

“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction.” (Phil 3:18)

✠ **Lecture VI: Would a Believer Perish?** ✠

According to the heresy of ‘Eternal Security’, a believer would never perish. Generally speaking, Protestants believe that salvation is by **grace alone: Salvation is understood to be God’s free gift and is therefore guaranteed**. In what follows we shall examine this teaching in light of the Holy Scriptures:

1) The example of the cut off branch:

In the Holy Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul compares the Jews who did not believe to natural branches broken off their olive tree, and the Gentiles **who believed** to a wild olive tree grafted in instead of them: “If some branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree” (**Rom 11:17**). He then says to the Gentiles, “You will say then, branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off and **you stand by faith**” (**Rom 11:19-20**).

It is obvious that St. Paul is speaking to believers who are now grafted in the olive tree and are partakers of its root and fatness. Now consider what the apostle says to those believers: “Do not be haughty, but **fear**. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise, **you also will be cut off**” (**Rom 11:20-22**).

Why is there any reason for fear, if salvation was indeed guaranteed? The last words **‘you also will be cut off’** are a warning to those believers that they would perish unless they continue in God’s goodness. This example is similar to what the Lord said, “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away” (**Jn 15:1-2**), “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned” (**Jn 15:6**). Therefore, **a believer** who remains unfruitful will certainly perish.

2) The example of the apostates & heretics:

The heretics and apostates were **believers** who departed from the sound faith and perished. St. Paul said, “**Some will depart from the faith**, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons” (**1Tim 4:2**). Undoubtedly, those who gave heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons perished as mentioned in (**Gal 5:20**). However, the words **‘will depart from the faith’** show that **they were indeed believers at one point**.

In the Holy Book of Revelation, we read about the doctrine and deeds of the Nicolaitans, which our Lord hates (**Rev 2:6,15**), those Nicolaitans are the followers of Nicolas who was among the seven deacons mentioned in (**Acts 6:5**). Now, Nicolas, who departed from the sound faith, was not a regular believer for he met the criteria set by the apostles for deaconship, “seek out from among you seven men **of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom**, whom we may appoint over this business” (**Acts 6:3**) yet he deviated and perished.

Another example is Demas, St. Paul’s assistant, who was mentioned in his epistles, “Luke the beloved physician and **Demas greet you**” (**Col 4:14**), “Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, as do Mark, Aristarchus, **Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers**” (**Phil 23-24**). Demas, the preacher and the co-worker of St. Paul, was certainly a believer. But read what happened to him, “**Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world**” (**2Tim 4:10**). In other words, Demas became an enemy of God because “friendship with the world is enmity with God” (**Jam 4:4**).

In the parable of the sower, our Lord said, “the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, **receive the word with joy**; and these have no root, who **believe for a while** and in time of temptation fall away” (**Lk 8:13**). Certainly, those who fall away in time of temptation will have no salvation. Yet, our Lord did say that they “*received the word with joy*” and that they “*believed for a while*”. This *while* may extend for years! St. Paul said, “Let no one deceive you by any means, for that day will not come unless **the falling away comes first** and the man of sin is revealed” (**2Thess 2:3**). No doubt, in such massive falling away, many believers will perish (**Heb 6:4-6**). It was said about the beast from the sea, “It was granted to him to **make war with the saints and to overcome them**” (**Rev 13:7**). The word “*saints*” undoubtedly means that they were believers, but they lost everything because they didn’t overcome the beast, “He **who overcomes** shall inherit all things” (**Rev 21:7**).

St. Peter said, “For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them” (**2Pet 2:20-21**). Certainly, those who “*escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and savior Jesus Christ*” were believers; yet, they perished for they turned from the commandment.

3) Sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of truth:

In the Holy Epistle to the Hebrews, St. Paul writes to the “holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling” (**Heb 3:1**), “Partakers of Christ” (**Heb 3:14**), who “after being illuminated, endured a great struggle with sufferings” (**Heb 10:32**). He even tells them, “Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus” (**Heb 10:19**). But what does he say to them?

“If we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries” (**Heb 10:26-27**). It is a warning to whoever sins of those ‘*holy brethren*’ that he/she would perish. Therefore, a believer who sins and does not repent will perish. What else does he say?

“Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant **by which he was sanctified** a common thing and **insulted the Spirit of Grace?** (**Heb 10:29**). The words ‘*by which he was sanctified*’ prove that this person who perished was a believer and was sanctified by our Lord Jesus Christ’s blood. Moreover, the words ‘*insulted the Spirit of Grace*’ refute any claim about the so-called ‘Irresistible Grace’. → St. Stephen said to the Jews, “You always **resist** the Holy Spirit” (**Acts 7:51**) ←

The Holy Book of Acts recorded the story of Ananias and his wife Sapphira, the two believers, who sinned willfully and perished as a result (**Acts 5**). It is written, “great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things” (**Acts 5:11**). If the apostles taught that once you believe, your salvation is guaranteed no matter what you do, what is the reason then for this great fear?

4) The example of the disobedient people in the wilderness:

St. Paul continues his exhortation to the ‘*holy brethren and partakers of the heavenly calling*’ saying, “Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts **as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness**” (**Heb 3:7-8**). What happened on this day of rebellion? What does it signify here?

Those who rebelled against the Lord and provoked Him are the disobedient people in the wilderness of Sinai. The Lord said, “I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest” (**Heb 3:11**). These people, who perished and their corps fell in the wilderness, had not they been saved before? St. Paul answers, “For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses?” (**Heb 3:16**).

The Lord had delivered them from the bondage, divided the Red Sea for them and they crossed it as a symbol of baptism, “all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1Cor 10:2). However, in spite of all this, they perished in the wilderness and lost their salvation. The Apostle warns *‘the holy brethren’* saying, “Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience” (Heb 4:11), “Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, **let us fear** lest any of you (holy brethren!) seem to have come short of it” (Heb 4:1).

The example of the disobedient people in the wilderness brings to mind Lot’s wife who was saved from the destruction of Sodom, yet, perished outside the city. Therefore, our Lord said, **‘Remember Lot’s wife’** (Lk 17:32). Indeed, “all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1Cor 10:11-12).

5) The example of Judas Iscariot:

Judas was one of the twelve disciples chosen by the Lord (Mt 10:4), he was given authority over unclean spirits to cast them out and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease (Mt 10:1), it was given to him to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven (Mt 13:10-11), he left all and followed the Lord (Mt 19:27), he was a candidate to sit on a throne with our Lord in His glory and judge the tribes of Israel (Mt 19:28), moreover, he did not go back with the rest of the disciples who did not believe the words of our Lord Jesus Christ concerning the Eucharist (Jn 6:66).

This Judas, the chosen disciple, the believer, the wonderworker, who was remorseful when our Lord was delivered to death, who regretted and confessed his sin in front of the high priests (Mt 27:3-4), perished and the Holy Bible calls him ‘the son of perdition’ (Jn 17:12) not only because he betrayed the Lord but also because he lost hope and killed himself. We cannot say that Judas was not a believer because, on one occasion, the Lord called him a devil (Jn 6:70), for He called St. Peter Satan in (Mk 8:33) and also it is written that even demons believe and tremble (Jam 2:19).

6) The example of lack of good works:

St. James said, “What does it profit my brethren if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?” (Jam 2:14). This brother who has faith is certainly a believer, but this believer who lacks good works will perish *“can faith save him?”* “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin” (Jam 4:17) → “The wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23)!

7) The example of lack of love:

In (1Cor 13:1-3): The person who, speaks the tongues of men and angles, has the gift of prophecy and understands all mysteries, has *all the faith* to move mountains, feeds the poor, and gives his body to be burned, is without a doubt a believer. This extraordinary believer, if he doesn’t have love, is nothing and will perish. This should remind us of the angel of the Church of Ephesus (Rev 2:1-7); he was certainly a believer compared to a star in the right hand of Lord Jesus (Rev 1:20; 2:1), He labored, had patience, and could not bear evil (Rev 2:2), also he has preserved and has not become weary (Rev 2:3). Nevertheless, because he left his first love (Rev 2:4), even though he was still a believer, he needed to repent and do the first works (Rev 2:5), or else he would perish (Rev 2:5).

→ **Obviously the doctrine of ‘Eternal Security of The Believers’ is flawed and contradicts Holy Scriptures, for all the elect are indeed believers but not all the believers are elect!** ←

* This lecture is adapted from ‘*salvation in the Orthodox concept*’ by H.H. Pope Shenouda III.