

SOTERIOLOGY (151)

A proper New Testament application is this—any leader who sins against God risks losing God’s blessings and God’s ministry. The leader who does sin needs to go directly to God and honestly confess his sin and ask God for His cleansing mercy and for the privilege of continuing in leadership.

This text is applicable for every N.T. believer. Many of these same principles are found in I John. Sin breaks intimate fellowship with God (1:3; 6-7). Sin causes a loss of full joy (1:4). Sin causes shame (2:28). Sin causes a lack of assurance of salvation (3:19).

When a believer chooses to sin against God, there is a loss of joy, confidence and a fear that God may send His chastisement. What should a believer do when he sins? He should do exactly what David did in Psalm 51—go straight to God and honestly and openly confess the sin (I John 1:9). Here is where one will find the forgiveness of God.

This is the true interpretation and application of Psalm 51:11. This text has nothing to do with losing one’s salvation. The LORD God had guaranteed David, long before he sinned, that He would give him special eternal blessings (II Sam. 7:4-16). David never questioned his salvation, but after his sin he did question whether or not God would still use him. He wanted once again to be used by God and blessed by God in service.

Psalm 51:11 is David’s prayer to God so that he could continue to be king and be blessed of God while being the king. According to I Chron. 29:26-28, God did positively answer David’s prayer.

5) II Thess. 2:3 - Here is a N.T. passage that is dispensationally misinterpreted and misapplied concerning the issue of eternal security. One who cites this text claims that the “apostasy” (falling away) refers to Christians who were once saved, but then fall away from their faith and are no longer saved.

There are two immediate contextual observations which may be made:

1) Nowhere does the context suggest that those who fall away are believers.

The word “apostasy” is one that means to tear away or to fall away (Smith, p. 54). Although the text is designed to instruct the “brethren” (2:1), it is not apostasy committed by the brethren.

2) This apostasy or falling away precedes the “man of lawlessness” being revealed.

The point Paul is making here is that the Antichrist will not be revealed until there has been a great turning from God. By using the word “apostasy,” Paul is referring to some major revolt or defection, some major tearing away from God that will precede the revealing of the “man of lawlessness.” The true interpretation is that just prior to the revealing of the Antichrist, there will be a major revolt against God and His Word.

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There will be a major defection from the truth. This revolt will not be led by believers; it will be a revolt led by unbelievers. This revolt will occur during the first part of the Tribulation (Matt. 24:5; Rev. 6:1-2).

The Thessalonians were troubled and shaken by some who were claiming they were already in the Tribulation and were already experiencing the “Day of the Lord” judgments (2:2). One of the reasons why this was being said was because unbelievers were controlling the world and were persecuting believers. As a result, some of the believers thought they were already in the Tribulation. Paul writes to these believers to explain that “apostasy” is a necessary part of the process that eventually will lead to the “Day of the Lord” and reveal the Antichrist. Paul did not want these believers deceived into thinking they were already in the Tribulation, for he had previously instructed them that they would not enter into this time of wrath (I Thess. 5:2, 4, 9).

This passage has nothing to do with losing salvation. In fact, Paul himself identified these Thessalonians as brethren who were strong and enlarged in their faith (II Thess. 1:3-4). The dispensation being referred to in II Thess. 2:3 is the dispensation of the Tribulation. It is not a text for the Church Age.

Every one of these five passages we have looked at have a common denominator—every one has been dispensationally misinterpreted. In fact, in most instances the dispensational issue is totally ignored when using the passage. Such an approach to Scripture fails to “rightly divide the Word of Truth.”

Interpretive Heading #2 - Passages of Scripture which are misinterpreted contextually.

When a person refers to a verse which he claims proves you may lose your salvation, we may almost always assume that the context of the verse has been totally overlooked and ignored. There are many passages of Scripture that are cited by Arminians that have absolutely nothing to do, contextually speaking, with the point they are trying to prove, namely, one may lose his salvation.

For analysis purposes we may subdivide contextual misinterpretations under several different sub-headings:

(Subheading #1) - Passages that contextually refer to false teachers.

There are several passages which are cited as “proof texts” which contextually have nothing to do with losing salvation, but have everything to do with false teachers who surface as we near the end of the Church Age.

1) I Tim. 4:1-2 – This passage is often used as a support for the belief that one may “fall away from the faith” and lose salvation. However, a careful examination of the context will reveal that this was not Paul’s intent at all.

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The Church is to be the pillar and support of the truth (I Tim. 3:15). This is paramount for the N.T. Church. Paul is writing to Timothy, who has been personally taught sound doctrine by the Apostle Paul (I Tim. 1:2-3). Paul had entrusted Timothy with the responsibility of teaching this important doctrine to others (1:3; 4:13).

Timothy found himself surrounded by teachers who were claiming to be right with God, who did not know what they were doing in their handling of the Bible (I Tim. 1:5-7).

As we come to chapter 4, Paul informs Timothy that as we near the end of the Church Age, there will be many teachers who will “fall away” from “the faith”—they will fall away from the faith system and from doctrinal truth and purity. The verb “fall away” means there will be some who will revolt, withdraw and become apostate to the truth of God (G. Abbott-Smith, p. 71). The article “the” before faith indicates that there will be many teachers who will surface as we near the end that will be apostate to the true system of sound doctrine. There will be many teachers who will literally lead people into demonic forms of worship that do not and will not conform to the truth (II Tim. 4:3).

The challenge Paul is making to Timothy is to keep proclaiming true doctrine even though as we near the end there will be many false teachers (I Tim. 4:11-16). In doing this, Timothy will deliver himself and those who hear him from false teachers. This passage has nothing to do with a believer in Jesus Christ losing his salvation. The context is clearly that of false teachers who are leading people into demonic doctrines. Paul’s charge to Timothy was to stay focused on communicating the truth of the Word of God. Proclamation of the truth combats error of heretics.

Dr. Chafer said it well concerning this text when he wrote: “The notion that some once saved are lost again, receives no support from this Scripture” (Vol. 3, p. 294).

2) II Peter 2:20-22 – Verses 20-22 are some of the most famous verses of the entire N.T. as a supposed “proof-text” for establishing that one may lose his salvation. One writer said of these verses: “Peter gave a graphic example of a person once being saved and then being lost... The Bible states clearly that a person can lose his salvation through neglect and disobedience” (Jimmy Swaggart, *Straight Answers to Tough Questions*, pp. 69-70).

Unfortunately, this writer, as all others who appeal to this passage, totally neglect to observe the context. What immediately must come to our minds when reading verse 20 is the matter of the antecedent of the pronoun “they.” Basic grammar tells us that a pronoun is used to take the place of a noun that is located somewhere within the context before the pronoun is used. Dr. Frank Braun, of the University of Michigan, said, “A pronoun is a word used in place of a noun, in order to avoid awkward repetitions” (Frank X. Braun, *English Grammar for Language Students*, p. 16).

Since verses 10, 12, 13, 15, 18, 19 and 20 all contain the pronoun “they,” it is very logical and important to resolve the matter of the antecedent for which this pronoun stands.

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If we go back to verse 1, we see that the specific identity of those being discussed are false prophets and teachers, who teach heresy and are sensual and who lead people astray. Although these false prophets and teachers have been exposed to the truth (2:20), they eventually reject the truth and follow their own lustful way.

A dog will go back and eat his own vomit because that is the nature of a dog (2:22). A sow will wallow in the mire because that is the nature of a sow (2:22). You can educate and externally clean up these animals all you want, but they will still do these things because that is their nature.

Peter's point is that a false teacher will always return to his false teaching and will always lead others astray. You can expose the false teacher to great truth, you can educate him and externally clean him up and make him beautiful; but in the end he will return to his false way and teaching, for that is his nature.

This passage has nothing to do with a saved believer losing his salvation. It is dealing with false teachers. This text warns the more the false teacher knows the more responsible and accountable he is. As we near the end, many of these false teachers will surface and God's people need to know this and remember this (3:1-3).

3) Jude 1:3-19 – Here is a text often cited as another “proof-text” for losing one's salvation. Frankly, upon a careful examination of the text, it is hard to imagine how anyone can conclude that this passage promotes this idea whatsoever. Those that take this position truly and totally neglect the context.

Verse 4 makes it clear that the people being discussed are “ungodly” persons who have been marked out for “condemnation.” This would immediately suggest that this discussion is not about believers. Verse 19 makes it clear that the people in question are “devoid” of the Spirit. This again makes it very clear that the discussion concerns that of an unbeliever.

Upon a close examination of the context, it is clear that Jude's point is not that of a believer losing his salvation; it is that of an unbeliever influencing the believer to have attitudes and behavior which are contrary to God's truth. Jude wanted the believers to be built up in the faith (v. 20) and not to be swayed by these godless heretics, who were teaching false things and living licentious lives.

Henry A. Virkler, who has written a well-accepted book on Hermeneutics—*The Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation*, writes: “The meaning of a text cannot be interpreted with any degree of certainty without historical-cultural and contextual analysis” (Virkler, p. 77).

Contexts which refer to false prophets and teachers must never be allowed to be applied to true teachers and true believers. Unfortunately, those who postulate the belief that one may lose his salvation often use verses from these contexts as proof of their position. Such mishandling of the Word leaves God's sheep without real knowledge and understanding, something for which God will highly hold teachers accountable (James 3:1; Jer. 3:15).

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Unfortunately, under this heading of “Contextual Misinterpretations,” not only do some contexts refer to false teachers, but others are (mis)used that refer to other things.

(Sub-heading #2) - Passages that contextually refer to moral reformation or outward profession.

There are certain passages that refer to those who profess salvation but do not possess salvation. Those who use verses from such contexts fail to “rightly divide” the true context.

1) Luke 11:24-26 – Here is another famous Arminian text that is often cited as one that proves one may lose his salvation.

There is no better discussion of this text than that of Dr. Chafer:

“The Savior is here presenting a phase of truth related to demonology which is not even remotely related to salvation by grace. A demon going out of a person, leaving that former abode free from such an unholy tenant may return, taking with him other demons worse in character than the first tenant. The fallacy of the use of this Scripture to teach insecurity is seen in the fact that the removal of a demon is not the equivalent of salvation, in which the divine nature and Spirit are given to the believer. (This episode occurred long before Christ ascended into heaven and sent His Spirit to indwell the believer.) The presence of a divine nature and Spirit guarantees that no demon can overtake God’s property (I John 4:4). This incident may represent a reformation or improvement in the case of a suffering one, but it contributes nothing to the question of whether one once saved might be lost again” (Vol. 3, pp. 296-297).

Religious reformation without the dynamic of real transformation is a demonic reformation. This is not a discussion of a person once saved losing his salvation. This is a text about a person once demon-possessed being temporarily delivered without coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

The context is certainly not a discussion of one once saved losing his salvation. Any honest examination of this context will reveal this important reality.

2) Matt. 13:1-8 – Here is a parable often cited as a proof-text for claiming one may lose his salvation. As with other texts, when we examine this context, it becomes very clear that this passage is not referring to the loss of one’s salvation in any way.

Those who suggest that this passage proves one may lose his salvation say that the seed which fell beside the road (13:4), the seed which fell upon rocky places (13:5), and the seed which fell among thorns (13:7), all represent people who were once saved, but now are no longer saved. However, upon examination of the context, we may observe that this type of interpretation is inconsistent with what is truly the point.

Jesus Christ was personally here on earth proclaiming to Israel that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, which was also the message of John (Matt. 3:2). Jesus Christ was the King and He was offering Israel her kingdom. Many people were following Jesus Christ, listening to Him.