must be received as a free gift of God's grace, *or we cannot have it*.

3. Salvation cannot be purchased *even in part* by us, because it requires payment of the penalty for sin—a payment we can't make. If one were to receive a speeding ticket, it wouldn't help to say to the judge, "I've driven many times within the 55 mph limit. Surely my many good deeds will make up for the one bad deed." Nor would it do to say, "If you let me off this time, I promise never to break the law again." The judge would reply, "To never break the law again is only to do what the law demands. You get no extra credit for that. The penalty for breaking the law is a separate matter and must be paid." Thus Paul writes,"...by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight..." (Rom 3:20).

4. If salvation from the penalty of breaking God's laws cannot be earned by good deeds, then it *cannot be lost by bad deeds*. Our works play no part in either *earning* or *keeping* salvation. If it could, then those who reach heaven could boast that while Christ saved them they, by their good lives, *kept* their salvation. Thus God would be robbed of having *all* the glory in eternity.

5. Salvation can be given to us as a free gift only if the penalty has been fully paid. We have violated infinite Justice, requiring an infinite penalty. We are finite beings and could not pay it: we would be separated from God for eternity. God is infinite and could pay an infinite penalty, but it wouldn't be just because He is not a member of our race. Therefore God, in love and grace, through the virgin birth, became a man so that He could pay the debt of sin for the entire human race!

It is finished!

In the Greek, Christ's cry from the cross, "It is finished!" is an accounting term, meaning that the debt had been paid in full. Justice had been satisfied by full payment of its penalty, and thus God could "be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom 3:26). On that basis, God offers pardon and eternal life as a free gift. He could not force it upon anyone or it would not be a gift. Nor would it be just to pardon a person who rejects the righteous basis for pardon and offers a hopelessly inadequate payment instead—or offers his works even as "partial payment."

Salvation is the full pardon by grace from the penalty of all sin, past, present or future; eternal life is the bonus thrown in. Denying this cardinal truth, all cultists, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, reject salvation by grace and insist that it must be earned by one's good works. They accuse evangelicals of teaching that all we need to do is to say we believe in Christ and then we can live as we please, in the grossest of sins, yet be sure of heaven. *Evangelicals don't teach that at all*, yet a similar complaint is made by those who believe in "falling away." They say that "once saved, always saved" encourages one to live in sin because if we know we cannot be lost we have no incentive for living a holy life. On the contrary, love for the One who saved us is the greatest and only acceptable motive for living a holy life; and surely the greater the salvation one has received, the more love and gratitude there will be. So to know one is secure for eternity gives a higher motive for living a good life than the fear of losing one's salvation if one sins!

While those who believe in "falling from grace" are clear that good works cannot *earn* salvation, they teach that salvation is *kept* by good works. Thus one gets *saved by grace*, but thereafter salvation can be *lost by works*. To teach that good works *keep* salvation is almost the same error as to say that good works *earn* salvation. It denies grace to say that once I have been *saved by grace* I must thereafter keep myself *saved by works*.

Such teaching, says Hebrews 6:4-9, rather than glorifying Christ, once again holds Him up to shame and ridicule before the world once again for two reasons: *if we could lose our salvation*, then (1) Christ would have to be crucified again to save us again; and (2) He would be ridiculed for dying to *purchase* a salvation but not making adequate provision to *preserve* it—for giving a priceless gift to those who would inevitably lose it. If Christ's dying in our place for our sins and rising again was not sufficient to *keep* us saved, then He has foolishly wasted His time. If we could not live a good enough life to *earn* salvation, it is certain we cannot live a good enough life to *keep* it! To make the salvation he procured ultimately dependent upon our works would be the utmost folly.

"Falling away" doctrine makes us worse off after we are saved than before. At least before conversion we can get saved. But after we are saved and have lost our salvation (if we could), we can't get saved again, but are lost forever. Hebrews 6:4-6 declares, "If [not *when*] they shall fall away...it is impossible (v 4)...to renew them again unto repentance." That "falling away" is hypothetical is clear (v 9): "But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak." So "falling away" does not "accompany salvation." The writer is showing us that *if we could lose our salvation, we could never get it back without Christ dying again upon the cross*. Such thinking is folly! He would have to die an infinite number of times (i.e., every time every once-saved person sinned, was lost, and wanted to be "saved again"). Thus, those who reject "once saved, always saved," can only replace it with, "once lost, always lost!"

God's Assurance

John assures us, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know [present knowledge] that ye have [present possession] eternal life..." (1 Jn 5:13). To call it *eternal life* would be a mockery if the person who had it could lose it and suffer *eternal death*. On the contrary, eternal life is linked with the promise that one *cannot perish*—a clear assurance of "eternal security" or "once saved, always saved." John 3:16 promises those who believe in Jesus Christ that they "*should not perish*, but have everlasting life." John 5:24 again says, "hath everlasting life, and *shall not come into condemnation*...." One could not ask for clearer or greater assurance than the words of Jesus: "I give unto them [my sheep] eternal life; and they shall *never perish*" (Jn 10:28). If, having received eternal life, we could lose it and perish, it would make Christ a liar.

If sin causes the loss of salvation, what kind or amount of sin does it take? There is no verse in the Bible that tells us. We are told that if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us *from all unrighteousness*—so apparently any sin can be forgiven. Even those who teach falling away rarely if ever say they got "saved again." Rather, they confessed their sin and were forgiven. Hebrews 12:3-11 tells us that every Christian sins, and that instead of causing a loss of salvation, sin brings God's chastening upon us as His children. If when we sinned we ceased to be God's children, He would have no one to chastise—yet he "scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Indeed, chastening is a sign *that we are God's children,* not that we *have lost our salvation*: "if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons."

Not by works

Some teach that one must be baptized to be saved; others that one must "speak in tongues." Both are forms of

salvation by works. Some people lack assurance of salvation because they haven't "spoken in tongues," others are confident they are saved because they think they have. Both are like those who say, "Lord, Lord, have we not...in thy name done many wonderful works?" (Mt 7:21-23). They are relying on their works to prove they are saved, instead of upon God's grace. Nor does Jesus say, "You were once saved but lost your salvation." He says, "I *never* knew you."

Here is an important distinction. Those who believe in "falling away" would say of a professing Christian who has denied the faith and is living in unrepentant sin that he has "fallen from grace" and has "lost his salvation." In contrast, those who believe in "eternal security," while no more tolerant of such conduct, would say of the same person that probably Christ "never knew him"—he was never a Christian. We must give the comfort and assurance of Scripture to those who are saved; but at the same time we must not give false and unbiblical comfort to those who merely *say* they are saved but deny with their lives what they profess with their lips.

Are we not then saved by our works? Indeed not! In 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 every Christian's works are tried by fire at the "judgment seat of Christ" before which "we must all appear" (2 Cor 5:10). Good works bring rewards; a lack of them does not cause loss of salvation. The person who hasn't even one good work (*all* of his works are burned up) is still "saved; yet so as by fire" (1 Cor 3:15). We would not think such a person was saved at all. Yet one who has truly received the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior, but who has no good works as evidence and may seem outwardly not to be a Christian, is "saved as by fire" and shall never perish *in spite of his lack of works*.

Do we then, on the basis of "once saved, always saved," encourage Christians to "sin that grace may abound?" With Paul we say, "God forbid!" We offer no comfort or assurance to those living in sin. We don't say, you're okay because you once made a "decision for Christ." Instead, we warn, "If you are not willing right now to live fully for Christ as Lord of your life, how can you say that you were really sincere when you supposedly committed yourself to Him at some time in the past?" And to all we declare with Paul, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves" (2 Cor 13:5).

Our confidence for eternity rests in His unchanging love and grace and the sufficiency of God's provision in Christ—not in our worth or performance. Only when this is clear do we have real peace with God. Only then can we truly love Him and live for Him out of gratitude for the eternal life He has given to us as a free gift of His grace—a gift He will not take back and which He makes certain can never be lost!

—Dave Hunt
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The position taken herein is not based upon either Calvinism or Arminianism, with neither of which Dave Hunt identifies. For further discussion see his book, *Whatever Happened to Heaven?* (Harvest House, 1988).

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Once Saved, Always Saved?

The question of the "eternal security of the believer" has been the cause of much controversy in the church for centuries—and still creates confusion and distress for many Christians. It is too much to expect to dispel this problem completely for everyone in a brief tract, but perhaps we can at least help in that direction.

Those who believe in "falling away" accuse those who believe in "eternal security" of promoting "cheap grace." While it may be a convenient expression, the latter phrase is of course unbiblical. To call it "cheap" is really a denial of grace, since it implies that too small a price has been paid. Grace, however, must be absolutely free and without any price at all *on man's part*; while *on God's part* the price He paid was infinite. Thus for man to think that his works can play any part in *either earning or keeping* his salvation is what cheapens grace, devaluing this infinite gift to the level of human effort.

To speak of "falling from grace" involves the same error. Since our works had nothing to do with meriting grace in the first place, there is nothing we could do that would cause us no longer to merit it and thus "fall" from it. Works determine reward or punishment—not one's salvation, which comes by God's grace. The crux of the problem is a confusion about grace and works.

Understanding Grace

1. We must be absolutely clear that these two can never mix. Paul declares, "...if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work" (Rom 11:6). Salvation cannot be partly by works and partly by grace.

2. We must be absolutely certain that *works have nothing to do with salvation*. Period. The Bible clearly states, "For by grace are ye saved...*not of works*" (Eph 2:8-10). True to such scriptures, evangelicals firmly declare that *we cannot earn or merit salvation in any way*. Eternal life