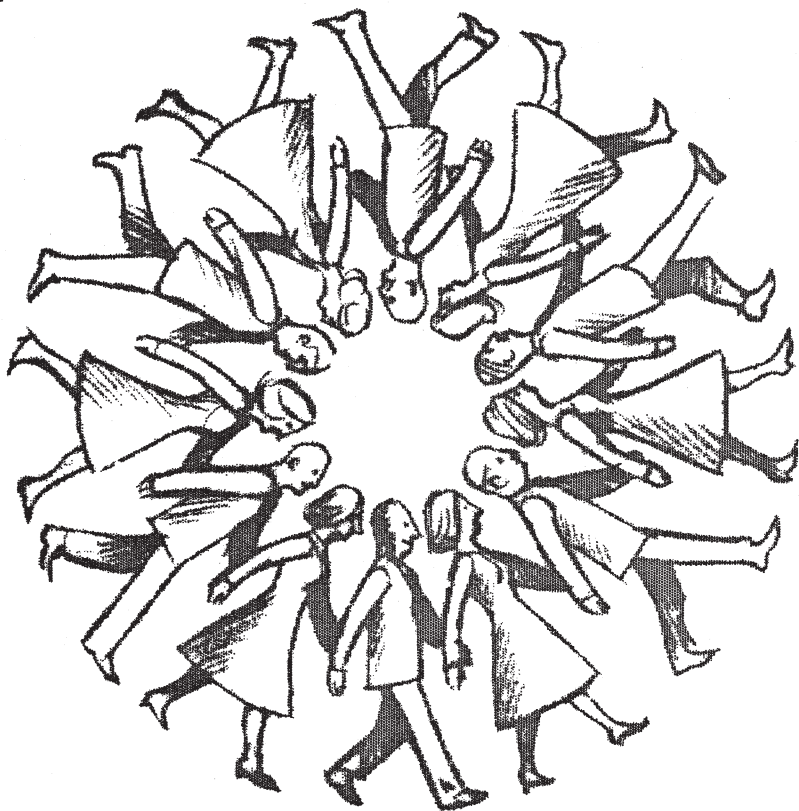


“Strange DOCTRINE”



By JAMES E. GIBBONS

WHILE DRIVING along in my car through the area of southwest Virginia and east Tennessee, I was passing the monotonous time involved in a long trip by listening to the radio. I was somewhat startled by the words of a radio preacher that hit my ears. He loudly and dogmatically proclaimed, *“There are a lot of people in glory tonight, right now, for this very reason.”* The reason he went on to say was, *“They backslid on the Lord, going back into sin, and wouldn’t repent. So the Lord finally*

said, 'I've had it with you! That's enough!' Then he snuffed out their lives and took them on to glory [heaven]." (!!!)

Did I hear him right? I couldn't believe what was being said. Professed religious people, backslidden and in sin, were taken to heaven because they were backslidden and in sin. Something didn't sound right here.

Calvinistic Views

If you are familiar with the doctrine of Calvinism, you will recognize this as one of the explanations of "once in grace, always in grace" or the perseverance of the saints. It is taught that if a person is "once saved" he can never fall or become "unsaved." But religious people do fall and go back into sin. Consequently, when this is pointed out, there are different explanations forthcoming in trying to explain the situation. Here are some of them this writer has encountered through the years in talking with people who hold such views. Needless to say, they are muddled and contradictory.

(1) I have been told that a person cannot fall, and if he does fall, he was never saved in the first place. (2) But, modifying this view considerably, I have been told that if he does fall, the Lord will chastise him and bring him back before he dies—he will not die in a fallen condition. (3) But then, going along with the scenario mentioned in the first paragraph of this article, I have been told that even though a person falls, he cannot fall from grace. (4) And, attached to this line of thought, it is said that although he does fall away into sin, his evil works will be burned and he himself will be saved even though he doesn't personally repent and never returns to the Lord (notice the first paragraph again).

Every Reason Why a New Christian Should Be Successful

Before we address these "explanations," which we believe are wrong, let us emphasize a point. There is every reason why a new Christian should make a go of it in living the Christian life. Having entered into the grace of God, the throne of grace is open to him (Hebrews 4:14-16; 1 John 1:7-10; Romans 5:1,2). He is a new creation in Christ with the gift of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 5:17; Acts 2:38; Ephesians 3:16). He has the Word of God of which Paul says that it "is

able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32; 2 Timothy 3:16,17). He has fellow Christians to encourage and help him in living the Christian life (Hebrews 10:23-25; Galatians 6:1,2). But in spite of all of this, there are those who receive the grace of God in vain (2 Corinthians 6:1; 1 Corinthians 15:2) and draw back unto perdition (Hebrews 10:35-39).

CAN A PERSON FALL?

"In Time of Temptation Fall Away"

The parable of the sower used by the Lord in getting across his teachings stands out very vividly (Luke 8:4-15). The seed fell in four different places, by the way side, the stony place, among thorns and on good ground. In each case, possibly aside from the first one, there was life as the seed germinated. However, in reference to the stony place, or the rock, he said, "They on the rock are they which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation *fall away*" (Luke 8:13). So, a person can fall, having once believed.

"Take Heed Lest He Fall"

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-13. It is very impressive in showing the possibility and danger of falling away. Paul illustrates with the children of Israel in the wilderness journey. Even though they were "baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat [food]," many lusted after evil things and fell—they became idolaters, they committed fornication, they murmured and "they were destroyed of the destroyer." Paul says these are examples and lessons for us. He concludes by saying, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth *take heed lest he fall*." (What Paul has said here follows the sobering words he said about himself in 1 Corinthians 9:27, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway"). All of this is very expressive and plain, isn't it? A person can fall after becoming a Christian.

"Lest Any Man Fall After the Same Example"

Continuing the same illustration of the children of Israel in the wilderness journey, the 3rd and 4th chapters of Hebrews

make interesting reading. The writer warns, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in *departing* from the living God...For we are made partakers of Christ, *if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.*" Then he illustrates with the failure of many Israelites to enter the Promised Land because of "unbelief." Heaven and being with Christ are parallel with the Promised Land for Christians. In view of what happened to Israel, the writer says, "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it," and summing it up "enter into that rest, *lest any man fall* after the same example of unbelief." Yes, there is a possibility of falling. (Also, notice Hebrews 6:6).

"If Ye Do These Things, Ye Shall Never Fall"

Read 2 Peter 1:2-11. We are admonished to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord, adding one thing right after another in our Christian growth. This process is necessary to our spiritual development. Thus these admonitions are summed up by Peter saying, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for *if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.*" And, after warnings about false teachers, 2 Peter 3:17 and 18 sums up the whole epistle, "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, *beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall* from your own stedfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen." A person can fall. This cannot be denied.

CAN A PERSON FALL FROM GRACE? Modified View of This Doctrine

Having established the fact that a person can fall, we are faced with a modified view of this doctrine. The modified view is not that a person cannot fall, it is that he cannot fall *from grace*. He can never be lost regardless. And this view, as we have already noticed (and will notice), of necessity leads to many other serious and faulty ramifications if this doctrine is to be maintained.

Saved By Grace

There are many factors that enter into our salvation, but overall the New Testament says that we are saved by grace (Ephesians 2:5,8). Therefore, if a person can fall from grace, that means he has fallen from that which saves him. He is in an unsaved condition.

In view of this, are there Scriptures that actually say a person can fall from grace?

“Ye Are Fallen from Grace”

Yes. Galatians 5:4 reads in black and white, “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; *ye are fallen from grace.*” Influenced by the proselytizing Judaizers, the churches in Galatia were trying to mix the law of Moses with the gospel. In such a muddled approach to God, the indictment of the apostle Paul comes down heavy upon them, “*Ye are fallen from grace.*” Yes, a person can fall *from grace.*

“Lest Any Man Fall from the Grace of God”

Read the 12th chapter of Hebrews. Let us zero in on verses 14 and 15. “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently *lest any man fail of the grace of God...*” This word translated “fail” here means to be late, inferior; to fall short, be deficient. Interestingly, in Romans 3:23 it is translated “come short” in the quotation, “For all have sinned, and *come short* of the glory of God.” In Hebrews 4:1, it is rendered “come short” again, “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to *come short* of it.” The KJV has as an alternate translation of Hebrews 12:15 in the margin of the Bible, “Looking diligently lest any man *fall from* the grace of God...” Yes, a person can fall *from grace.*

Context of Chastisement

Since one of the comebacks of Calvinistic thinking people is that the Lord will chastise a sinning Christian and he will always come back to the Lord, an extended examination of the context of Hebrews 12:15 is in order. It is tied in with the subject of the chastisement of the children of God. Read the Scripture earlier in this chapter that leads up to verse 14 and 15. God can and does use things that happen to us to chastise and

purify us. We are told that we are chastised “that we might be partakers of his *holiness*” (verse 10). It is after this that the writer admonishes, “Follow peace with all men, and *holiness*, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of [fall from] the grace of God...” He doesn’t say that an erring believer will always come back to God (many so-called Christians are not brought to repentance), but he does say that without holiness *no man* shall see the Lord. He does say that a person can fall from the grace of God.

THE EXTREME VIEW **Going to Heaven in Ones Sins**

Coupled with the doctrine of “once in grace, always in grace” (a person can’t fall from grace) is the extreme view reflected in the first paragraph of this article as represented by the radio speaker. My wife and I had the unusual experience a few years ago of being personally involved with a person holding this extreme view. We rescued this person from the middle of the highway, who was drunk and waiting for a big truck to hit him so he could go to heaven (he said). He was supposed to go to prison, but according to his “theology” thought he could expedite things and go on to heaven. He thought he was saved and there was no way that he could be lost. Heaven would be his home.

Works Burned, No Reward, Yet Saved

The appeal is made that somehow a person’s evil works will be burned and he will nevertheless go to heaven (like the radio preacher said). Scripture in the 3rd chapter of 1 Corinthians is twisted to try to fit into this framework of thought. In verses 13 through 15 we read, “Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” Yes, it does say there is a trying by “fire” and that if a man’s works are burned, he will not receive a reward, but he will still be saved. But what does this mean? What is Paul saying here?

The Preacher's Works, His Converts

Again we need to read the verses before and correctly fit everything into context. Paul had been talking about the various preachers who had visited Corinth and their work there. The Corinthians were all wrapped up in the personalities of men with a decided party spirit ("I am of Paul...I am of Apollos," etc.). Paul pictured the preachers as being God's builders and tenders of God's vineyard. In this context he says that "every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour" (verse 8); then, "For we [the preachers] are labourers together with God: ye [the Corinthians] are God's husbandry, ye [the Corinthians] are God's building" (verse 9). The foundation of Christ had been laid (verse 11). The converts were the material that the preachers were building on this foundation, which constituted the temple of God. The nature of the material, or converts, making up the building is spoken of as "gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble" (verse 12). So, the reference to trying "every man's works of what sort it is" has to do with the preacher's converts. If the converts proved to be "wood, hay, or stubble," not good material for the building, the preacher would not receive a reward for what he had done, but he would himself nevertheless be saved. This is not talking about evil works of supposed believers in general, but the converts who had supposedly been added to the church in relation to the one who won them. This is no support of the extreme Calvinistic view.

A Strange Doctrine

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid..." (Romans 6:1,2). It doesn't work that way. The Lord came to save us from our sins, not in our sins ("And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people *from their sins*," Matthew 1:21). Remember: "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers [fornicators], and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie" (Revelation 22:14,15). "He that overcometh shall inherit all things: and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. *But* [in

contrast with, contrariwise] the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers [fornicators], and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Revelations 21:7,8). Only the pure in heart shall see God (Matthew 5:8). Surely what we have examined in this little article is a "strange doctrine" foreign to the Word of God. □



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