

IS IT EASY TO BE SAVED AND HARD TO BE LOST?¹

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When people are asked this question, they almost always answer that it is very hard to be saved, but easy to be lost. They think that God has made the way to His heaven difficult and unpleasant. Going to heaven is a kind of endurance test, like the marathon; only the very strong and persevering can possibly finish it. Only a handful of special “saints” who have unusual qualifications will get to heaven at last. Of course, such an idea imagines God to be a hard Master, something like a university registrar who admits only students who have demonstrated unusually high achievements. As we well know, thousands of students are not admitted to universities because they lack diplomas from lower educational institutions. The common idea many have is that admittance to heaven is on somewhat the same basis. It’s very difficult to get in; if you are extremely fortunate and have the stamina to work hard at it, you might make it.

Such an idea also fosters pride. If you happen to be a “saint” in this meaning of the word, you are one of those lucky “achievers.” You feel yourself to be on a higher level than other people, because you are doing something that is so difficult that only a tiny handful of people will ever succeed at it.

The same idea considers the road to hell as being extremely “easy” to take. It’s like a long delicious downhill slide that is such smooth tarmac that your bicycle just coasts along with no effort on your part. You don’t have any peddling to do, just relax and let yourself go; “easy does it,” and before you know it, you land in hell.

This idea also involves the thought that God does not really care. If you want to go to hell, that’s OK with Him, He seems to be saying; my heaven is a special place intended only for a few very elite people who are willing to sweat and puff and pedal uphill all the way. If you don’t like pedaling hard,—goodbye.

What kind of “God” is this? If He really wanted people to be saved, wouldn’t He help them? If you wanted people to come to see you at your home, would you make the road leading there as difficult as possible?

Alienation from God or enmity against Him is the root of all sin. Do you now see how this false idea is closely related to sin itself. If you feel that God has made it as difficult as possible for you to be saved, how can you possibly love Him? If you are a student who has studied as diligently as you possibly can in order to go on to university, can you have mean thoughts about the registrar who rejects you and who dooms you to a life of menial work because he thinks you don’t have the “ability” to go to higher education?

Some Christians have tried to solve this problem by saying that God “predestined some to be saved and others to be lost,” and there is really nothing

¹ Romans 5:20, 21. “Redeemed,” “It Took a Miracle.”

you can do about it. For those lucky ones He has predestined to be saved, even the uphill road to heaven is as easy as going downhill., but for those who are predestined to be lost, no matter how hard they try they can never be saved. This understanding of “predestination” does not put God in a right light. Such a God would not be fair, and you know it. (The truth is that the Lord has predestined *all* to be saved. Those who will be lost will be lost because they “voted” against the Lord’s choice for them, and resisted and rejected Christ.)

Who says it is “easy” to be saved?

This may surprise you! Therefore it is important that you read His words, “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of you, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is *easy* and My burden is *light*” (Matt. 11:28-30).

There are the two key words—“easy” and “light.” Does He mean what He says? But this quotation makes up only one-half of our question “Easy to Be Saved.” The other half is also found in the words of Jesus, in the report Paul gives of his conversation with Christ when he was arrested on his way to Damascus, “At midday, . . . I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is *hard* for thee to kick against the pricks. . . .

I am Jesus whom thou persecutest” (Acts 26:13-15).

Saul was having a battle with his conscience while he was fighting against Christ. The Holy Spirit pressed into his soul the constant conviction of sin, because the road on which Saul was traveling would lead him directly to be lost. In order for him to have gone on in his mad campaign against Christ, he would have had to repress or beat back all the convictions and promptings of the Holy Spirit. This was “hard” on him and it could have led to severe physical and emotional disorders. The Lord loved him so much that He actually made it “hard” for Paul to destroy himself through continued impenitence.

When Saul became the apostle Paul, he never forgot the reason. Ever afterwards he taught that it is easy to be saved and hard to be lost. He had discovered the “good news.” For example, consider the following statement by Paul which is so often misunderstood: “This I say, then, Walk in the [Holy] Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth [strives, contends] against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Gal. 5:16, 17).

There are two ways to understand this: (1) The evil that the flesh prompts us to do is so strong that even the Holy Spirit cannot help us; we just “cannot do the [good things] that [we] would.” Or, (2) the good that the Holy Spirit constantly prompts us to do is such a powerful motivation that the flesh loses its control over us, and the believer in Christ

“cannot do the [evil] things” that the flesh by nature prompts him to do.

Explanation (1) is terribly bad news. As long as you have a sinful nature (the “flesh”) you are doomed to constant failure. This is what many really believe. Their experience seems to prove it, for they find the flesh is all-powerful. Love of sin, unlawful sex, pride, hatred, drugs, liquor, materialism, constantly beat back the Holy Spirit and they find themselves defeated time after time, so they say. Surely the Lord loves them and pities them. He knows how many times they have shed tears because of their constant defeat. There seems to be no way out!

On the other hand, explanation (2) is the best “good news” one can imagine. The Holy Spirit is actually working, “striving” against the sin that tries to overcome us. He is stronger than the flesh. Every moment of every day He continues to “strive” or contend against the promptings of our sinful nature. If only we will *consent* to cooperate with Him, those evil promptings are completely defeated. He spends as much time with each of us in a constant “striving” against sin as if we were the only person in the world. He never takes time off; “your Protector is always awake. . . He never dozes or sleeps” (Ps. 121:3, 4, G.N.B.). He is helping you 24 hours a day, seven days a week!

Now, which of these two explanations is the correct one. If you will read the passage again carefully, you will see that (2) is the only one that *can* be correct: “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall *not fulfill* the lust of the flesh.” The flesh will tempt you

or prompt you to evil; but if you chose to listen to the convictions of the Spirit (that’s what it means to “walk in the Spirit”), every such temptation to evil will be defeated! It is because Jesus knew about this mighty work of the Holy Spirit that He had said, “My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”

When a person is converted, he is brought under the power of the Holy Spirit. But this does not mean that he is no longer a human being with normal temptations. He doesn’t become like a stick or a stone, or a statue of a “saint” in some cathedral. The flesh still reveals its tendencies and desires. But the believer in Christ is no longer *subject* or *captive* to these promptings. Now he is *subject* to the Spirit; and the result is that he walks “at liberty.” These evil purposes that are suggested by the sinful nature are killed at the root. The believer becomes the king, no longer the slave. “They that are Christ’s have crucified the affections and lusts” (Gal. 5:24). Jesus was sent “in the likeness of sinful flesh” and met those temptations and “condemned sin in the flesh.” “I am crucified with Christ,” Paul says. Union with Christ means victory with Christ. “Because I live, ye shall live also,” Jesus said; you can overcome, He adds, “even as I also overcome” (John 14:19; Rev. 3:21).

Which is the stronger—grace or sin?

Again, most people will sadly tell you that sin is stronger. They may go to their church once a week, but sin comes knocking at their door; something inside them seems to compel them to admit the sin into their lifestyle. Some have become so discouraged that they have given up almost all

hope of ever finding freedom from the “dominion” of sin.

Listen to what the “good news” say: “Where sin increased, God’s grace increased much more. So then, just as sin ruled by means of death, so also God’s grace rules by means of righteousness, leading us to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 5:20, 21, G.N.B.). This agrees with what we have been finding. Grace is always stronger than sin. If this has seemed to us untrue, it is because we have not understood the pure goal of the New Testament. Note: “As sin ruled” so now “God’s grace rules.” When sin was ruling your life like a king, it beat back all the power of grace (like Saul of Tarsus “kicked against the pricks”). But when we yield the heart to God’s grace, then grace rules like a king and beats back all the power of sin. This is why Jesus said that “My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

There can be no such thing as salvation from sin unless grace is stronger than sin. When sin began, “there was war in heaven” and the loyal angels outnumbered the evil angels two to one and cast them out (Rev. 12:7-10). That is encouraging. But something vastly more encouraging happened: when the “war” was transferred to this earth in the Person of Christ, He defeated sin in its final stronghold—human nature. Sin is doomed. It will finally be eradicated from God’s universe. If that is so then gaining the victory over sin now is the privilege of every child of God.

Why it is easy to be saved.

It may be easier for us to grasp such a great idea if we see *why* it is true. Just as grace is stronger than sin so the Holy Spirit’s striving is stronger than the strivings of sin, so the new birth is stronger than the old birth. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God” (2 Cor. 5:17, 18). There is a new power working in the believer that is as much stronger than the power of inherited tendencies of evil, as our heavenly Father is greater than any earthly father.

This is not mere magic. There is a reason for it. In the same passage Paul says, “The love of Christ constraineth us” (vs. 14). Constrain is the very opposite of restrain. It means to propel, to push forward.

To illustrate, try to imagine that you are a poor ignorant slave of long ago who has been resurrected from an even more remote era before the age of automobiles. The “master” has a big heavy SUV at the bottom of a hill, and he commands you, “Take my chariot up to the top of the hill!” So you begin by doing the best you know how—pushing. After the utmost straining of every muscle, you manage to move it a few inches and then put a rock under the wheel to hold what you have gained. Panting and sweating in the hot sun, you wonder how you will ever get it to the top of the hill. (Many people think that getting to heaven is every bit that difficult!)

Then suppose someone comes and tells you some “good news.” “Get inside the automobile, and

turn a little key you see there.” You do, and then you hear a humming sound, under the hood.

“Now move that shift there into the “D” position, which means “drive.” You obey.

Then he adds, “Do you see that accelerator pedal on the flood? *Step on it!*”

What happens? The heavy SUV zooms up to the top of the hill! “The love of Christ constraineth us” like a powerful engine.

How does that love work?

Paul goes on to explain what he means: “Because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again” (vss. 14, 15).

Let’s see what this says:

If One (Christ) had not died for us, we would all finally be dead.

Whether we believe or disbelieve, makes no difference; we owe all we have to His sacrifice. He died for all. A well known author has said, “To the death of Christ we owe even this earthly life. The bread we eat is the purchase of His broken body. The water we drink is bought by His spilled blood. Never one, saint or sinner, eats his daily food, but he is nourished by the body and the blood of Christ. The cross of Calvary is stamped on every loaf of bread. It is reflected in every water spring.”²

If we will appreciate that He died for “all,” understanding what that means, then the great

change comes in our hearts. “Henceforth,” Paul says, we shall find it impossible to go on living for ourselves. The “constraint” goes to work right away, and “henceforth” we “live unto Him which died for . . . [us], and rose again.” It becomes impossible not to serve the Lord enthusiastically once we appreciate the real meaning of the cross of Christ.

This idea that it is easy to be saved and hard to be lost fills Paul’s teachings. For example: “Despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” (Rom. 2:4).

God takes the initiative in saving us. He is not standing back, with His divine arms folded in unconcern while we wallow in our lost condition. He is not saying, “Well, I made the sacrifice for you two thousand years ago; I did my part—now it’s up to you. You must take the initiative. If you want to come, come, and if it seems hard to you, leave it—you just don’t have the ability to be saved!” Many people think of God that way, but it is wrong. They think that God does not really need them in heaven, and they feel He doesn’t want them either. But what Paul is telling us here is that God is taking the initiative for our salvation; He is *leading* us to *repentance*. As surely as God is good, He is leading every one to repentance. The trouble is, we *resist* Him! Often we hinder what He is seeking to do for us. *Let* Him lead us.

This sounds revolutionary to some who say, “It seems that if the sinner is going to be saved, *he* must take the initiative and really work hard at it. He must *do* something in order to be saved!” But Paul

² Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 660.

says that God is doing something! And if the sinner will only stop resisting what God is already doing, God will be successful in saving him.

When you begin to see the secret of the Lord's active, seeking love, you find this "good news" leaping at you continually from the pages of the Bible. Note these beautiful thoughts from Paul's Letter to the Galatians:

"Before faith came we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our school-master to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. . .

"Now I say, that the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant [slave], though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appoint of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world; but when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. 3:23-25; 4:1-6).

What is Paul saying? Let us understand his main points:

The sense of guilt that the law imposes on us is a merciful thing, for it is meant "to bring us unto Christ."

"Faith is come" the moment we believe. When we were still living in unbelief, we were "shut up" as in a

prison. We find our freedom in being "justified by faith."

God counts all people as "heirs" even though they do not as yet have faith. "Before faith came" we were all wanderers from God, kept under the law, guarded and abused by a severe master, "shut up" until we might be led to receive salvation. God counts even the ungodly as His children, like a little barefoot boy who is to be the heir of the great estate, but who now is bossed around by the slaves on the estate. Without exception, all of us are "shut up" "under the law" until we reach that moment in life when faith comes. This imprisonment is part of the Lord's drawing process, an evidence of His persistent and active love for us.

While it is easy for us to draw a circle that shuts other people out, God draws a circle that shuts us in. He loves the whole world. (Don't forget of course that it is possible to *resist* His love like Judas did, and be lost).

The proof that God's love has gotten through to our hearts is that we think of Him and call upon Him as our "Father."

"Abba" is the Hebrew word for father, representing the simple heart-cry of a child who does not yet know how to talk.

Why it is hard to be lost

It is hard to be lost because the Lord loves you so much that He tries every way possible to hinder you in the path that leads to destruction. "It is hard . . . to kick against the pricks." The Holy Spirit constantly convicts of sin. Solomon personifies the Holy Spirit as "Wisdom" and says:

“Listen, Wisdom is calling out. . .

On the hilltops near the road and at the crossroads she stands.

At the entrance to the city, beside the gates, she calls:

‘I appeal to you, mankind; I call to everyone on earth. . .

Choose my instruction instead of silver; choose the knowledge rather than the finest gold. . .

The man who listens to me will be happy. . . .

The man who finds me finds life, and the Lord will be pleased with him.

The man who does not find me hurts himself, and anyone who hates me loves death” (Prov. 8:1-4, 10, 34-26, G.N.B.)

You and I have heard that “voice” over and over again. One does not coast downhill into hell, we *pedal* and we pedal *hard* against a strong headwind. We have to keep on *resisting* that voice of love. Sad to say, it is possible to resist the Holy Spirit and be lost. God believes in freedom, and He will force no one to be saved. But He will make it “hard” for us to be lost *if* we understand the good news of the gospel.

Let me quote again from the book by Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling*: “Infinite love has cast up a pathway upon which the ransomed of the Lord may pass from earth to heaven. That path is the Son of God. Angel guides are sent to direct our erring feet. Heaven’s glorious ladder is let down in every man’s path, barring his way to vice and folly. He must

trample upon a crucified Redeemer [before] he can pass onward to a life of sin.”³

Do we not have to fight hard?

Yes, we do have a battle to fight. We must resist temptation, and the fight is constant, unrelenting. How then can it be “easy” to be saved?

What we need to understand is the nature of that “fight.” Paul explains it, “Thou, O man of God, flee these [evil] things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. *Fight the good fight of faith*, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called” (1 Timothy 6:11, 12).

What are we to do? “Flee” from evil things. If a bloodthirsty lion were seeking to kill you, would you think it “hard” to run away from him? You would be glad to run!

“Lay hold on eternal life,” remembering that the Lord has predestined you to be saved. It is *His* will that you be saved, for He desires “that all men be saved.” Is it hard to lay hold on something so wonderful? *Believe* the “good news,” for the battle is “of faith.” That’s right—the battle is *believing*. “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4). We must continually “strive” and “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). But we must also breathe “without ceasing” if we would live. Is that “hard”? And we must also eat, probably several times a day, as long as we live. Is that “hard”?

The important point is that our own individual effort is useless apart from the grace of Christ. We must

³ *Our High Calling*, p. 11.

not forget His cross. That is what makes our “yoke . . . easy.”

Was Christ’s burden on the cross light and easy? No, it was terribly heavy and hard! He actually sweat drops of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane, and as He hung on the cross, His great heart of love was ruptured in death. Was He telling us a lie when He said, “My burden is light?”

The burden He speaks of in our text (Matthew 11:30) is His burden that *we* carry. The “faith that worketh by love” makes it light for us to carry, for *we appreciate how heavy it was to Him*.

The only hard thing in becoming a true Christian is the choice to surrender self to be crucified with Christ. But we are never called upon to be crucified alone—only *with Him*.

Thank God, it is a million times easier for us to be crucified with Christ, than it was for Him to be crucified alone for us! “Behold the Lamb of God,” and it does become “easy.”

And if even this still seems hard, don’t ever forget that it remains *much* harder to go on fighting against such love like that and beating off the persistent ministry of the Holy Spirit, in order to be lost.