

Deuteronomy 28:1-2, Hebrews 6:1-8
“Once saved always saved”

This past week it was such a joy to examine and then receive into membership the confirmation class of 2025-2026. The members are Zoe Maffett, Brayden Young, Fiona Lau, Lucy Kondratowski, Kasen Fasnacht, and Natalie Sherrack. The new generation of believers and disciples and followers of Jesus are in the house. We examined them by asking them questions and they answered after a journey of learning the basics of the faith. Remember when we preached on the milk of the faith, the things we ought to know we have to learn at some time, and then we move on to the meat of the faith. Well, the entire class is about learning the milk, the basics of the faith.

There was one question that is on one of their first tests that they take it goes something like this: We are able to earn our salvation through good works and faith, true or false. Every single year the vast majority of those taking this test get it wrong. The answer is false. We cannot earn our salvation through either works or faith, because it is not ours to earn or to lose, it is God's to give, and give it generously he does.

This takes us to the question for today that we have to answer, does our obedience, even our faith, serve as something that we do or that we have so that we can earn our salvation. The converse question is also true, does our disobedience serve as a catalyst to lose our salvation, is that even possible? I know, this sounds very theoretical, and some Sundays we find ourselves in the theory of theology, but it has real life impact. Obedience and disobedience has plagued us from creation itself, what impact does it have?

You should know the answer to this question simply from the sermon title: Once saved always saved. But don't get it twisted, our obedience and our disobedience matters. Let's read.

READ

I'm in that age bracket now that I get invited to seminars that are held by our denomination that address retirement and preparing for retirement. I love what I am doing and you happen to pay me to do it, so my goal is to work as a pastor until I'm 70, so 13 years from now, if you can put up with me. But in the discussion that we had on Thursday it became very clear that there were certain things we should really do in order to prepare for the future, but at the end of the day, the Providence of God is what will dictate and rule our lives. That doesn't mean don't plan, but the fact of the matter is the better we plan the more prepared we are for

when the Providence of God, for when things happen in our lives that we least expect happen. We are more nimble when we plan for the future.

As Presbyterians we believe strongly in the Providence of God. That is one of the reasons why we baptize both infants and adults because we believe that even though those youth will stand before and declare their personal faith in Jesus Christ, that is not an act that saves them, Jesus is who saves them. Jesus' act on the cross and his resurrection is what saves them. The blood of Christ saves us, not any action or declaration that we make. So when we say once saved always saved we say it within the context of believing without any hesitation that it is God who saves, not us.

To begin today we are going to look at Scriptures that solidify the theological concept of once saved always saved and then we are going to look at Hebrews which seems to say something different and try to understand exactly what it is that it is saying. Look at John 10:28-29, where we read that Jesus is the one who gives eternal life and to those whom he gives eternal life, no matter what happens in life, nobody and nothing can snatch his sheep out of his hands. Our presence in the hand of God will remain forever, nobody and nothing can change our status as being the sheep of God's pasture. Hear and be comforted those who see yourselves as less than what this Scripture describes you as, sheep of God's pasture, even in our disobedience.

But wait, there is more, look at Romans 8:38-39 which tells us that nothing can separate us from the love of God. You can add to that list, even our apostasy, or our falling away from the church or the faith community. The accusation is that if you believe this then it creates a people who are luke warm and aren't motivated to live for God and to be disciples that bear good fruit. Without the carrot and the stick, without the promise of eternal life and the threat of losing your salvation, you will settle into a complacent life where what you do doesn't matter so why do anything? I don't know, that has never been my approach, and that sounds miserable. Who wants to live like that?

Finally, look at Roman 8:30, where we get our Presbyterian word of predestined and where Paul says that those whom God has called he has already glorified. You can't take that glory away from people, because they have already experienced it. It is that glory that actually often brings people back into the fold. Which is why I insist that every time a person walks through these doors they have to experience the living Christ, because it is then and only then

that we can be assured that they are seeing Christ through us and it provides them an opportunity to become a follower of Christ.

So it is clear in Scripture that once you have tasted salvation in being welcomed into the fold of Christ, then that salvation is permanent, and doesn't come and go based upon your fickleness and your obedience or even your disobedience. But Hebrews 6 seems to be saying something a bit different. When you read vs.4 it seems pretty cut and dried and some will say that those who say they believed didn't really believe, and they will point to I John 2:19 as proof. But that isn't what we read here in Hebrews. They really believed, look at vs.4 and 5 where we read that they have tasted the heavenly gift and they have been enlightened. Their salvation was legitimate, it was not fake.

The author, as we have been saying over and over again, is experiencing a lot of people from the community buckling under the pressure of having to make the decision of either being a follower of Jesus and living in constant danger, or succumbing to the society and culture and living a safer life. In his experience, once they left the church they were not coming back. In Italy where we served, the Waldensian community is so small and the greatest danger to the community comes when their children decide to marry and will they stay within the church at marriage, or will they leave the church. We have seen that once they leave the church they never come back. It is just too hard to live as a minority, when you can choose to join the rest of society.

The impossibility of returning does not come from a commandment from God, and certainly not a desire of God, but from our disobedience which almost inevitably leads to us never returning. The role of obedience and disobedience here reveals itself powerfully. We see in Deuteronomy how the author lays out the role of obedience. If we obey we will experience God in a very different way than if we disobey. Don't get it twisted, things will not be perfect. Red Bortzfield in the last few years when I visited him we spoke a lot about Job, it was his idea. He could identify Job, this person who obeyed God and yet whose life was difficult, very difficult. Obedience does not lead to an easy life. In fact, here in Hebrews, obedience to God led to a much more difficult life. So it is difficult to find people who will choose obedience when it leads to a more difficult life.

But what we see here is that when people slam the door on the church and walk away, they are turning their backs on the grace of God that is reaching out for them, desperate to bring

them back into the fold. God isn't turning his back on them, he never does, but they are turning their back on him. You see repentance and obedience and faith, they are all a gift from God and not an act of man or woman. Ever since creation we have disobeyed. We read in vs.8 that disobedience produces thorns and thistles. Where have we seen in the Bible an act of disobedience that has produced thorns and thistles?

Look at Genesis 3:17-18, this act of disobedience produced results that were not what God had wanted for us. The same is true for us, when we choose to live apart from God, then there will be ramifications that we would never want for us, and that God does not want for us. Obedience and disobedience have a clear impact upon our relationship with God. But, not upon the grace of God. God never puts limits on God's grace, but rather the author here is speaking from experience about those who have left the church and have never come back.

Our faith in God is not static, it is always moving in one direction, either toward God or away from God. No one stays still in their faith. There are things that we can do in order to increase our faith. The spiritual disciplines are one way in which we can move closer to God. Our young adult Sunday School class is trying out fasting over this period of time. Let me tell you, I have personally found myself moving closer to God as a result. I know that when we have the read through the Bible and we are going through that and I have the discipline of reading Scripture every day I always feel as if I am moving in the direction toward God. So our obedience and our disobedience does have an impact on how close or how far we are from God, and not because God is the one moving, we are.

But these disciplines, and our ability or inability to be obedient has no impact on our salvation, just how we are able to experience the fullness of life in Christ here on this earth. The more obedient we are the more full our life is in Christ. Who doesn't want that? In fact in our reading today we see that in verse 1 that our lives should be a reflection of always moving toward – what word do you have? Perfection? How about maturity, using a word from last week. The maturity described is not the type achievable by our trying harder, but rather, like faith, comes directly from God.

The fruit we produce will be a result of our maturity. My hope for us is that we will hear and believe the good news of the Gospel that in the name of Jesus Christ we are forgiven, and not in our efforts or even in our obedience and disobedience, and that we will go away today assured of our salvation which will free us to do His will. Amen.