

Once Saved Always Saved? The Debate Continues

Like many Christians today, Stephen Pippin long believed in the adage, "Once saved, always saved."

This concept, sometimes referred to as "hyper-grace," is often preached in the pulpits of America—leading many to conclude that their ticket to heaven is secure once they say the sinner's prayer.

"The only thing I'm saying is when the preacher says, 'Believe in Christ and you will be saved,' know it is a belief that is supposed to last all your life. It's not just a belief that is supposed to last just that night," says Pippin, the assistant pastor at Dodson Branch Community Church in Cookeville, Tennessee, and the author of *Once Saved, Always Saved*.

"It's living in Christ. It's fellowship. It's a constant relationship. Christ is your friend. He's not just your ticket to heaven and way out of hell. It's loving God that gets us to heaven. But Jesus says many will go to hell. How many say the sinner's prayer and many years later are just as bad or worse? I know people like that in my own life. How can a man fall into a reprobate state and still say Christ is his Master and Lord?"

In his new book, Pippin explores this profound question, one which Bible scholars have pondered for two millennia: Can a Christian lose his or her salvation and, consequently, entrance into heaven?

In the book, Pippin delves into the topic of what it takes to be secure with Jesus. He shares his thoughts on eternal security and the impact on one's afterlife of living a life of sin after salvation.

Pippin's spiritual journey began at age 12 when he first accepted the Lord as his savior. Afterward, he was "on fire for Christ for about three years," but then fell away.

After recovering from substance abuse, immersion in the hip-hop culture and a life of sin, Pippin rededicated his life to Jesus in 2012. From careful study of Scripture, Pippin, now 31, began shaping and publicly voicing his views on whether heaven is achievable for all Christians.

In an interview with *Charisma News*, Pippin cited a number of Bible verses to support his views. The book contains more than 600 Bible verses.

Dispelling the notion that one can work their way to heaven, Pippin cites Isaiah 64:6, noting, "all our righteousness is as filthy rags."

"This is why Paul is so adamant about belief, belief, belief, because it is abiding belief, or continued belief, that is key," Pippin says. "It's not our works. We can't work our way to heaven."

Pippin also references the importance of obedience to God (Rom. 16:26) and following the Bible. Further, he cites Luke 6:46: "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I say?"

Pippin says, "I heard a popular saying, which has become popular in this lukewarm age: 'Everybody wants a savior, but nobody wants a Lord.' Nobody wants to go to hell, but then again nobody wants to obey God. But Jesus says, 'I'm your Lord.' He tells us what to do. We obey Him, not ourselves. We are not our own God.

"My book basically says to abide in Him. The one word I can say is 'obedience' to describe the whole book. Be obedient. It's not a perfection kind of obedience. No man can be perfect. It's a brokenness that comes with salvation in Christ

Jesus.”

Pippin also tells the parable of the prodigal son, noting what the boy’s father said in Luke 15:24: “For this son of mine was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.”

“It means when he left his father that he was considered dead and lost,” Pippin says. “He wasn’t considered his anymore. He was considered the world’s—meaning if you live in the world you’ll die with the world.”

Finally, one of the most powerful verses he cites is Heb. 10:26-27: “For if we willfully continue to sin after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation....”

In his analysis of this verse, Pippin understands that many believers “do backslide every once in a while.”

“It’s more about fully putting on the old man,” Pippin says. “It’s when a man loses his connection with God, when he loses that hatred for sin. Trust me, we sin every day. But if we lose that conviction, the Holy Spirit conviction, then I believe the man is in great need of repentance.

“How can God minister—meaning live inside of you, be convicting you and be your Lord—if you don’t hear His voice? Jesus says, ‘My sheep hear My voice.’ People think Jesus took up the cross for us. That’s not what He said. He said, ‘Take up your cross and follow Me.’ Deny the world. Deny yourself. Deny everything for Me. He told the rich young ruler to give away all his treasure, to give it to the poor—meaning have a heart.”

Pippin says he understands that no one can be perfect, but too few believers today make a real effort to strive toward holiness—succumbing to the world’s temptations.

“Like I said, it’s not perfectionism,” Pippin says. “I’d be a hypocrite to say that. It’s abiding in Christ. It’s struggling with sin. Don’t just fall into the world’s temptations and think your eternal destiny is assured. We all sin before God. Follow the example of Paul. At the end of his life, he said that he had kept the faith, meaning he didn’t lose it. That’s what it is. It’s being broken for Christ, sacrificing for Christ.”

Pippin recognizes that all believers will continue to sin, but God calls on us to fight against sin.

“It’s a very difficult thing not to sin—trying to live a perfect life,” Pippin says. “The answer is to walk in the Spirit, study the Bible everyday, do your best, feed the poor, have a heart and pray constantly. Be not lukewarm. Jesus says in Revelation 3:16: ‘So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spit you out of My mouth.’ That means you are in His body and he spews you out of His body.

“We are going to sin, we’re going to slip up. It’s a guarantee, but fight against it. Go to God. Every time run to the cross. That’s it. Struggle. Strive with Christ. He knows we’re not going to be perfect. None of the apostles were perfect. They were men just like us, fighting against sin. But they did fight against it. Keep believing Christ will lead you.”

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