

What About 'Once Saved, Always Saved' When a Megachurch Pastor Falls?

The very public moral failures of a number of megachurch pastors over the past few months and years have not only caused a crisis for these men, their families, their congregations and the millions who have been influenced by their ministries. Their falls have also caused a theological crisis for many ministers, especially those who believe in the doctrine known as "once saved, always saved." Now, these ministers have been forced to make a choice between two possible positions.

The first choice is that none of these pastors or preachers were ever saved. Or second, that even though these men were actively or previously involved in grievous sin, they were, are and always will be saved.

This theological crisis has brought this dilemma to the forefront of the minds of many believers in Yeshua (Jesus) and is causing many to question anew their understanding of what it means to be saved.

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It's one thing when Joe Nobody comes in off the street drunk, hears the Good News and repeats the sinner's prayer, only to return to the bottle and the gutter. When that happens, it's easy to simply justify his walking away by saying, "Well, he was never really saved." With those few words, adherents can preserve their doctrine of "once saved, always saved." After all, if he were really and truly saved, he would not have fallen back into his addiction.

But now we have multiple ministry leaders who have ministered for years and led thousands into a relationship with Yeshua, raised up hundreds of men who also have ministered for years, raising up their own disciples. These men served their congregations and gave millions to other ministries and missionaries. They demonstrated the fruit of the Spirit and called Yeshua L-RD.

Yet each of them fell into sin—some years ago, some recently and some for many years. Those who believe in “once saved, always saved” are left with only two choices. Choice one: None of these men were ever saved, regardless of the fruit of their ministries. Or choice two: These men have always been saved, even while they were actively participating and practicing the very things Paul said in Galatians 5:19-21 would not inherit G-D’s kingdom.

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“Now the deeds of the flesh are clear: sexual immorality, impurity, indecency, idolatry, witchcraft, hostility, strife, jealousy, rage, selfish ambition, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, just as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit God’s kingdom” (Gal. 5:19-21, TLV).

But what if there is a third choice? What if, when Yeshua said in Matthew 24:13, “But the one who endures to the end will be saved,” He really meant it? What if, when Paul said, “Therefore, my loved ones, just as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now even more in my absence—work out your salvation with fear and trembling,” in Philippians 2:12, he meant it literally? What if we understood that redemption begins when we are born again, but salvation is what takes place when we endure to the end?

When we place salvation in its correct context, we are not left with only the two options above. Instead, we view our relationship with Yeshua in its proper framework, which allows us to view these men, and in fact, all men and women, as human beings, fighting their flesh daily and having the ability to continue to seek forgiveness. This understanding of G-D's grace doesn't cheapen grace, nor weaken grace—rather, it empowers grace.

The truth is that while I am not thankful these megachurch leaders fell into sin, I am thankful that it has caused so many to question and look more deeply into the doctrine of “once saved, always save” because truly, there—but for the grace of G-D—go you and I.

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