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# ONCE SAVED ALWAYS SAVED?

MINI BOOK

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One of the features of my BibleTalk.tv website is that people can make comments, ask questions, or send emails directly to me about the content of my teaching. Most of these are kind and encouraging coming from people who are members of the Church of Christ, but many more are from folks who are part of other religious groups and denominations within the broad heading of Christianity.

They have many questions, which I try to answer, but one question or challenge to my teaching that is often repeated is, "Why do I teach that it is possible for a Christian to lose his or her salvation?" This query is expressed in different ways, for example:

1. You're just preaching a "works" type of gospel. This is because I insist that baptism, along with faith and repentance, is a necessary response to the gospel. The point of the objection here being that baptism is a "work" and we are saved by faith only.
2. Another charge is that I'm preaching a "salvation by discipleship" gospel. This accusation based on my insistence that Christians must grow spiritually or they will die spiritually. The argument here being that once we are saved,

nothing we do or fail to do (like grow spiritually) can cause us to lose our salvation.

Of course, these arguments and pushback are based on the notion described by the title of this mini-book: "Once Saved, Always Saved?" I put a question mark, but normally there is no question mark because many believe (incorrectly in my opinion) that once a person is saved it is impossible for them to be lost again.

This debate reached a critical point recently when one of the BibleTalk.tv viewers challenged me to name a single person in the Bible that was saved and then, according to the Bible, was lost. This challenge made me realize that I had not taught specifically on the topic of "once saved, always saved" before and it was

time to bring some biblical clarity to this important subject.

## **ONCE SAVED, ALWAYS SAVED — HISTORY**

Perseverance of the saints, also referred to as eternal security as well as the doctrine known as, "Once Saved, Always Saved" is a teaching that essentially says:

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Once a person is born of God or regenerated by the Holy Spirit, nothing in heaven or on earth will be able to separate that person from God (Romans 8:39). In other words, once you are saved this is how you will always be no matter what.

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Of course, no doctrine exists in a vacuum. Teachings are based or formulated to complement or to support other teachings. This idea (once saved, always saved) is no

exception, being a doctrine originally formulated by Augustine of Hippo who was a fourth century Catholic monk and theologian. He taught the following:

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Those whom God chooses to save are given, in addition to the gift of faith, a gift of perseverance which enables them to continue to believe, and precludes the possibility of falling away (Augustine of Hippo - AD 354-430).

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Several centuries later John Calvin incorporated this concept as part of his five points of Calvinism defined and confirmed at the Synod of Dort in 1618. Here is a brief summary of these:

1. **Total depravity** – Mankind is dead spiritually and cannot want or understand the gospel or salvation unless he is enabled to do so by God's Spirit.
2. **Unconditional Election** – God chooses who He will give eternal life to without considering anything good or bad about them.
3. **Limited Atonement** – The death and payment for sins is limited to only those chosen by God for salvation.
4. **Irresistible Grace** – God's grace to save a person cannot be resisted, you cannot say no to God. If He decides to save you, you are powerless to refuse.
5. **Perseverance of the Saved** – Once saved, always saved.



This is the **TULIP** acrostic used to remember the five points of Calvinism.

When someone says, "What is the difference between the Church of Christ and our Baptist friends or other Evangelical, Pentecostal or Protestant churches?" The answer is not simply that they use instruments in their worship and we don't, or they have women preachers and we don't, or they don't think baptism is necessary and we do.

These are important differences, yes, but the core differences that produce these outward ones are twofold:

1. In general, these religious groups do not accept the fact that what the Bible specifically teaches about a matter is the binding and final authority, and those in the Churches of Christ (see

Restoration Movement) do. This is why they permit and encourage non-biblical practices such as women pastors or instrumental music being used in public worship, or their acceptance of openly and practicing gay members and ministers, and we reject these things and other non-biblical practices because they cannot be supported with Scripture. We need to understand that it is not being narrow-minded or legalistic to insist that what we do as Christians or various practices done in and for the church must be supported by Scripture.

2. Their doctrines and practices concerning salvation are to a lesser or greater degree based on Calvin's five-point teaching on how one is saved;

while our teaching on salvation openly rejects these and rely solely on the New Testament's plain teaching about salvation. This is not being "self-righteous" or "holier-than-thou" – this is our approach to putting Christ's teachings into practice.

Thomas Campbell, one of the early preachers and teachers responsible for the Restoration movement, from which come the Churches of Christ, began to reject and declare as unbiblical these teachings by Calvin that form the basic theology for most Baptist, Evangelical, Pentecostal and Protestant churches. One of the reasons why the Churches of Christ grew so quickly in the 19th and 20th centuries was the rejection of these Calvinist principles in favor of the simple message of salvation from the New Testament preached and

taught by Church of Christ evangelists and teachers. For example, in the case of:

## **1. Total Depravity**

We said man is a sinner, yes, but not so depraved that he can't hear and respond to the good news of Jesus Christ. Where did we get that idea?

<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the

end of the age."

- **Matthew 28:18-20**

## **2. Unconditional Election**

You don't need to wait and wonder if God will choose you for salvation. Salvation is available for everyone who believes and is baptized in Jesus' name. Where did we get that idea?

He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.

- **Mark 16:16**

It seems rather clear in this passage that Jesus assures the person who believes and is baptized that he/she will be saved. And, conversely, the one who disbelieves (and

thus rejects baptism) will be condemned. The one who chooses is not God but the person who believes or disbelieves.

### **3. Limited Atonement**

Jesus' sacrifice is not only for a precious few, but as Paul teaches in I Timothy 2:6, "Who gave Himself as a ransom for all." Note that Paul says that Jesus' sacrifice is a ransom for everyone. Everyone who does what? Everyone who believes and is baptized.

### **4. Irresistible Grace**

The Bible teaches that the believer has a part to play in his own salvation by the exercise of his will in expressing his faith through obedience. Those who believed (an act of will) on Pentecost Sunday

expressed their belief according to Peter's command to repent and be baptized.

<sup>37</sup> Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" <sup>38</sup> Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself."

<sup>40</sup> And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!"

<sup>41</sup> So then, those who had received

his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

- **Acts 2:37-41**

The Bible doesn't say that those who were arbitrarily chosen by God came forward and were saved. Luke says that salvation (the promise) was for everyone that God called to Himself, not everyone that God randomly chose. That's simple grammar, not theology. The preceding verses demonstrate how God does this calling through the preaching of the gospel to all the nations, and on Pentecost Sunday we see a demonstration of the Apostles doing this very thing.

Then, in verse 41, Luke writes that those who received the word were baptized. There is no arbitrariness here. There is no



irresistible grace here. The Bible says that those who believed (accepted as true that Jesus was the Son of God based on the evidence presented by Peter in his sermon) and repented (another act of the will) were baptized in His name and thus received forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

These people acted on their belief (expressed their faith) according to Peter's instructions and therein lies the difference between ourselves and our Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical and Pentecostal friends and neighbors. Their view of salvation and baptism is more highly influenced by Augustine and Calvin's teaching than they are by the New Testament's teaching on the subject. For example:

## **Roman Catholicism**

Catholics baptize babies because they believe in total depravity, they call it Original Sin. They believe that a baby is born with sin, and based on the vicarious faith of the parents or the godparents, that sin is removed at baptism. Never mind that a baby cannot give an assent of will (belief and repentance) according to the New Testament, Catholic dogma and tradition trump basic Bible teaching.

## **Most Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal**

Calvinist teaching has crystallized into traditions and practices where people do things while not even aware of why they do them. When I speak with Baptist people that I know and we happen to discuss religion they cannot explain why they believe and practice what they do

concerning salvation. The teaching on baptism being a prime example. These groups don't see the necessity of baptism because it represents man's conscious participation in his own salvation and they reject that idea. If, as Calvin taught, God chooses you and you can't resist His choosing, then baptism has no real purpose since it represents your response to God's offer of salvation. All you can do is accept what He has done (i.e. I accept Jesus as my personal Savior - a phrase not found anywhere in the New Testament).

Of course, this leads to many tortured explanations of the role of baptism in the process of salvation, none of which are supported by any Scripture (i.e. "an outward sign of an inward grace" or "it's a symbol of your salvation" or it's a "witness that we are already saved"). Unfortunately,

none of these are supported by any specific Scripture references or body of teaching by any of the New Testament writers. It seems to me that when Peter the Apostle was preaching on Pentecost Sunday, he simply answered the crowd's question, "...men and brethren what shall we do (to be saved)?" With the simple response to "...repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sin and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:37-38). Grammatically, contextually and historically the repentance and the baptism have always come before salvation was pronounced. Many argue that baptism is not necessary but cannot point to any person in the New Testament after Pentecost Sunday who became a Christian without being baptized! If, therefore, baptism is essential as we believe the Bible teaches, then this undermines the

theological framework that supports the teaching and practice of most "Christian" churches today.

## **5. Perseverance of the Saved**

Those chosen by God can never lose their salvation. Restorationists taught that man's continued salvation is based on his continued faith until death or Christ's return (whichever comes first). Jesus Himself said:

But the one who endures to the end, will be saved.

- **Matthew 24:13**

Many people that I have a debate with over this particular issue say the following concerning the Scripture above: "Oh well, this passage is only talking about the

millennial reign" or "It's only talking about the end time," as if this would disqualify what Jesus teaches here concerning the necessity to remain faithful in order to preserve our salvation. My response is, "So what! You either have to be faithful to the end, or when Jesus comes, or during the millennial reign, or whenever the end time comes. It still says what it says. You have to be faithful to the end of whatever era you are in to maintain your salvation."

In answer to the statement, "Show me one person in the Bible who was saved and then lost." I offer the following biblical examples of this transformation:

### **1. Lucifer**

He was called Morningstar and was created and anointed as a guardian cherub. Isaiah and Ezekiel write of his change and fall

from that position because of his own actions.

<sup>14</sup> "You were the anointed cherub  
who covers,  
And I placed you there.  
You were on the holy mountain of  
God;  
You walked in the midst of the  
stones of fire.

<sup>15</sup> "You were blameless in your  
ways  
From the day you were created  
Until unrighteousness was found  
in you.

**- Ezekiel 28:14-15**

<sup>12</sup> "How you have fallen from  
heaven,  
O star of the morning, son of the  
dawn!

You have been cut down to the  
earth,

You who have weakened the  
nations!

<sup>13</sup> "But you said in your heart,

'I will ascend to heaven;

I will raise my throne above the  
stars of God,

And I will sit on the mount of  
assembly

In the recesses of the north.

<sup>14</sup> 'I will ascend above the heights  
of the clouds;

I will make myself like the Most  
High.'

**- Isaiah 14:12-14**

Here we see that he fell from this position  
because of his own actions and pride, and  
then was lost forever:



And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

**- Revelation 20:10**

Don't pray for the devil, he's done. The answer to the question, "Can someone who is saved, someone who is with God then be lost?" was answered with Lucifer's fall from perfection before the world was even created.

## **2. Cain**

Cain was not a lost person, he even consciously worshiped God as did his brother Abel. God even warned him of his potential fall:

If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.

- **Genesis 4:7**

The warning was simple and clear, be careful because you are in danger of falling. In Cain's life there was a moment when he had to make a choice and what happened? He made the wrong choice, he became an unrepentant murderer, and unrepentant murderers are not in heaven (Galatians 5:21).

### **3. Judas**

Judas was a Jew, among God's people, and chosen as an Apostle. He, like the other

Apostles, went out to preach and heal and cast out spirits.

<sup>5</sup> These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; <sup>6</sup> but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. <sup>7</sup> And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'

- **Matthew 10:5-7**

Judas was among that group, but there was a precise spiritual tipping point where Judas rejected the faith he had and gave in to his disbelief, dishonesty, and greed.

<sup>26</sup> Jesus then answered, "That is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and give it to him." So

when He had dipped the morsel, He took and gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.<sup>27</sup> After the morsel, Satan then entered into him. Therefore Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly."

**- John 13:26-27**

God did not force Judas to believe or disbelief, He merely knew in advance what Judas would choose and folded that knowledge into His plan and to His purpose. Peter pronounces the obvious end to the unrepentant traitor.

to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place."

**- Acts 1:25**

When he talks about replacing Judas, Peter clearly states that Judas turned aside and went to his own place. He turned aside (from belief, Apostleship, fellowship with Jesus, etc.) and chose to go another way, to go to his own place. And what place was that? The place of condemnation for having disbelieved and rejected the Lord and the faith.

At this point someone might point out that none of these had the indwelling of the Spirit and the regeneration He brings as do those who become Christians since Pentecost. This argument suggests that God had a different method of salvation in the Old Testament than the one found in the New Testament. However, a look at the characters described in the Old Testament reveals that all those God chose to serve in a particular way were required to remain

faithful (not perfect) until death to maintain that salvation.

A good example of two individuals chosen by God and anointed (empowered for service/ministry) by the Holy Spirit were Kings Saul and David. Both were specifically chosen by God, received an anointing of the Spirit and served as King of Israel. The difference between the two was that Saul, because of his unfaithfulness, lost not only the throne but his soul as well; and David who sinned grievously (Bathsheba) but remained faithful until death was honored as a beloved king by his people and received his eternal reward.

I point this out to underline the fact that salvation in the Old Testament was based on faith as it is in the New, and God

required that believers remain faithful to the end of their lives or forfeit that salvation as He does today. The Jews of the Old Testament were born into a covenant relationship with God, but when at some point many of them turned to the worship of idols, they lost not only that special relationship but also the promise of heaven attached to it if they didn't repent and return to faithful worship and life.

#### **4. The seven churches and the seven angels**

One of the most dramatic examples of the possibility of losing salvation is found in the book of Revelation. John explains his vision of the seven lampstands and the seven stars.

As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden

lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

**- Revelation 1:20**

In this vision John receives a message from Jesus for the seven churches at that time located in Asia Minor. Each message contains an encouragement as well as a warning for each of these churches. The encouragements are positive comments on these church's faithfulness, perseverance, service and love. The warnings, however, are all the same:

The churches must endure, overcome and remain faithful until death or Jesus' return if they are to receive the reward which is described in different ways. John writes that they must endure to the end in order



to eat of the Tree of Life, not be hurt by the second death, receive the hidden manna, the white stone or the new name. These are all different ways of saying eternal life or the eternal reward, and all specifically refer to the reward of those who endure until the end.

The second part, which is understood, is that those who don't do this will not receive this reward.

Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place— unless you repent.

- Revelation 2:5

These passages teach that the saved, by their conscious faithfulness, maintain their salvation. If individuals were chosen in advance by God for salvation and could never be lost once they were saved, there would be no need for these verses.

If there is no possibility that once saved the Christian could never lose that salvation, why would the Holy Spirit through the inspired writers give us the following verses?

<sup>1</sup> It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. <sup>2</sup> Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. <sup>3</sup> And I testify again to every man who receives

circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law.

<sup>4</sup> You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

**- Galatians 5:1-4**

Paul is warning the Galatian Christians that if they forsake the gospel (which is what saves them) and they succumb to the false teachers who were preaching a salvation based on Law (primarily being circumcised and keeping various food laws and other ascetic practices), he said if you do that you are cut off from Christ.

<sup>17</sup> These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved. <sup>18</sup> For speaking out

arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, <sup>19</sup> promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.

<sup>20</sup> For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. <sup>21</sup> For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. <sup>22</sup> It has happened to them

according to the true proverb, "A dog returns to its own vomit," and, "A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire."

**- II Peter 2:17-22**

Again, a warning against false teachers who in this case were promoting teachings that enable believers to sin without any spiritual consequences, labeling their heresies as a type of liberation theology or religious freedom. Note that Peter traces the dangerous consequences for believers who fall into this trap: they're freed from the trap of sin by Jesus and the gospel but then, because of false teaching which they choose to believe, they return to the trap.

Peter says that the last state (being trapped in sin and lost but knowing Christ) is worse than the first state (being trapped in sin

and lost but not knowing Christ). If one was saved without the possibility of being lost why would Peter write this? There would be no point to this unless Peter was confused.

And then of course there is Hebrews 6:1-6. This passage was written to Jewish Christians who were struggling with their faith and tempted either to quit and return to Judaism or simply return to the world as unbelievers. The Hebrew writer explains how Christianity is not only superior, but the fulfillment of the Jewish religion and their return to Judaism would be a forfeiture of all the blessings they had in Christ including eternal salvation. If, as many believe, one could not be lost again why would there be a need for this warning? In chapter 6 the writer graphically describes what happens to one

who abandons Christ for another religion or the world, he says in verse 1:

<sup>1</sup> Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, <sup>2</sup> of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. <sup>3</sup> And this we will do, if God permits. <sup>4</sup> For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup> and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,

- Hebrews 6:1-5

Here the writer establishes the identity of the person he is writing about:

- **Enlightened** – The knowledge that Jesus is the Son of God. The understanding that God's method of salvation is through the atoning work of Jesus. This along with the promise of the resurrection that is to come. This has been revealed to them through the gospel. This is the essence of the enlightenment that comes through faith.
- **Tasted Heavenly Gifts** – The peace and joy that comes from forgiveness,
- **Partakers of the Holy Spirit** – The indwelling. In Acts 2:38, Peter says that the Spirit indwells the believer who repents and is baptized. Later in



Romans chapter 8 Paul describes the influence of the Holy Spirit in our prayer life, in our conduct, our study and in resurrecting all faithful believers from the dead.

- **Tasted the Good Word** – The powers of the age to come. Christians are witnesses of the transforming power of God's word in their own lives and in the lives of other people. At that time many Christians had miraculous gifts of healing, speaking in tongues, prophecy and so forth. It is clear, therefore, that he is talking about Christians here and not those who are lost. I mention this to emphasize the fact that lost people are not enlightened, they haven't tasted the gift of the Spirit or have the hope of resurrection.

So, it is clear that he is talking about Christians here.

<sup>6</sup> and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.  
<sup>7</sup> For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God;  
<sup>8</sup> but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

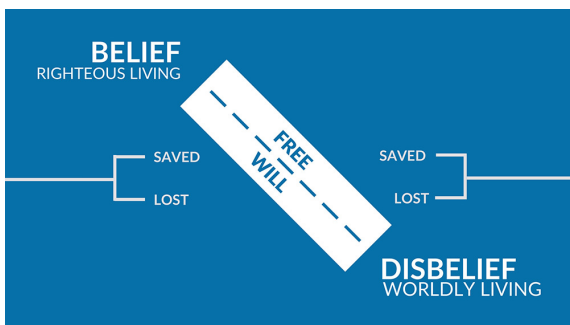
- Hebrews 6:6-8

The author does not say that believers will always be saved even if they fall away.

There is no way to twist this passage to confirm that once a person is saved, they can never lose this salvation. He clearly describes what happens to the believer who falls away by rejecting and abandoning the things that he's just described. The passage then describes what happens to the one who has done this:

- The unfaithful one produces sinfulness and disbelief (thorns and thistles).
- The unfaithful one is considered worthless (produces no spiritual fruit).
- The unfaithful one is close to being cursed (while alive).
- The unfaithful one will be burned (condemned/lost) at judgment.

Calvinists say that the reason this person fell and was lost is because they were never really chosen by God in the first place. They will also argue that this person was insincere or was simply pretending to be a Christian. However, a careful reading shows that the person described is a genuine Christian who, because of weakening faith and the draw of the world, rejects Christ and renounces his faith through worldly living as opposed to spiritual living, and as a result stands condemned and will bear the punishment due at judgment.



Because of the free will given to us by God, we can choose which direction we want to follow in life. This means that we can follow the highway to heaven or the highway to hell. Free will is what makes us human and separates us from lower life forms. It is what makes our love for God meaningful and valuable. Love offered by one who has no choice is not love. God chose to love us and send His Son to save us. We, created in His image, choose to love Him back by believing and expressing that belief through faithfulness.

## SUMMARY

I hope that this study, which is difficult to hear, is nevertheless clear about what the Bible teaches concerning the possibility of one losing their salvation. This is not meant to be an encouraging or uplifting study, it is meant to be a sobering one. There is a time for everything under the sun and the time reading this is meant to be an occasion for sober consideration as a mature Christian.

Let me close with an admonition to sober-mindedness and the reason that this is necessary.

<sup>8</sup> Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. <sup>9</sup> But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing

that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. <sup>10</sup> After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. <sup>11</sup> To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.

**- I Peter 5:8-11**

I repeat once again, if it were impossible to be lost, once saved, why would Peter warn Christians to be sober-minded and aware of Satan's efforts to destroy us? Realize, however, that sober-mindedness does not mean being afraid:

- I am not afraid of the devil.

- I am not afraid of falling away.
- I am not afraid that I might lose my salvation.

Being sober-minded means that I am aware:

- That He who is in me is greater than he who is in the world (I John 4:4).
- That God cares for me and does not want any believer to be lost (Matthew 18:14).
- That God Himself, through the Holy Spirit within me, has promised to create and perfect the image of Christ's character upon me (I Peter 5:10-11).
- That God has given me everything I need to remain faithful to the end:



- He's given me the words of Christ to save me and guide me (II Timothy 3:16).
- The Church of Christ to minister to me, to train me, to minister to others and to help me remain faithful (Ephesians 4:12-14).
- The Holy Spirit sent by Christ to comfort and strengthen me, and at the end of time to raise me up from the dead and be with the Lord forever (Romans 8:11).

Let us, therefore, be sober-minded and consider these things.

**READ IT,  
LEARN IT,  
PASS IT ON...**

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