



Conducted by
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"I have some good christian friends who believe they are saved by faith only. They contend that they are sealed by the Holy Spirit and cannot be lost, and they appeal to the scripture which is found in Ephesians 4:30. Would you please attempt to shed some light on this passage of scripture?"

IN order to answer this question it seems to me that we shall have to explore (1) what it means to be justified by faith, (2) whether or not a person can reach a state whereby they cannot be lost, and (3) what Paul is teaching when he refers to being sealed by the Holy Spirit. If we can find satisfactory answers in the Bible to these questions then I feel that we shall clear some confusion in the minds of those sincere souls who want to do the will of God.

Justification by Faith

It is clearly evident from the teaching of the Bible that man cannot be self-effecting regarding his being cleansed from sin. He has no standard of righteousness of his own that God will accept. It was necessary therefore, that God should reveal His own standard of righteousness and He did this by what He effected through Christ Jesus, as Paul put it, "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law..... the righteousness of God through faith in Christ Jesus for all who believe" Rom. 3:21,22. So Christ is the promise; Christ is the hope; and Christ is the way. As Paul asserts, "He (Christ) was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification Rom. 4:25.

So Christ is the way. It was He who said that they who would come to the Father must come by Him. The blood of Christ was shed FOR (with a view to) the remission of sins and had to be received by faith. The sacrifice of Christ had been promised for a long time but had remained a secret even to the ones who had prophesied concerning it, but Paul explained that the secret of the good news (the gospel) was now made known to all nations, for he teaches, "The mystery (the gospel) which was kept secret for long ages, is now made known to all nations,

according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about OBEDIENCE to the faith" Rom. 16:25,26. You see, belief in Christ must not be thought of as merely an act of the mind or heart reception only, but rather as a principle of action. Concerning faith, the writer to the Hebrews says, "By faith Abraham OBEYED; and he went outBy faith Noah PREPARED an ark By faith Abraham, when he was tested, OFFERED UP Isaac" Heb. 11. So we could go on. It was not, then, by faith alone, but by faith with its concurrent acts. Faith alone is dead, but faith, working by love, and resulting in repentance, confession, and immersion, brings one into the state in which God declares one justified. As Paul further teaches, "But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become OBEIENT from the heart to the STANDARD (or FORM) of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness" Rom. 6:17,18. When are we set free from sin? When we OBEY the gospel.

When do we OBEY the gospel? When we ACT on our faith.

What did Peter tell his hearers on the Day of Pentecost? He told them what to DO. What did they DO? They repented, confessed, and were baptised.

According to the teaching of God's Word we are not saved by faith ONLY. Our faith should make us say, "Lord, what will Thou have me DO". It is then that we shall OBEY God. What message did Jesus give to His disciples? "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth *and is baptised* shall be saved" Mark 16:16.

Sealing with Holy Spirit

It is in the Ephesian letter that Paul teaches about the sealing of believers by the gift of the Holy Spirit. In Eph. 1 Paul teaches that God has revealed His will in Christ Jesus, and that all things will be finally consummated in Jesus (Eph. 1:10). He then goes on, "In whom (Christ) we have obtained an inheritance" (v11), and then in verse 13, "In whom also ye trusted, AFTER that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also AFTER that ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise". It seems from this scripture that we trust in Christ after hearing the gospel, and that we are sealed IN HIM by the Holy Spirit of promise. The essence of the gospel was preached by Peter at Pentecost when his hearers asked what they should DO to be saved, "Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" Acts 2:38. The blessings are IN Christ, and therefore Paul teaches, "If any man be IN Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" 2Cor. 5:17. When Paul wrote his letter to Rome he said, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptised INTO Jesus Christ were baptised INTO His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" Rom. 6:3,4.

The metaphor of the sealing of believers by the Holy Spirit implies ownership, security, and destination. We are not our own, we have been bought with a price—the blood of Christ; we are secure IN HIM, and "if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection" Rom. 6:5. Therefore, Eph. 4:30 becomes clear. We would not want to grieve the Holy Spirit who dwells within us: He is the earnest until we come to the greater glory. So if you want to be sealed by the Holy Spirit, then come INTO Christ in the way He has taught.

Can we be lost?

God has never been loath to deal summarily with those who were unrepentant and went their own way. He did this with the nation of Israel, and when Jesus contrasted the faith of the centurion with the faith of the children of Israel, he said, "But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" Matt. 8:12. In John's gospel, Jesus refers to himself as the true vine, and then goes on, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away" John 15:1,3. There is implicit rejection in the words of Jesus as recorded in Luke 9:62 "And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God". In the early days of the Church, Ananias and Saphira were among the christian community but God dealt with them because of their sin against the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul himself, when surveying his Christian life had to say, "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" 1 Cor. 9:27.

Yes, we can be lost, even after accepting Christ. If this were not so then it would mean that we could go on sinning in the certain knowledgethatall would be well ultimately. I am quite sure that the Bible does not teach this, and that such a view would be inconsistent with all the available evidence. As Peter says, "We must strive to make our calling and election SURE" 2 Peter 1:10.

(All questions please to Alf Marsden, 66 Mitchell Street, Newtown, Wigan Lancs.)