

# **Handout - How To Interpret Passages That Seem To Indicate Salvation Can Be Lost**

(appropriate for High-Schoolers and older)

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One of the fundamental rules for interpreting scripture is to use the Bible to interpret the Bible. One application of this principle is to always interpret the obscure or unclear passages of the Bible in light of the more clear passages seeking to understand all of God's thinking in a particular area. So, we study all that the Bible has to say about a topic and we accept what the weight of the evidence in the clear passages means. Having done that we also know that the Word of God does not contradict itself. As a result we interpret the few obscure passages about a topic starting with what these passages do not mean. If these passages appear to contradict the clear passages then we know we are not interpreting the obscure passages correctly.

When we find ourselves in this situation it is an exciting time because it means that we are going to have to do a more detailed study exploring all the options that are consistent with the clear verses and that are also compatible with the meaning of the words in the obscure passage and determine which option is the most likely meaning. In the process of doing this we are going to learn new things that we did not know before and our understanding of the Bible and the mind of God is going to improve significantly. This is why God has put obscure verses in the Bible – so that we can grow stronger as we wrestle with them.

**Eternal Security:** *No action past, present, or future as initiated by a Christian, a third party, or by God will separate the Christian from his salvation throughout eternity, beginning at the point of salvation and without end thereafter.*

The overwhelming body of clear Biblical evidence indicates that the Christian can never lose his salvation for any reason.

For a detailed study on this topic please see, "Eternal Life: Why We Can't Lose It Once We Get It" at: <http://gciweb.org/2011/04/youth-bible-study-materials-michael-r-daily/>

Therefore, we know that all of the obscure passages that we are going to look at in this study do not mean that a Christian's salvation can be lost. These verses mean something else. Our challenge is to figure out what this "something else" is. Unfortunately, this "something else" is not one thing. It is different things in different passages. Although we will look at some of the more popular obscure passages, this study is not exhaustive. Nevertheless, after this study the student should be able to take a similar approach in studying other obscure passages not covered here and come to a successful outcome.

## **I Corinthians 13:12**

**For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.**

The Greek word used for dimly is "ainigma" which means "riddle or puzzle". This is where we get our English word "enigma" which means "something that is difficult to understand or explain". These puzzles are not just a struggle with context they are intentional puzzles and riddles. We know this because of what II Peter 3 says:

## **II Peter 3:15-16**

**and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, <sup>16</sup> as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.**

Peter fully understood the context of Paul's writings but some of them were still puzzles for him. These obscure passages we will be studying are riddles or puzzles that God wants us to wrestle with but that we may never get a fully correct understanding of in this life. We can be dogmatic about what the passages don't mean but we can never be fully sure we know exactly what they do mean in this life.

This is a two part lesson. In part 1, we will be looking at passages related to two major issues:

- 1) Christians who fall away from following Christ
- 2) Apostate Non-Christians.

***Apostasy:** to say in a formal or definite way that you refuse to follow, obey, or support a religious faith any longer*

## Christians Who Fall Away From Following Christ

### I Corinthians 9:25-27

Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. <sup>26</sup> Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; <sup>27</sup> but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

Revelation 2:10 - Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Revelation 3:11 - I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.

These passages do not refer to eternal life but to special eternal rewards called crowns given for long term exceptional service in one of five areas of the Christian life. There are five crowns (Imperishable Wreath, Crown of Life, Crown of Glory, Crown of Righteousness, and Crown of Exaltation). It is possible to lose eternal rewards, including crowns, but it is not possible to lose eternal life. For a detailed study on this topic please see, "Eternal Rewards – Compilation" at: <http://gciweb.org/2011/04/youth-bible-study-materials-michael-r-daily/>

### John 15:1-6

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. <sup>2</sup> Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup> You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

This passage is directed at Christians in regard to bearing fruit. Christians who don't follow and obey Christ do not bear fruit. As a result their lives are burned up in terms of eternal rewards. Compare this passage to:

### I Corinthians 3:10-15

According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. <sup>11</sup> For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, <sup>13</sup> each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. <sup>14</sup> If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

### Luke 8:11-15

“Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God. <sup>12</sup> Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved. <sup>13</sup> Those on the rocky *soil* are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no *firm* root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away. <sup>14</sup> The *seed* which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of *this* life, and bring no fruit to maturity. <sup>15</sup> But the *seed* in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.

Verse 13 refers to immature believers who fall away from the faith in time of temptation. When the Bible talks about Christians falling away from the faith it is not referring to eternal salvation. It means they fall into sin or fall away from actively following Christ and will suffer the loss of eternal rewards but not their salvation. In addition to the loss of eternal rewards Christians who continue to rebel in sin will be disciplined by God in order to get their attention and their repentance. In this passage the only ones who did not receive salvation are the seed that fell beside the road (verse 12). Note the difference in wording Jesus uses in describing them.

### II Timothy 4:9-10

**Make every effort to come to me soon; <sup>10</sup> for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.**

The deserters fell away from the faith and lost eternal rewards but not their salvation. Demas is an example of Christians who are choked with the pleasures of this life mentioned in Luke 8:14 and bring no fruit to maturity but their eternal salvation is not affected.

### Revelation 3:15-19

**‘I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. <sup>16</sup> So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. <sup>17</sup> Because you say, “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, <sup>18</sup> I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. <sup>19</sup> Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.**

This passage is clearly referring to Christians who are lukewarm in their obedience to Christ. As a result they are losing eternal rewards (I Corinthians 3:12-13 describes them as gold, silver, precious stones refined by fire) and are about to experience God’s reproof and discipline unless they repent.

For a detailed study on the topic of God’s discipline of disobedient Christians please see, “The Prime Directive” at: <http://gciweb.org/2011/04/youth-bible-study-materials-michael-r-daily/>

### I Timothy 1:18-20

**This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, <sup>19</sup> keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. <sup>20</sup> Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme.**

This passage refers to Christians who have fallen away from the faith. But these went a step further and were teaching things that were not true. As a result Paul is asking God to discipline them in order to get their attention (using pain) so that they would repent. Paul is not referring to their salvation which remains intact.

### Galatians 1:6-9

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; <sup>7</sup> which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! <sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

The Greek word for “accursed” is “anathema” meaning an object of God’s disfavor. There is no indication in this passage that this accursedness is permanent or eternal. If the false teachers are non-Christians, their eternal destiny is the Lake of Fire. If they are Christians, then painful discipline from God is needed to get their attention and their repentance.

### Hebrews 3:12-19

Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. <sup>13</sup> But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. <sup>14</sup> For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end, <sup>15</sup> while it is said, “TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS, AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME.” <sup>16</sup> For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? <sup>17</sup> And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? <sup>18</sup> And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? <sup>19</sup> So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

This passage is discussing Christians whose hearts became hardened to God and they fell away from following Him because of unbelief in His promises. These Christians are not able to enter His rest but this is not the same as salvation. The Greek word for “rest” is “katapausin” which means a calming of the winds. It is the calmness in life that comes from knowing you are in the will of God. Christians living in rebellion to God do not experience this calmness and instead experience God’s discipline. Verse 14 just means that if we continue to follow Christ we are partakers of Him and if we don’t we are not partakers (not cooperating) with Him. The word, “partaker” is a relatively weak word as we will see later in our analysis of Hebrews 6. None of this is referring to eternal salvation but to our time on the Earth.

### Colossians 1:21-23

And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, <sup>22</sup> yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach— <sup>23</sup> if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

This passage is referring to the Christian’s judgment in order to receive eternal rewards, not salvation. Verse 5 of this chapter shows that the hope being referred to is their hope of experiencing what is laid up for them in heaven (i.e. rewards). **Colossians 1:5 (Amplified Bible) - Because of the hope [of experiencing what is] laid up (i.e. reserved and waiting) for you in heaven. Of this [hope] you heard in the past in the message of the truth of the Gospel**

The focus here is on Christians standing before the judgment seat of Christ unashamed because of their steadfast commitment to following Christ. In other words the continuing in the faith results in being blameless and beyond reproach at the judgment for eternal rewards. It is not referring to salvation. Compare this passage to **I John 2:28 - Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.** None of these passage is addressing salvation.

## Apostate Non-Christians: Those Immersed in the Christian Community Who Ultimately Reject Christ

### I John 2:18-19,22

Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. <sup>19</sup> They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.

<sup>22</sup> **Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.**

In the letters to the churches the author is addressing two different types of people - true Christians and false Christians who are also members of and immersed in the churches. It is important to keep this in mind knowing that both audiences are being addressed at the same time and some verses apply to one group and other verses apply to the other group all in the same passage.

Eventually, those in the church who are not really Christians will separate themselves out as stated in I John 2.

### Galatians 5:2-7

**Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. 3 And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. 4 You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. 5 For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love. 7 You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?**

Paul is talking to two different types of people in this passage. One group (verses 2 to 4) are people who have heard the gospel and find it to be interesting but they are not sure they really believe it. As a result they seek to add additional requirements to salvation, because they don't really believe it can be true. Therefore, these people, although they may claim an intellectual or emotional sympathy with the gospel as well as friendship with Christians, are not really Christians themselves – they have never made the personal decision to accept Christ as Savior and Lord. Paul uses the term “severed from Christ” not because they are attached to Christ but because they think they are. These people have fallen short of the grace of God. The second group (verses 5-7) are immature Christians listening to these other people and wondering if they are right.

**Key Point:** *While the eternal destiny for apostate non-Christians is different than for Christians who fall away from the faith, it is often not easy to tell which is which from external observation so we don't give up on anyone.*

### Hebrews 6:4-6

**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, <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.**

This passage refers to non-Christians who have been immersed in the study of God's Word or in fellowship with Christians, perhaps for many years. For whatever reason they find it attractive but have never received Christ as their personal Savior and Lord. The Greek word for partakers is “metochous” which means to be associated with or to go along with. The Holy Spirit, using the Word of God, works on all men convicting them of sin, righteousness, and judgment (**John 16:8**) so even non-Christians who spend time around Christians and the study of God's Word have been made partakers of (i.e. to go along with) the Holy Spirit (If God had used the terms “sealed with” or “indwelt by” the Holy Spirit the reference would be of Christians, but those are not the terms used).

They have also observed the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the Christians they have been immersed in fellowship with. Eventually, these people will either become Christians or will intentionally decide against Christ. If they decide to reject Christ it is impossible to renew them to repentance since they have seen all there is to see and it was not enough. They rejected Christ even though they had an intimate, insider's view of everything. Note that the words used in this passage (enlightened, tasted, partake) are words demonstrating a weak association – these people are observers and social participants, but not Christians.

### **II Peter 2:20-21**

**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.**

Again, this passage is referring to non-Christians who have immersed themselves in fellowship with Christians and the study of God's Word but who never made that decision to accept Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. Their experience is one of Biblical knowledge, not personal relationship with God.

When they turn away they are in a worse state because they cannot be renewed to repentance (**Hebrews 6:6**). If they had not known these things there would still be hope for them to repent.

Some of you have been involved in church activities since you were in pre-school. You have memorized verses, heard hundreds of sermons, studied the Bible, and even been involved in Christian ministry. Even so, some of you have never actually accepted Christ and put your trust in Him as your Savior.

This is a very dangerous situation. One of three things will eventually result:

- 1) You will continue to drift along out of habit and die in your sins, separated from Christ for eternity
- 2) You will, at some point, make a decision to accept Christ as your personal Savior and Lord before you die
- 3) You will, at some point, decide that you don't believe any of this, reject Christ, and go another way

Let's talk first about numbers 1 and 2.

Perhaps you don't know which situation you are in. Our hearts can easily deceive us (**Jeremiah 17:9**) so it's not always easy to know for sure if you have made a decision to accept Christ as your Lord and Savior. Perhaps you engage in Christian activities out of habit. Perhaps you prayed to receive Christ but the memory is a little fuzzy and you were young and you are just not sure.

If you are in this situation what should you do?

### **II Corinthians 13:5-6**

**Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test? <sup>6</sup> But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test.**

### **II Corinthians 2:9**

**For to this end also I wrote, so that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.**

We can test ourselves to see if we are in the faith. How? By doing something out of obedience to Christ that cannot be done out of routine or habit. You have to go out of your way. Let's look at Paul's conversion.

### Acts 22:12-16

**“A certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there,<sup>13</sup> came to me, and standing near said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very time I looked up at him.<sup>14</sup> And he said, ‘The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth.<sup>15</sup> For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard.<sup>16</sup> Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.’**

We are saved by faith calling on the name of Jesus, not by baptism. But baptism is a good test to see if we are in the faith. Why? Because baptism is easy enough that any new Christian can do it, but its hard enough that most non-christians won't. You can use baptism to test yourself to see what is in your heart.

If you have not been baptized why not? Why do you delay? If you are a real Christian you will find a way to get yourself baptized. If not you won't bother with it. Perhaps you are not sure if you are a Christian and you were baptized when you were younger but you are not sure why you did it. Perhaps you wanted to please your parents or get something that was being offered to those who got baptized. Now that you are more mature and free from these other motivations its OK to ask to be baptized again. Just explain the situation to your pastor. You getting baptized is an encouragement to others, but its primary purpose is to demonstrate to yourself that you have made a real decision to follow Christ.

### Let's move on to item #3

(Non-christians immersed for long periods of time in the study of God's Word and fellowship with Christians who ultimately decide to reject Christ).

### Hebrews 10:26-30

**For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,<sup>27</sup> but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.<sup>28</sup> Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.<sup>29</sup> How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?<sup>30</sup> For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge His people.”**

This passage also refers to non-Christians who have some knowledge of the truth because of their openness to studying the Bible and fellowshiping with Christians but who never received Christ as personal Lord and Savior. If they end up turning away from Christ and deciding against Him they are, in effect, trampling the Son of God under their feet and there is no hope of repentance for them. The only new puzzle in this passage is the phrase, “and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified”. Non-christians are not typically thought of as set apart or sanctified by the blood of the covenant. Some scholars (such as John MacArthur) believe the “he” that was sanctified was Christ. Is there any evidence in the Bible of Christ being sanctified? Yes.

### John 17:16-19

**They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.<sup>17</sup> Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.<sup>18</sup> As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.<sup>19</sup> For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.**

### Hebrews 2:9-10

**But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. 10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings**

### Hebrews 5:8-9

**Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. <sup>9</sup> And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation,**

### John 10:36

**do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God**

### The First Apostate: Judas Iscariot

#### Matthew 26:20-25 (Compare this passage to II Peter 2:20-21)

**Now when evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the twelve disciples.<sup>21</sup> As they were eating, He said, “Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me.”<sup>22</sup> Being deeply grieved, they each one began to say to Him, “Surely not I, Lord?”<sup>23</sup> And He answered, “He who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl is the one who will betray Me. <sup>24</sup> The Son of Man is to go, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.”<sup>25</sup> And Judas, who was betraying Him, said, “Surely it is not I, Rabbi?” Jesus said to him, “You have said it yourself.”**

### John 6:64

**But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him.**

Judas was personally discipled by Jesus Christ in the flesh for 3 years. He saw all the miracles. He heard all of Jesus’ teaching. He saw Jesus and the disciples do the Christian ministry. He himself did the Christian ministry. And after all of that, he decided that none of it was real and he sold Jesus for a bag of coins. At the moment he publicly turned against Jesus, all hope for his salvation was lost.

### Another Example: Charles Templeton (1915 to 2001)

In 1936, Charles Templeton became a Christian evangelist. In 1941, Templeton founded the Avenue Road Church of the Nazarene, in Toronto and in 1946, Templeton co-founded a Christian ministry called Youth for Christ which is still in existence today. Templeton hired Billy Graham to be their first full-time evangelist. In essence, Templeton was Billy Graham’s boss.

Shortly afterward, Billy Graham and Templeton made an evangelistic tour of western Europe, frequently rooming together, and holding crusades in England, Scotland, Ireland, Sweden and other countries. Both Graham and Templeton took turns preaching at these crusades to audiences of 30,000 a night. After 21 years as an internationally known evangelist, Templeton left the ministry and publicly declared himself an agnostic. He went on to author various secular books and host secular radio programs. In 1995 he completed his slide into atheism in publishing his last book before his death titled, “*Farewell to God: my reasons for rejecting the Christian faith*”. In his writings Templeton states that from the very beginning he never really believed in the Creation account recorded in Genesis or in the existence of Hell.

#### Some comments made by his son Brad Templeton:

*“His last book, Farewell to God .... went into great detail about all the reasons why he left the faith. He wrote it because he felt there were a large number of people out there who were struggling with a faith that was pushed on them as a child. He thought these people, who largely attended church out of habit if at all, would seek out something that could release them from this implanted faith”.*



Marshall Frady in his book, Billy Graham, quotes Billy as saying to him:

*"I love Chuck to this very day. He's one of the few men I have ever loved in my life. He and I had been so close. But then, all of a sudden, our paths were parting. He began to be a little cool to me then. I think ... I think that Chuck felt sorry for me."*

In Templeton's book, "Farewell to God" he comments,

*"I occasionally watch Billy in his televised campaigns. Forty years after our working together he is saying the same things, using the same phrases, following the same pattern. When he gives the invitation to come forward, the sequence, even the words, are the same. I turn off the set and am sometimes overtaken by sadness. I think Billy is what he has to be. I disagree with him at almost every point in his views on God and Christianity and think that much of what he says in the pulpit is puerile (childish), archaic nonsense. But there is no feigning in Billy Graham: he believes what he believes with an invincible innocence."*

Is it possible to do Christian ministry without being a Christian? Judas did. The senior pastor of a church I attended said that he was a pastor for 8 years before he became a Christian. The Holy Spirit will use God's Word to work in people's hearts regardless of who the speaker of the words is. And what does the Bible say?

### **Matthew 7:22-23**

**Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup> And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'**

Just because you have led people to Christ or taught the Bible or pastored a church or started a Christian ministry or prayed for someone to be healed and they were (Templeton did all of these things) it does not mean you are a Christian. It comes down to a personal relationship with Christ based on your decision to accept Christ as Lord and Savior by faith. Nothing else can take the place of that.

## **END OF PART 1**

### **PART 2**

This is the second part of a two part lesson. In part 2 we will be looking at passages related to:

- 1) The Unforgivable Sin
- 2) Tit for Tat Verses
- 3) Enduring To The End Verses
- 4) Verses Referring to Variations in Intensity of Punishment
- 5) Verses About Christian Perfection

### **The Unforgivable (Eternal) Sin**

The unforgivable sin is something directed against a ministry of the Holy Spirit and involves blasphemy. This is not something you do accidentally. It is something that takes intentional, malicious action to do.

**Blasphemy:** *something said or done that demonstrates great disrespect for something holy*

### **Mark 3:28-30**

**"Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; <sup>29</sup> but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"— <sup>30</sup> because they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit."**

The unforgivable sin is something directed at the Holy Spirit with the intent to severely damage His ministry. In Matthew 12:28 Jesus makes it clear that He casts out demons by the "Spirit of God".

### Matthew 12:22-32

Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus, and He healed him, so that the mute man spoke and saw. 23 All the crowds were amazed, and were saying, "This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?" 24 But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons." 25 And knowing their thoughts Jesus said to them, "Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand. 26 If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand? 27 If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? For this reason they will be your judges. 28 But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. 29 Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. 30 He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters. 31 "Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. 32 Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.

When Jesus miraculously healed the demon-possessed man, the Pharisees could not deny that a miracle occurred but they attributed the miracle to satan, not to God, in order to discredit Jesus and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. They were, in essence, claiming that Jesus was satan incarnate and not God incarnate (in the flesh). This was clearly the unforgivable sin Jesus is referring to.

Can the unforgivable sin be committed today? Some Bible scholars believe that this one sin is the very specific thing that the Pharisees committed while Jesus was in the flesh as described in these passages and therefore, the sin cannot be committed today because the circumstances of this incident will not occur again in the future (see **II Corinthians 5:16**). However, further study indicates that this unforgivable sin may exist today in things having the characteristics of an intentional attack on the ministries of the Holy Spirit.

What are the ministries of the Holy Spirit in relation to non-Christians? Essentially this: The Holy Spirit wrote the Bible and makes it Living and Active (**II Peter 1:20-21**). The Holy Spirit convicts non-christians of sin, righteousness, and judgment (**John 16:7-11**). The Holy Spirit provides supernatural gifts to Christians that non-christians can see in action (**I Corinthians 12:4-7**).

### II Peter 1:20-21

**But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a *matter* of one's own interpretation,<sup>21</sup> for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.**

### John 16:7-11

**But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.<sup>8</sup> And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment;<sup>9</sup> concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me;<sup>10</sup> and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me;<sup>11</sup> and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.**

### I Corinthians 12:4-7

**Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.<sup>5</sup> And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.<sup>6</sup> There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*.<sup>7</sup> But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.**

One example was covered in Part 1 of this study dealing with Apostate Non-Christians. The non-christian who has been immersed in the ministry of the Holy Spirit convicting him of sin, righteousness, and judgment while learning the Word of God for long periods of time, having witnessed the gifts of the Holy Spirit in Christians he has fellowshiped with who then publicly and with intent rejects it all as not being true has “insulted the Spirit of grace” (Heb 10:29) and committed the unforgivable sin.

This is why **Hebrews 6:6** says that **“it is impossible to renew them again to repentance”**, and **II Peter 2:20** says, **“the last state has become worse for them than the first”**, and **Hebrews 10:26** says, **“there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins”**. I believe Judas Iscariot committed the unforgivable sin as Jesus states in Matthew 26:24, **“woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born”**.

#### **Hebrews 6:4-6**

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,<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.

#### **II Peter 2:20-21**

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.

#### **Hebrews 10:26-29**

For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,<sup>27</sup> but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.<sup>28</sup> Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.<sup>29</sup> How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?

#### **Matthew 26:21-25**

As they were eating, He said, “Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me.”<sup>22</sup> Being deeply grieved, they each one began to say to Him, “Surely not I, Lord?”<sup>23</sup> And He answered, “He who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl is the one who will betray Me.”<sup>24</sup> The Son of Man is to go, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.”<sup>25</sup> And Judas, who was betraying Him, said, “Surely it is not I, Rabbi?” Jesus said to him, “You have said it yourself.”

Many atheist organizations in America today are led by apostate non-christians who used to be involved in the Christian ministry. The Freedom From Religion Foundation is an example of this. If a person immersed in the church decides to publicly reject Christ and joins one of these organizations, they will often provide a form, such as a “De-Baptismal” certificate that the person can sign and send in to their church. This document is a formal rejection of the Christian faith. The day the person signs this form and mails it, I believe personally, is the day that they have forfeited any hope for their own salvation. They have committed the unforgivable sin.

Another possible example of the unforgivable sin today is related to modifying the written Word of God. The authorship and protection of the written Word of God is a ministry of the Holy Spirit. Those who maliciously and intentionally change God’s written Word and then republish it as God’s Word, in my personal opinion, have also committed the unforgivable sin.

### **Revelation 22:18-19**

**I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; <sup>19</sup> and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.**

First, this command applies to the entire Bible and is repeated in other books of the Bible such as:

**Deuteronomy 4:2 - You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.**

**Deuteronomy 12:32 - “Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it.**

**Proverbs 30:5-6 - Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. <sup>6</sup> Do not add to His words Or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar.**

These warnings are directed at those who would intentionally and maliciously change the written Word of God and publish a false Bible. Some examples are the New World Translation Bible published by Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormon books such as the Book of Mormon.

Not every Mormon or Jehovah's Witness is affected by these warnings, just those responsible for creating these publications and presenting them as the written Word of God. For this small group of people salvation, I believe, is no longer available.

**Key Point:** *It is important to not give up on anyone because we are not able to tell with certainty which individuals have committed these sins and which have not. Only God knows who is who.*

### **Tit for Tat Verses**

#### **Luke 12:8-10**

**“And I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will confess him also before the angels of God; <sup>9</sup> but he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God. <sup>10</sup> And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him.**

Verse 9 is referring to non-christians who continue to deny Christ right up until death.

We know that a temporary denial of Christ out of fear can be repented of and does not cause a loss of salvation because of what happened with Peter in Luke 22.

#### **Luke 22:31-34**

**“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; <sup>32</sup> but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” <sup>33</sup> But he said to Him, “Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!” <sup>34</sup> And He said, “I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me.”**

### **Luke 22:54-61**

Having arrested Him, they led Him away and brought Him to the house of the high priest; but Peter was following at a distance. 55 After they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter was sitting among them. 56 And a servant-girl, seeing him as he sat in the firelight and looking intently at him, said, "This man was with Him too." 57 But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know Him." 58 A little later, another saw him and said, "You are one of them too!" But Peter said, "Man, I am not!" 59 After about an hour had passed, another man began to insist, saying, "Certainly this man also was with Him, for he is a Galilean too." 60 But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. 61 The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, "Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times."

### **Matthew: 6:14-15**

**For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.**

There are two types of forgiveness discussed in the New Testament. One is the legal, final forgiveness of sin given to all Christians at the moment of conversion as described in Ephesians 1:7 and Colossians 1:13-14.

### **Ephesians 1:7**

**In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace**

### **Colossians 1:13-14**

**For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.**

However, the passage in Matthew 6 is not referring to this type of forgiveness. It is referring to the demonstration of forgiveness in everyday relationships. If we withhold forgiveness from others it does not affect the legal forgiveness that we receive with our salvation but it does negatively affect our relationship with God our Father just as any sin does. The temporary withholding of relational forgiveness by God is a form of fatherly discipline to help get us to repent, forgive the other person, and get us back on the right track. This pattern of relational sin hindering our relationship with God shows up in other places as well. For example, if we don't live with our wives in an understanding way God's willingness to answer our prayers will be hindered.

**I Peter 3:7 - You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.**

### **An Illustration (may or may not be true) of the idea of forgiving others and God's forgiveness of us**

When Leonardo da Vinci was painting the "Last Supper," he had a bitter argument with a fellow painter. Leonardo was so enraged that he decided to paint the face of his enemy into the face of Judas. That way the hated painter's face would be preserved for ages in the face of the betraying disciple. When Leonardo finished Judas, everyone easily recognized the face of the painter with whom Leonardo quarreled. Leonardo continued to work on the painting. But as much as he tried, he could not paint the face of Christ. Something was holding him back. Leonardo decided his hatred toward his fellow painter was the problem. So he worked through his hatred by repainting Judas' face, replacing the image of his fellow painter with another face. Only then was he able to paint Jesus' face and complete the masterpiece.

## Enduring To The End Verses

### I Corinthians 15:1-2

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, <sup>2</sup> by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

In this passage some were being taught that the resurrection only applied to Jesus and not to anyone else. Later, in verses 12-17 Paul clarifies that if they don't believe in the resurrection they don't have eternal life.

### I Corinthians 15:12-17

Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? <sup>13</sup> But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; <sup>14</sup> and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. <sup>15</sup> Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; <sup>17</sup> and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins"

So, in this passage Paul is calling them to make a decision. Either believe what he taught them, the gospel that saves, or believe something else that does not save (i.e. no resurrection).

## Seven Year Tribulation

### Matthew 10:22

You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.

### Mark 13:11-13

When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit. 12 Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. 13 You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.

### Matthew 24:9-13

"Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. 10 At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. 11 Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. 12 Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. 13 But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.

These passages all refer to a specific situation, the perseverance of believers during the seven year Tribulation period that is to come in the future. In this specific situation those believers who endure the Tribulation to its end will be saved from physical death by the return of Jesus Christ and will enter the Millennial Kingdom in their mortal bodies. It is not referring to eternal salvation.

*"The age in general, climaxing with the second coming of Christ, has the promise that those that endure to the end (Matt 24:13), that is, survive the tribulation and are still alive, will be saved, or delivered, by Christ at His second coming. This is not a reference to salvation from sin, but rather the deliverance of survivors at the end of the age as stated, for instance, in Romans 11:26, where the Deliverer will save the nation Israel from its persecutors." - John F. Walvoord, **Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come** (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p. 184*

## Verses Referring to Variations in Intensity of Punishment

### Luke 12:42-48

And the Lord said, “Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time? <sup>43</sup> Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. <sup>44</sup> Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions.

<sup>45</sup> But if that slave says in his heart, ‘My master will be a long time in coming,’ and begins to beat the slaves, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk; <sup>46</sup> the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and assign him a place with the unbelievers.

<sup>47</sup> And that slave who knew his master’s will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes,

<sup>48</sup> but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more

This passage is discussing 3 different types of non-christians. The first (verses 45-46) is one who knows what is correct and intentionally goes in the opposite direction. This is the apostate non-christian that we have previously discussed. This person receives the worst punishment (cut to pieces) and rightly so for they have committed the unforgivable sin.

The second type of person (verse 47) is the one who has been immersed in the church, who knows the Gospel, and knows what to do, but instead of accepting Christ as Savior and Lord they continue to live life by following their routines and habits. These non-christians will receive the second harshest punishment (many lashes).

The third type of non-christian (verse 48) is not knowledgeable of the gospel or God’s Word. If you say, “John 3:16” to these people they have no idea what you are talking about. If you say the word, “saved” out loud they think you are from an alien planet. These will receive the least harsh punishment (a few lashes).

This passage is not referring to losing salvation but to differing degrees of punishment in the Lake of Fire. Just as there are differing degrees of eternal rewards in heaven for Christian obedience, there will be differing degrees of intensity of punishment in the Lake of Fire for non-christians.

The most severe punishments are reserved for apostate non-christians and those who worship the beast during the Tribulation as stated in **Revelation 14:9-11**.

### Revelation 14:9-11

Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, <sup>10</sup> he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. <sup>11</sup> And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.”

## Verses About Christian Perfection

### 1 John 3:4-10

Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup> You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. <sup>6</sup> **No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.** <sup>7</sup> Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; <sup>8</sup> **the one who practices sin is of the devil;** for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> **No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.** <sup>10</sup> **By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.**

We know from John's previous words in this same letter that John does not mean that Christians are perfect.

**I John 1:8** - If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

### I John 2:1

**My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;**

When John refers to sin in this passage he is not referring to individual sins but to the continual practice of sin.

In I John 3:8, when John says, "the devil has sinned from the beginning", the verb is present tense indicating that from day one and persisting ever since, the devil is characterized by sinning. In a similar way non-Christians are characterized by persistent and continuous sin. For them the sin of unbelief is a way of life.

In reference to the Christian, John is saying that it is impossible for a child of God to persist in a continuous lifestyle characterized by sin. If someone thinks they are a Christian but can continue to live a lifestyle of sin for a long time this person was never a Christian. This is why James says that faith without works is dead. If there is never any fruit it doesn't matter what you say, there was no faith.

### James 2:24-26

**You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. <sup>25</sup> In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? <sup>26</sup> For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.**

If a person really is a Christian and begins to live a long term lifestyle of sin then God will invoke discipline on the person to get their attention and repentance. God does this first by inflicting pain on the person using merciless officials (those in authority over them – **Proverbs 17:11**), then permanently damaging some part of their life (**Proverbs 29:1**), and if they continue in sin, an early death (**Proverbs 30:17**). Either way the lifestyle of sin will be brought to an end and not allowed to continue. For a detailed study on God's discipline of disobedient Christians please see, "The Prime Directive" at: <http://gciweb.org/2011/04/youth-bible-study-materials-michael-r-daily/>

**Proverbs 17:11** - A rebellious man seeks only evil, so a cruel messenger (merciless official) will be sent against him.

**Proverbs 29:1** - A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken beyond remedy.

**Proverbs 30:17** - The eye that mocks a father and scorns a mother, the ravens of the valley will pick it out, and the young eagles will eat it.