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Correspondence between a Roman Catholic priest and the Editor



Letter from Patrick McCafferty.

Dear Mr Foster,

You have summarized Our Lord's teachings in the New Testament as (1) "Instructions to sinners as to the way by which they may be saved" and (2) "Commands given to those who are saved in which is set forth the pattern of the life of victory and blessing which may be enjoyed by the believer".

What happens when believers fail to obey those commands thus given by the Lord? In my letter of September 18, I referred to Matt 24:45-51. The master will "cut off" the wicked servant and will "SEND HIM TO THE SAME FATE AS THE UNFAITHFUL WHERE THERE WILL BE WEEPING AND GRINDING OF TEETH". If it were not possible for Christians to fall away, the Lord would not have found it necessary to warn us so solemnly. Can you not see that?

You write: "The true child of God is filled with horror at the prospect of being a false professor and so he doubtless will pray many times as did David in Psalm 51:11: "Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.". If your understanding of salvation is correct, then those words of David do not and cannot apply you. The reality is, however, that they are given to us by the Holy Spirit to guard us against presumption and to keep us walking on the right path that leads to life; for it is certainly possible, the Lord forbid, for a person to fall away, for the sown seed of the Word of God not to produce its crop.

However, the more one grows in the love and grace of God the more impossible it is that he/she would ever fall away. This is indeed sanctification and it is very evident in the person's disposition and manner of living. I thank God that I know such people, Protestant and Catholic, who are in love with the Lord and His loving Spirit shines through them. Peter had to repent of his denial of Jesus. The prodigal son had to come to his senses and "leave this place" of sin and degradation. Had he failed to do so, he would have died in his alienation, far from his father's house. We human beings MUST respond to God's grace. If someone is drowning in the sea and someone throws him/her a lifeline, the person in danger of drowning must make the effort to catch hold of the lifeline. The person who throws the lifeline is trying to save the person in danger of drowning. The person going under, however, must co-operate with being saved.

Likewise, we must take hold of Christ's saving and finished work and allow it to be wrought in us and efficacious for us. This is not, as you allege, us "saving ourselves". We are simply availing of the wonderful work of God for which He Alone is responsible. It is self-evident, however, that we must accept what God is offering. I contend that this acceptance is continuous – growing in grace and love throughout our lives.

You wrote: "What is absent from any of your responses is a reference to the workings of the old nature or "the flesh," "the old man" within the Christian." However, in my reply of September 18, I wrote: "Christ being perfectly formed in us is clearly an unfolding of and growth in grace. It is the ongoing "putting to death of the flesh with all its passions and



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desires" (Gal 5:24). We have to struggle hard and with perseverance against the old nature. Paul very graphically writes to the Church at Colossae about "the complete stripping of the body of flesh". (Col 2:11) This is the new circumcision of the heart and it is ongoing detachment from the things of this world and all that is of "the flesh".

I repeat, the warnings in the Scriptures addressed to believers and disciples are far too severe and solemn to be understood as you would have us understand them. For example, the Lord threatens with Hell fire the man who calls his brother a "renegade"! (Mt 5:23). I repeat to you again the words of Hebrews 10:35-39: "do not lose your fearlessness now since the reward is so great. You will need perseverance if you are to do God's Will and gain what He has promised". (The sacred author then quotes Habakkuk 2:3-4) 'Only a little while now and a very little while, for come He certainly will before too long. My upright person will live through faith but if he draws back, my soul will take no pleasure in him'. "We are not the sort of people who draw back and are LOST by it; we are sort WHO KEEP FAITH UNTIL OUR SOULS ARE SAVED".

It is abundantly clear that the Lord considers it a possibility that his upright person is capable of drawing back and being lost. Therefore, we are at war with sin and that aspect of our nature that is "old" and thus Paul says to us, engaged in this constant battle: "Let your armour be the Lord Jesus Christ and stop worrying about how your disordered natural inclination may be fulfilled". (Rms 13:14).

Your teaching on salvation renders the theological virtue of Hope meaningless and redundant. Hope is the movement towards a future and possible good. How can you hope for what you already possess, namely eternal salvation? We are not yet in Heaven. We wait with boundless confidence for God to keep His promises, but we must continue striving to be faithful in the meantime. Rms 8:24-25 and I Thess 1:3. Remember the parable of the ten bridesmaids, five of whom were wise and five foolish. The foolish ones were excluded from the Kingdom because of their carelessness. With this parable in mind, consider the solemn warning of the Lord in Luke 21:34-36: "WATCH YOURSELVES, or your hearts will be coarsened with debauchery and drunkenness and the cares of life, and that day will come upon you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come down on ALL THOSE LIVING ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH. Stay awake, praying at all times for the strength to survive all that is going to happen, AND TO HOLD YOUR GROUND BEFORE THE SON OF MAN". Therefore, "see that you have your belts done up and your lamps lit" (Lk.12:35-36).

You quote John10:28 "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand". No one can steal from Christ or the Father. NOTHING can separate us from the Love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rms 8:38-39). However, we could choose to separate ourselves from that love by choosing evil, God forbid. For this reason, Jesus clearly says to every faithful soul that loves Him: "REMAIN in My Love. IF you keep My commandments, you will remain in my Love" (Jn 15:9-10). Observe well this warning to His disciples: "Anyone who does not remain in Me is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; these branches are collected and thrown on the fire and are burnt". (Jn 15:6).

Yours sincerely,

Patrick McCafferty.



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Reply from Ivan Foster.

Dear Mr. McCafferty,

You ask, "What happens when believers fail to obey those commands thus given by the Lord?" I gave you a portion of God's Word which dealt with this matter though you did not refer to it in your reply, 1 Cor 11:28-32. Believers do disobey Christ. Thus John says: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). The general tendency of true believers is to continue on, to abide in the state wherein grace has brought them. It is the opposite to apostasy.

It is no argument to trawl through the Holy Scriptures and quote verses warning of the dreadful consequences awaiting those that profess faith in Christ but then fall away, if we are erroneously claiming that the verses teach something they do not. They do not teach what you claim. They are warnings to those who lightly assume a profession of Christianity but whose hearts have never been truly regenerated. They are addressed to that multitude of which Christ speaks in Matthew 7:21-23. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Professing Christ, they never ceased from working iniquity. Religious but reprobate. They never knew Christ and never wrought holiness. They may well have been baptised and graduated through all the initiations that religion can provide, but they were never converted. They attended church but also frequented the pub and the dance-hall and the disco. They knew nothing of the regenerating grace of God which makes a man "a new creature." There are many instances in the Bible of those who blaze for a little while as professed believers but who, in the end, fall away. "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (John 6:66). These were professed disciples but they showed the emptiness of their profession by turning back. They are as the seed among the thorns and on the shallow ground (Matthew 13:1-30). They never were truly united to Christ.

But the true convert is "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5). The true Christian, as a result of his justification by faith, enjoys the blessing of being kept by God — not as you insist, kept by his own diligence. You reduce the glorious promise of John 10:28 to a worthless shell. What good is the triple assertion of our security if the one most important threat is not covered? When Christ says, "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand," the phrase: "neither shall any man" must mean what it says and include the man who is in God's hand, otherwise words mean nothing. You make man the determiner of who will be in heaven and who will not. I believe that God has determined to save a people and all He has purposed to be saved will be saved, for all that is required to save them and keep them has been imparted to them at their regeneration. It is part of the work of grace for the Lord to "keep the feet of his saints" (1 Samuel 2:9). John states the matter simply. "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" (1 John 2:19). Those



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who are truly of the people of God will not apostasise or fall away.

You prove nothing by quoting Scripture that proves reprobates, who may pretend to be Christians for a time, will be lost. Show me where a true believer was lost and is in hell.

The ground of the true Christian's perseverance is God's decree of election, flowing out of His unchanging love for His people. The people God would save, He has loved with "an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3). Can it be that some of those thus loved from eternity will perish everlastingly in hell and leave the God of heaven with an unrequited love? I think not. Did Christ shed His blood for those who will be finally lost? I think not. Christ shall see the travail of Calvary's agonies and be satisfied. "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities" (Isaiah 53:11). Our perseverance springs from the full payment of the price of redemption by Christ. If any for whom He died are lost, then His blood sacrifice was wasted. "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19).

The perpetual indwelling of the Holy Spirit assures the true Christian's perseverance. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (1 John 3:9). The redeemed nature, the regenerate nature, cannot sin and will be kept until glorification.

The "evil servant" of Matthew 24:45-51, to whom you refer, is just that, an "evil servant" masquerading as a true Christian in the household of the Lord, but whose works show just what his true nature is. He is the same person as that symbolised under the likeness of the tares in Matthew 13. This is not a good Christian who has apostatised, but a false professor who has begun to show his true colours and suffers the consequences.

The words of Psalm 51:11 do most certainly apply to Calvinists. Though David had greatly sinned — adultery, deceit, murder — yet God had not removed His Spirit from David. Only one who believes in the perseverance of the saints could dare to ask, in the wake of such awful wickedness, to retain the Spirit's blessing as David did. Your system of teaching would have David pray: "Give me back the Holy Spirit which I have lost." But that is not what David prayed. Even though he had sinned grievously, David was not cast aside by the Lord. Grace is still at work within his heart, causing him to cling to God and His mercy. This is the experience of all the elect of God.

Of course, Peter had to repent after he denied the Lord. But I say that his repentance was secured by the redemptive purpose of God in Christ. The weeping of Peter was not self-induced but Christ-induced. "And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:61-62). It was the "look" of Christ which imparted repentance. It is the same "look" as that referred to in Exodus 2:24-25. "And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them." What moved God to act in mercy was the Covenant of Grace, the very same covenant under which He deals with His true people today.



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You use the example of the drowning man grasping a rope and being pulled to safety. There is just one very vital flaw in that example. We are not as DROWNING men. We are DEAD men. "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins", (Ephesians 2:1). How can the dead soul believe, hold unto, obey and avail themselves of that which is necessary to their salvation? I have referred to this point on numerous occasions in this brief exchange of letters and you have yet to tell me!

You ask: "How can you hope for what you already possess, namely eternal salvation?" I suspect that you use the word hope colloquially, in the fashion it is used every day, namely to mean "entertaining the possibility of something coming to pass." That is not the Bible's use of the word. It means "trust." "But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it" (Romans 8:25). Heaven is not just a possibility for the true believer. It is a certainty. But it is a certainty that we have not yet seen, so we hope and wait with confidence. Paul refers to the glorification of the believer, something that is yet future, in the same past tense as he refers to the other experiences of grace which were already known by those to whom he was writing. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Romans 8:28-30). The glorification of God's elect is an accomplished matter as far as God is concerned. The one who has experienced the call and entered upon the blessings of justification shall most definitely be glorified. That is why Paul goes on to say what he does in verses 31-39. Nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39).

Yours sincerely,

Ivan Foster.