

## Once Saved, Always Saved?

Matthew 26:30–44, 69–75; Canons of Dort 5.4

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**O**NCE saved, always saved. Do we as a church believe that? I want you to think about that for a moment. Do we believe that those God in his love chose in eternity will spend an eternity loving him? Yes. Yet, how is this slogan so often used? It's used to say that a person who claims to be a Christian can live like an unbeliever his or her whole life and still be saved. It's used to justify sin and being unconcerned with godliness. So do we believe "once saved, always saved?" Yes, if understood rightly. No, if it means what so many think it means.

What our Scripture lesson teaches us tonight is that while a true believer cannot completely fall *from* grace a true believer can fall *into* heinous sins. To say that we can fall from grace is to say that we become unsaved and outside the grip of God's hand. But to say that we can fall into sin, even heinous sin, is to say that even then we are in the grip of grace, albeit not a very tight grip. The question before us tonight is "can I fall into heinous sins?"

## The Real Potential in Ourselves

Can I fall into heinous sins? In answer I want you to see *the real potential in ourselves*. Look at pages 109–110 in the back of the *Psalter*:

Although the weakness of the flesh cannot prevail against the power of God, who confirms and preserves true believers in a state of grace, yet converts are not always so influenced and actuated by the Spirit of God as not in some particular instances sinfully to deviate from the guidance of divine grace, so as to be seduced by and to comply with the lusts of the flesh.

We have the potential because of our sin nature. The same sin nature that ran through Peter veins runs through us. With Peter, we can be prideful: **“Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away....Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!”** (vv. 33, 35). Like Peter, while **the spirit indeed is willing...the flesh is weak** (v. 41). Our hearts are full of flammable material with a big bright sign in all capital letters: **EXPLOSIVE**. And all it takes is the smallest of sparks. Or to use another illustration, our sins are like the cold of winter that cause a fruitful tree to nearly go dormant.<sup>1</sup>

We have the potential as *the example of the saints* shows. The article from the Canons before us concludes, saying, “This, the lamentable fall of

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<sup>1</sup> Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man*, 2 vols. (), 2:57.

David, Peter, and other saints described in Holy Scripture, demonstrates.”

*Lamentable.* This certainly describes David’s fall in 2 Samuel 11 as he committed adultery with Bathsheba and then covered it up by having Uriah placed at the front of the battle line so he would assuredly be killed. Instead of watching out for sin he was watching to sin. *Lamentable.* This certainly describes Peter. He was called by the Lord, trained by the Lord, accompanied the Lord as he did his miracles and preached the Gospel of the kingdom, but there he was, falling and denying our Lord; there he was not able to stay awake while our Lord agonized in prayer over the cross to come (vv. 36–44). And then after our Lord spoke to him about denying three times, Peter goes and places himself **outside** the very place our Lord was interrogated (v. 69). And there he said, **“I do not know what you mean”** (v. 70); there he **denied...with an oath: “I do not know the man”** (v. 72); there he **invoke[d] a curse on himself and sw[ore], “I do not know the man”** (v. 74). He should not have been in the palace as this shows he underestimated his propensity to sin and overestimated his ability to withstand. This lamentable potential in use should cause us to lament like Peter: **And he went out and wept bitterly** (v. 75).

## The Righteous Permission in God

Can I fall into heinous sins? Yes, because of *the righteous permission in God*. Don't forget that God is in control of all aspects of our lives. If he weren't there would be no hope of change! Jesus tells them, **"You will all fall away because of me this night"** (v. 31). Jesus quotes Zechariah 13:7, **"For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered'"** (v. 31). Note again the Canon, which says, "When [we neglect watchfulness and prayer], they are not only liable to be drawn into great and heinous sins by the flesh, the world and Satan, but sometimes by the righteous permission of God actually fall into these evils. This, the lamentable fall of David, Peter, and other saints described in Holy Scripture, demonstrates."

Let's look at how this is illustrated in Luke 22:31-34, the parallel to our text this evening: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31-32). What did you notice about our Lord's words? Did he say he turned Satan down? Did he say Satan had no business asking such a thing? No. Our Lord's answer shows that he did give Satan permission to "sift" Peter. Why?

It was so that Peter's faith would be refined and purified, as he was to strengthen his brothers in faith after he repented and returned to the Lord. What this means is that the Lord can allow us to fall into sin on our own accord and that we need to be aware of this. He wants our faith to be strengthened even more through the experience so that we'll come out more assured than before.

### **The Remedy Prescribed in Scripture**

And because I can I fall into heinous sins let's look at *the remedy prescribed in Scripture*. Should we rest secure in a carnal security because we know we are impervious? Should we just give up because we might fall anyway? We cannot respond like this! Look again at the Canon: "they must, therefore, be constant in watching and prayer." **"Watch and pray,"** as Jesus said to his disciples (v. 41).

We are to keep watch for our brothers and sisters (Gal. 6:1). Are you concerned when a brother or sister is not here? Are you aware that a brother or sister may be falling? We are to keep watch for ourselves (1 Thess. 5:6; 1 Peter 5:8). Are you aware of your weaknesses?

Praying (Eph. 6:18; Pray 1 Thess. 5:6, 17). Engaging in warfare!