

## INTRODUCTION

Some of us may have bought things through financing before. It may be a big item like a house or a car that we cannot afford to pay the whole amount upfront. When you apply for a loan and pay the monthly installment do you actually own the item? Technically speaking, the item belongs to the bank until you pay it off. If you do not believe me try skipping a few monthly payments and see what may happen. Fifteen years ago I bought my current car through financing. By God's grace I was able to pay it off earlier and that saved me some money on the interest. I remember at one time I was looking for the car title. I looked everywhere but could not find it. I was quite worried that I might have misplaced it somewhere. Then I suddenly realized that I still owed the financial institution money and so they withheld the title. Otherwise, I would have full ownership and could sell the car to somebody. That is how the commercial world works. What about the spiritual realm? Once a person accepts Christ is he saved forever? Looking at the same question from another angle: can a saved person be disqualified and lose his salvation if he commits a serious sin afterward? That may be a critical question that bothers some of us. We began our quarterly series on "What a Wonderful Grace" last Sunday. Now we come to the second message of the series. We will deal with this important question of whether once a person is saved he is forever saved. To tackle the matter we will go back to examine our spiritual status when we did not know Christ. Next we will ask what it actually means to be saved. Finally, we will explore our obligations after we are saved.

## EXPLANATION

### 1. 在罪中悖逆 Defiance in Sin

First of all, what was our spiritual condition when we did not know Christ? The Bible describes that we were in a state of defiance in sin. **Ephesians 2:1-3** paints a grave picture for us: **1** As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, **2** in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. **3** All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. Paul says that we were dead in sin before we knew Christ. Still remember when we studied the book of Ephesians last year I called it "dead meat?" We neither had the desire nor strength to follow God's way. Instead, we were tempted and controlled by the devil to lead us to sin. This dark force manipulates all that our world can offer like fame and fortune, pleasure of this life and pride. Also, Jesus says in **John 8:34** that: ...I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Who were the audiences to whom Jesus addressed? Those were the religious leaders of Jesus' days. They knew the Scripture, they taught it to the people and people respected them in the society. But Jesus condemned them as slaves to sin. **Psalms 14:2-3** also read: **2** The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. **3** All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one. According to God's evaluation we are all equal because no one seeks after God on his own effort. You may protest after hearing all that: "I

am not that bad! I do a lot of good things. I help needy people and volunteer my time for this and that good cause in the community.” I believe all of us are morally good people and those efforts are all positive actions that contribute to the society. But what God looks for is not morally good people who perform good deeds but spiritually perfect people who can measure up to His righteous standard. **Isaiah 64:6** says - All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. All of our good works mean nothing to reach God’s perfect standard. You would not feel bad to use torn clothes to wipe the floor or to get rid of fallen leaves to the trash collectors. All those items have lost their values! We sin not because we are lacking in knowledge to do good works, it is because we lack the ability to perform them perfectly. You tell your little kids at home not to play with knives or not to touch hot object on the stove, then what is the next thing they may do? They do the very same things you ask them not to do. We grown-ups are no better. We incline to do what we know is wrong. I doubt if any people who use drugs, commit adultery or cheat on their tax return do not know they are sinning. They just find excuses to justify their actions. The rewards and excitement of sinning carry very strong appeals. We also like to challenge the rules. There were signs in every room of a seaside hotel asking the customers not to fish from the balcony. Perhaps the rule was set up for safety reason or to avoid the mess fishing may create. You know what? People fished from the balcony anyhow. How did the hotel solve the problem? A clever manager thought of a simple solution: removed all the signs! Without a posted rule no one would challenge the rule. That is human sinfulness. Before we know Christ we live in defiance of sin. We do not just sin against ourselves, we sin against the people affected by our wrongdoings but most importantly we violate the holy and righteous God who created us. If you do not think that you are that desperate you would not feel the need to look for a solution to your sins. You may think that everyone commits the same sins and there is nothing wrong about it. We do not care but God does. Ultimately, God will deal with the consequence of our sins. To our brothers and sisters when we realize how corrupted we were before we knew Christ we will begin to appreciate how wonderful God’s grace is. The more we think of our past the more grateful we are to our Lord.

## 2. 从罪中得救 Deliverance from Sin

We were born to live in defiance of our sins. However, God is merciful enough to deliver us from sin. Jesus Christ is the only remedy God provides for us. **Acts 4:12** says: Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. Because ultimately God is the One who is offended by our sins He is the One who comes up with the terms for compensation of the damages. Jesus saved us not because of how good we are. It is solely because He chose to grant His mercy and grace to us. Most Christians know this passage in **Ephesians 2:8-9** in which Paul tells us: **8** For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - **9** not by works, so that no one can boast. We then need to ask: what actually did Jesus deliver us from? Let us consider a few areas. First, Jesus delivered us from the eternal punishment of sin. Jesus says in **John 5:24** that: I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. We have the assurance that once we are in Christ we will forever be with Him. Not only did Jesus deliver us from the condemnation of sin He also delivered us from the bondage of sins. **Romans 6:6** tells us: For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should

no longer be slaves to sin. When we confess our sins and accept Christ we identify with His death for us on the cross. There is a classical hymn by the title “Were You There?” In the lyrics a series of questions are asked: “Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they nailed Him to the cross? Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb? Were you there when He rose up from the dead?” The same answer to all those questions is: “Yes, we were there.” Even though the series of event took place over 2,000 years ago we can still identify with Christ. When Christ rose from the death we rise with Him. The end effect is, as Paul puts it, that “the body of sin might be done away with.” It is an anthropomorphic illustration of sin as if it had a body. The bondage of sin has been “done away with,” which means that its bondage on us has been rendered powerless. Imagine a poisonous snack whose teeth are plucked away or a school of sharks separated from you by the thick window in an aquarium. The danger of getting hurt by those wild animals has been “done away with.” When we were delivered by Christ from sin not only that we were delivered from the condemnation of sin and the bondage of sin, we were also delivered from the temptation of sin. In Romans chapter 7 Paul talks about his struggle with the temptation of sin. He candidly shares that he has a desire to do good but he lacks the strength to carry it out. On the contrary Satan keeps tempting him to commit sin. Aren’t you thankful that you are not alone in this struggle over evil? Even a saint like Paul faced the same dilemma! Paul laments over this tension in **verse 24** by saying: What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? The answer is in the **next verse**: Thanks be to God - through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. Only when we are in Christ we can have the power to overcome temptation. A big news happened last week was the 1.6 billion Powerball. I heard that 3 people in different states won the grand prize. The jackpot created a false hope of getting rich overnight. Some people spent hundreds or even thousands of dollars to buy lottery tickets and ended up losing everything. Money, fame, material possessions or some other things may be your biggest temptation. But once you are in Christ all that temptations somehow lose the attraction to you. You can be free from the bondage and temptation of sin because in Christ you have been delivered from sin.

### 3. 靠爱子保守 Dependence on the Son

So far we have talked about our defiance in sin while we were yet sinners and our deliverance from sin through our Lord, Jesus Christ. He took initiative to build an eternal relationship with us. We are saved because of the wonderful grace of Jesus Christ. However, after we are saved we still need to depend on the God-beloved Son to walk in the truth. A growing relationship with Jesus Christ is a positive proof that we have been saved. Jesus uses an analogy of vine and the branches to describe our relationship with Him in **John 15:5** - I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. Apart from Jesus we cannot live a Christian life. Believing in Christ is a matter of relationship. Any of our mobile device has a built-in battery. No matter how energy efficient a device may be eventually the power will be depleted and you need to plug it in to recharge the battery. For Christians, if we go independent from God we are destined to sin and stumble. We always need to connect to the source of our spiritual power to live a victorious life. How can a person remain in Christ? The same Apostle John elaborates in **1 John 2:5** - But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him. John tells us that we know that we are in Christ if we obey His word. Where can we find the Word of God? It is all in

the Bible. If you read God's Word diligently then you will know how God wants you to lead your life. By the empowerment of the Holy Spirit we will have the desire and strength to do what pleases God. The reason why we have the willingness to obey God's Word is an indication that we have a growing relationship with Him. Your neighbors' kids do not have to listen to you because they have no blood relationship with you. Rules become meaningful because of a loving relationship. The more you get into reading God's Word the more you will enjoy it. I am thankful to the Lord that more than 60 people have signed up to follow the Bible reading plan. If you have not done so you can fill out a form in the foyer and our coworkers will get you started. It would be a major misunderstanding to think that accepting Christ is only about getting to heaven after we leave this earth. Going to heaven is the end result of our Christian life, but not the reason for believing in Christ. Do you see the difference between result and reason? For the guys among us, after we get married we have a lady in the house to cook and clean for us. Those are the results of marriage. If you see those as reasons for your marriage then you are a very pitiful man! Just like after we got married we have to cultivate the relationship with our spouse after we received Christ we have to grow in the understanding of our Lord. Paul prays for the Colossian believers in **1:9-10** of the letter he wrote to them that: **9** For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. **10** And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God. The more we know God, the more we learn to love Him and submit to His will.

## CONCLUSION

As you can see the whole salvation process is completely out of God's grace. We were born to be defiant in sin. But Jesus Christ delivered us from sin and He continues to help us grow in our dependence on Him. Back to our original question: once a person is saved is he forever saved? From God's perspective the answer is affirmative. Salvation is 100 % God's grace and 0 % of our effort. If there is nothing we can do to earn our salvation then there is nothing we can do to lose it. We read earlier from a passage in Romans 8. Let us read together again **verses 38-39** on God's promise: **38** For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, **39** neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. That is God's promise! There is no power or any factor that can separate us from the love of God. For those who have accepted Christ our eternal relationship with God is secured. To the parents among us your kids will forever be your kids, even if they are so rebellious to pronounce that they will sever their relationship with you. Once we are in Christ we are forever God's children. Nothing can reverse that relationship.