

## Jason Upchurch - Q & A - August 2022 - Calvinism and Eternal Security

### Question 1: What are the different views on losing salvation?

This is a great question for many reasons and I'm actually going to take up this whole sermon answering this one question because I think it's that important.

When I was in high school this was something that came up often: our pastor made sure we knew we couldn't lose our salvation. I don't really know why he emphasized that, to be honest with you. But he did.

I don't recall knowing anyone who thought we could lose our salvation. I had come across some difficult verses - which I'll share with you in a minute - but nothing that was a deal breaker.

Later when I got to college I understood that this is a discussion more broadly between those who are Calvinists and those who are Arminians. And someone's view on whether or not they can go from being a justified child of God to an unjustified child of God really stems from their view as either a Calvinist or an Arminian.

So let me just take a few minutes to briefly unpack what a Calvinist and Arminian is because that's going to help us in the larger discussion about whether or not you can lose your salvation. I don't think I've ever unpacked what a Calvinist is or an Arminian, but let me give you a crash course because eternal security - and views on whether or not someone can lose their salvation - are wrapped up in this discussion.

I'll spare you the historical development, but know that in the years following the death of John Calvin in the 1500s, followers of Jacob Arminius put together Remonstrances - objections - to John Calvin's teaching. And they objected to Calvin's teaching on salvation at 5 points. Those objections are actually now formulated into what we know as the 5 points of Calvinism which is put together in the Acrostic TULIP. So let me talk about TULIP for a minute.

T - total depravity is that sin has affected the whole of man. We are not as bad as we could be but sin does taint every part of who we are and especially spiritually.

**Rom. 3:10-12:** No one is righteous, no not one. No one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have become worthless, no one does good not even one."

Calvinists would say we are totally depraved, spiritually dead, and therefore God has to do the entire work of salvation to bring us back to spiritual life, including giving us the faith to believe.

Arminians would agree we are totally depraved, but they would say that God has given all people Prevenient Grace in order to believe. Prevenient means "to go before." They would argue that although all people are totally depraved, God has given each person just enough grace to believe in the gospel if they want to on their own. This is a general grace God has given to all humanity.

The problem with that view is that there is no passage that teaches this, but it's something they assume must be true if the gospel is to be preached freely to all people.

U - Unconditional election, that is that God has chosen to save people, not based on any good thing in us, but only because of his mercy and grace. Our election has no conditions. There is nothing in us that God says he needs or wants in us.

Both Calvinists and Arminians believe in election and predestination, the question is **why** has God chosen some and not others. Calvinists would say God has simply chosen based on his own grace and for his own reasons. Arminians would say that God has chosen people based on foreseen faith. God looks down the halls of time, as it were, and sees who will believe and chooses based on those who believe.

But we have no passages indicating that God chooses based on foreseen faith at all. They often point to the word “foreknowledge” which we’ll see in a bit, but that word in the original language doesn’t mean to simply look down into time. It means to plan or determine something.

According to **Eph. 1:5, 11**: In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ. Why? According to the purpose of his will...we have been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.

**1 Cor. 1** God chooses who will be saved based not on what we bring to the table, but quite the contrary. God chooses the losers so that we will give him all the glory. So our salvation is unconditional.

TUL

L - Limited Atonement is the teaching that Jesus died for the sins only of those who believe in him.

Really, this answers the question: For whom did Jesus die? Who was Jesus trying to save? Was he attempting to save absolutely all people? Was that his intention? Or did he die specifically for those who would believe in him? Is the atonement limited to the elect?

Not all Calvinists hold to limited atonement. If you hold to limited atonement, you are considered a 5 point Calvinist, holding to all 5 letters of TULIP. If you believe that Jesus died for absolutely all people you are called a 4 point Calvinist holding to just 4 out of the 5 points.

Now, just as a side note: everyone limits the atonement somehow. Unless you believe that absolutely everyone will be in heaven, you limit the atonement. Did the blood of Jesus atone for the sins of Judas? No, he’s in hell. Are people in hell covered by the blood of Jesus? No. Their sins are not atoned for, that’s why they’re in hell. So everyone limits the atonement somehow. The issue is whether or not God intentionally sent Jesus to die for the elect or for all people.

Of all the 5 points this one is most controversial. I am a 5 point Calvinist. Are there verses that seem to indicate God wants all people to be saved? Sure. But when we look at verses that are specifically answering the question: for whom did Jesus die? It seems clear he died for those who would believe in him.

**Eph. 5:25**: Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

**John 10:11, 15**: I am the Good Shepherd, the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep...I lay down my life for the sheep.

Not the goats, the sheep.

**Matt. 1:21**: Mary will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. Why? For he will save his people - his people - from their sins.

Now, I know. What about **John 3:16**? For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever - whoever - believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. Well we Calvinists believe that verse is inspired too. We believe that anyone who truly believes in Jesus will be saved.

But the reality is that **John 3:16** is not addressing the precise question: of who did Jesus die for? It’s not answering that question. It’s answering: how can someone have eternal life and not perish?

There are other verses that make limited atonement seem difficult: Jesus gave himself a ransom for all (**2 Tim. 2:6**). And there are others.

By the way: when you have a difficult doctrine you don’t just add up verses on both sides and whoever has the most verses wins. You actually have to soberly consider the truth of God’s Word. This is why systematic theologies are massive. They’re trying to harmonize what the whole Bible teaches about specific issues.

## TULI

I - Irresistible Grace. Basically this means that those whom God has predestined will respond positively to the gospel when God calls them. That doesn't mean they're saved the first time they hear the gospel, but they will respond in faith when God wants them to.

**John 6:37, 44:** All that the Father gives to me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out...No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

**James 1:18:** Of his own will he has brought us forth by the Word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

God brings us forth - spiritually gives us birth - of his own will.

Arminians would say we can resist his will in spiritual birth. People resist God's will all the time when they disobey God's commands. So too they can resist God at salvation. The problem with that is that the work of regeneration in a person's heart is precisely God changing their heart to love him.

It's not like people come into the Kingdom kicking and screaming. When we're saved we come willingly because God has changed our will. He has given us new spiritual life and now we love Christ. That love is a work of God in our heart.

## TULIP

P - Perseverance of the saints. Or, maybe more accurately preservation of the saints. That is, all those who God has saved will endure in the faith. They will not be lost.

That's the real issue in the question that was asked. But again, I think it's helpful to understand that there's a much larger discussion at hand when we're talking about eternal security and usually these other issues come up which is why they're packaged together.

Perseverance of the saints: This is often called "once saved always saved" or "the security of the believer."

Why would this be in question? Well it's in question because we have a bunch of verses and situations where it appears that those who were genuine Christians have left the faith. They professed faith in Jesus and they walked a Christian life for a time, but now they are gone. And the Scriptures say those same things.

Hebrews has 5 major warning passages and at first glance it appears that genuine Christians forfeit their salvation one way or another. If we're going to be honest with Scripture we need to understand that these are difficult passages to wrestle with. **Read Heb. 2:1-4**

What does it mean to drift away? It's really boating language. It's when you don't tie your ship down and it slowly, slowly moves farther and farther away. Unnoticed, slowly over time.

When I was in high school we did a church camp on Lake Roosevelt and I brought my dad's boat. We beached it one night, but failed to tie it down. One night the backwater rose just enough to set the boat drifting. By morning time the boat was miles downriver. Slowly, silently it had drifted away.

That's what happens to a lot of people. Slowly, silently they drift away from Christ. And the author says if we neglect Jesus we will receive a just retribution - punishment - for drifting away.

Wait a minute? I thought if you were saved you were saved. Well, two things. First, **if** you are saved, if you are actually in Christ you won't drift away. Second, all those who are genuine believers will take these warnings and cling to Jesus all the more. They will pay much closer attention.

If your reaction to these verses is "that's not me, I can do whatever" you're the exact one he's warning.

**Look at 3:12-19. Read**

He calls them brothers, but at the same time he warns that there might be some who have an unbelieving heart causing them to fall away. Apostatai in the Greek - where we get our word apostatize. It means to actively reject something, revolt against it.

So on the surface it can sound like what he's saying is that genuine brothers - that's what he calls them - could actively reject Jesus because of an evil unbelieving heart.

Now, to be fair to our Arminian friends, most of them don't like the phrase "lose your salvation" because it sounds like one morning you got up and all of a sudden magically hate God. Like you lose your keys or your wallet.

Most would prefer the word apostatize or repudiate salvation. They would say that a true believer can at some point actively reject God and they would do so because because of sin or drifting away.

My problem with that, is that even in this verse, he says make sure you don't have an **unbelieving** heart. I think he's saying "Brothers, make sure you're actually brothers."

I think this is a very gentle pastoral encouragement. He assumes they're all believers and so calls them brothers, but says there's a possibility some of them are not. Maybe some are unbelievers.

I don't know anyone in here who is actively rejecting Jesus, but I imagine in a group this size some of you are not believers. I don't know who, I'm okay calling you all brothers but still warning you all nonetheless.

This week Tim Karr was preaching at chapel and for the last sermon at the very end he asked all the camp staff to stand up. And he admonished the camp staff to continue on the in the faith. Over the last 20 years he's seen a lot of staffers abandon the faith for one reason or another. He doesn't assume that these kids are unbelievers, but he's seen enough to know and warn and encourage.

### **Look at 6:1-6. Read**

This is arguably one of the most troubling warnings in all of Hebrews for two reasons. First, because it sounds like people can be saved then abandon the faith - he uses the term fallen away again.

But, second, if they fall away they'll never come back. There's too much to unpack, but let me say what I think he's describing is someone who has every opportunity to be saved, every chance to know the gospel and even see miraculous works of God, and maybe make a profession of faith, but never come to saving faith.

Those people are hardened and will never be renewed to repentance. I don't think this is describing everyone who has ever abandoned Jesus. But I do think it applies to some. These are people who have never been saved. Two reasons why. **Read 7-8**

So the first reason is that the parable he gives. The parable is a parable of 2 people, a believer and an unbeliever who experience all the same experiences he just mentioned - the enlightened, tasting the goodness of the Word of God, so on. Both experienced those amazing things. For believers it yielded a great crop. For unbelievers no matter how much rain you pour out on it, it yields thorns because they're not genuinely the field of God. It'll be burned.

So I think this is another way of saying just because people have amazing spiritual experiences and even grow up in the church it does not ensure they are saved.

The second reason I don't think this is describing someone who was saved and later abandoned the faith is because what he goes on to say. **Read 9-10**

He says plainly that he wasn't talking about those who were saved. In your case, beloved, let's talk about salvation. Which means he wasn't talking about salvation before.

There are 2 other warning passages but I think you get the idea. **Turn to 1 Tim. 1:18-20.** Here we have a passage that seems very clear cut. People did believe but now they don't. **Read 18-20**

This is harder. You'd think a ship sailing along is legit. So a shipwreck is the sinking of something legitimate.

I think what Paul is getting at is the same thing that Jesus got at in the parable of the 4 soils or even the parable of the wheat and the tares. We have to have some kind of language to talk about those who profess faith in Jesus and later abandon it.

All throughout John's gospel there are people who "believe in Jesus" and yet in the very next chapter reject him and try to kill him. What do we do with those guys? I think what we do with those guys is we understand there is a type of belief that people can have in Jesus that is not quite saving faith.

They believe Jesus is a good guy, like the 10 lepers they believe he can heal even though only 1 praises him, but they don't have saving faith.

So how do we address all this? Well, the reason I spent so much time on giving you a crash course on Calvinism before is because a lot of how you answer these questions is wrapped up in how you answer other questions because it's not always clear in the passage.

See our theology will inform how we interpret Scripture and how we interpret Scripture will inform our systematic theology.

Let me give you a quick example. The Trinity. Our systematic theology of the Trinity informs how we interpret passages about Jesus. And specific passages about Jesus inform our view of the Trinity.

Trinity: There is 1 God; there are 3 eternal persons; each person is fully God.

We don't get that understanding from 1 specific passage. We get bits and pieces of that from dozens of passages. AND we have that big understanding and apply it to individual passages without even thinking about it.

Well, the same thing is true when it comes to eternal security. Our understanding of the whole of Scripture will help us interpret passages that are difficult.

**Turn to 1 John 2:18-20.** This is the apostle John talking about false teachers and why they walk away from the truth. **Read**

This is one of the most helpful verses in this discussion. Although it's specifically about false teachers, it helps understand that people who go out from us - that is, they abandon the faith - were never of us. They were never believers, never children of God. If they were children of God they'd still be here.

So they leave and we know for sure they're not Christians.

**Turn to Rom. 8.** This is a little more substantial in the eternal security discussion.

By the way, this isn't just a topic to banter about. What we're dealing with here is that precious truth that those who Christ saves he always saves. When Jesus gives someone eternal life, you what kind of life they have? Eternal life. Not temporary life, not 10 years life, not 30 years life. But eternal life.

Now, when we're talking about this we have to be clear about what salvation is. What is it when someone comes to faith in Jesus? It is a total life transformation. We are new creations in Christ Jesus. We now live a life of repentance from sin and faith toward God.

Is that life perfect? Of course not. But we strive for godliness and rest in God's grace. But that is different from someone who makes a profession of faith when they're a kid, then goes off and lives a life of sin for 30 years and then comes back to church. Were they saved for those 30 years of sin-indulging life? No, of course not.

So we don't believe - and the Bible doesn't teach - that we can just sort of say a prayer and hocus pocus we're in the Kingdom. No; true saving faith is a radical change of direction in the believers life.

And believers are going to struggle all their lives, that's actually what Paul is talking about here. **Read 26-30**

This is beautiful. **Verses 29-30** is called the golden chain of redemption. Those whom God foreknew, that's not knowing what's going to happen in the future. Foreknowledge in the Bible is essentially equated with predestined and planned but with an emphasis on love. It's like when you're pregnant with a baby, even though you haven't met them you love them deeply. That's a rough illustration, but you get the idea.

Those whom God foreknew, he predestined. Those whom he predestined, he called. What is called? It's called into the faith, it's that irresistible grace where God raises us from the dead.

Those whom he called he justified. He declares us legally righteous because the righteousness of Christ has been imputed to our account and our sin has been placed on Jesus. And those whom he justified, he also glorified.

What's amazing about this is that the grammar suggest that glorification is already completed. Well, let me ask you: are you glorified? No. Then in what sense are we glorified? In the sense that just as certain as someone is predestined, they are certain to be glorified because it God bringing about the whole process.

Our glorification - which is the hope every Christian - is a sovereign work of God. We are eternally secure because we've been foreknown, predestined, called, justified by God and we will be glorified.

That confidence in glorification is eternal security. **Read 31-39**

If you're in Christ, you're not going anywhere. If God has justified you, no one - no one - will ever condemn you.

**Turn to John 10.** This is Jesus after he just said he's the Good Shepherd that lays down his life for the sheep. **Read 22-30**

Jesus says in 8 different ways that we are secure in him. We hear his voice, he knows us intimately, we will follow him, he gives to us eternal life, no one will snatch us out of his hand, we will never ever perish, the Father holds us, and Jesus and the Father secure our salvation together.

You guys, these are precious, precious truths in salvation. If you are a blood bought child of God you will always be a blood bought child of God.

A lot of people want to argue over these truths or think they're repulsive or offensive. They don't want to hear about Calvinism or whatever else. I agree that there's some baggage with that term, but these truths are short hand for all the glorious things God has accomplished for us in Christ.

There really is no more important question when it comes to salvation than: what has Jesus actually accomplished in saving people. Has Jesus just made salvation possible? Has he just given us some kind of access to the Father? Or has he actually accomplished what he set out to do: save his people from their sins? And keep us for eternal life.

I have to tell you there are times when I question whether or not I'm really in the faith. Am I just going through the motions? Am I just along for the ride?

You know what gives me hope? That there really is no where else for me to go. I've had very dark days in my walk with Jesus. Seasons where I've felt distant and lonely. Seasons of sinfulness and depression.

Do you know why I'm still here? It's not because of me or my strength. It's because he will hold me fast.

It's because Jesus has given me eternal life. I am in the hand of Jesus and because of Jesus I will never ever perish.

To him be the glory and honor and power and dominion now and forever. Amen. **Pray**