you embrace that old form again, there would be no way that you could ever be restored.

That is, as long as you held that position, because you have in effect repudiated the very heart of it. So I think that what the apostle is doing here is giving that kind of argument, saying here's the logical conclusion that would flow out of this kind of thinking. And so he's saying, if you believe this, you're going to lose your salvation.

Does that mean that anybody does lose their salvation? I don't think so. Listen to what he says just a few moments later in the text. But beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you.

Yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. Oh, the relief I feel when I hear that, because here the apostle is making it very clear that what he is saying up above about people losing their salvation is a manner of speaking. And yet he steps up to the plate and says in the final analysis, but I'm confident of better things concerning you, things that do accompany salvation.

And what accompanies salvation is perseverance. Now we see it one other place that I think is important. You take two persons in the New Testament, both of whom had a serious and radical fall.

And any Christian is capable of a serious and radical fall such as David was. The question here is whether we can have a full and final fall. Judas was a member of the apostolic community.

He was a disciple of Jesus Christ. He was with our Lord for His earthly ministry. And Judas betrayed Christ for thirty pieces of silver and went out and hanged himself.

And the Scripture says of Judas that he was a devil from the beginning. Now Jesus predicted that Judas would do this. And He said, whatever you had to do, do quickly.

And in that same meeting, at that same table, He said to Simon Peter that Simon Peter would deny him three times. And Peter protested vehemently saying, never will I do that, Lord. And Jesus looked at him and said, Simon, Simon, Satan would have you and sift you like wheat.

You're a piece of cake in the hands of Satan. But I have prayed for you so that when you turn, strengthen the brothers. He didn't say that to Judas.

But He said it to Simon. And He didn't say, Simon, if you turn, if you repent, but when you repent, feed the brothers and strengthen the brothers. Because Simon belonged to Christ.

And he fell dramatically and radically. But the intercessory work of Christ was in effect so that Simon was not lost. Now again, in that same upper room, when we read the high priestly prayer of Jesus, where Jesus prays for His disciples, He not only prays for them, but for all of those who believe as a result of their witness, which includes us, that they may not be lost.

And so our confidence in the perseverance of the saints is not a confidence that rests in the flesh, where we look at ourselves and we say, well, I'm never going to fall away. I'm much too dedicated, sounding like Simon Peter in the upper room. In fact, I don't even like the term perseverance.

I like the term preservation. That we, the only reason we persevere, the only reason we can persevere is because God preserves us. If it were left to ourselves, we could fall at any moment.

Satan could sift us like wheat. But our confidence in the final chapter of our salvation rests in the promises of God to finish what He has started and rests upon the efficacy of the great high priest that we have who intercedes for us every day. He will preserve us.

That's a message of comfort and hope for all believers, isn't it? Dr. R.C. Sproul has titled today's presentation, The Perseverance of the Saints. And it's part of a 60-part series from Renewing Your Mind called Foundations, an overview of systematic theology. To some, systematic theology can be daunting.

Perhaps you've seen the lengthy and intimidating textbooks in your pastor's study. Or maybe you've come to the conclusion that theological studies are dry, boring, or even unnecessary. Well, as you heard in today's lesson, the doctrines of the Christian faith are engaging, relevant, and they're accessible.

And we're pleased to say that we've collected all 60 messages from Dr. Sproul on this topic. And we've packaged the DVDs into one comprehensive special edition set. It's titled Foundations, an overview of systematic theology.

This edition of the series also includes a CD-ROM that contains audio presentations and a printable study guide. When you give a donation to support the ministry, you're invited to request all 60 DVDs along with the CD-ROM. This special edition is titled Foundations, an overview of systematic theology.

Give your donation and make your request when you call 1-800-435-4343 or go online to rymoffer.com. This webpage is for today's special offer only. At Ligonier Ministries, it's our goal to bridge the gap between Sunday school and seminary. We believe that the study of God's holiness is more than just an academic exercise.

And our passion is to expose as many people as possible to the holiness of God so that God is glorified. We're grateful for your gifts to support this mission. And as a way of saying thanks, we'd like to send you this special edition of the 60-part teaching series from Dr. Sproul on DVD.

This resource is substantial. It's not just an audio series. When you give a donation, we'll send you the special edition, including a CD-ROM, with all of the audio and printable study notes as well.

This is an excellent reference tool you can use for your own education. Or many of our listeners tell us it's helped them lead a small group Bible study or a Sunday school class. You will appreciate Dr. Sproul's engaging teaching style as he explains how the truths of Scripture relate to each other in perfect harmony.

The Foundation's series covers topics including the origin of the Bible, the triune nature of God, sin, salvation, miracles, the end times, and much more. Give a donation and request your copy of the DVD set, Foundations, an overview of systematic theology. Call 1-800-435-4343 or online go to rymoffer.com. I'm Lee Webb and I'm glad to have you along with us today.

Next weekend, Dr. Sproul continues his overview of systematic theology with a lesson on the biblical images of the church. Listen next weekend to Renewing Your Mind.