**Dr. Charles F. Stanley and sanctification.**

In our previous weblog article called ['How secure is Dr. Charles F. Stanley's eternal security?'](http://www.keesdegraaf.com/index.php/209/how-secure-is-dr-charles-f-stanleys-eternal-security) we stated that *‘over and over again, Dr. Stanley has emphasized that people are saved* ***only*** *by an act of divine grace which does not depend at all on any deeds of the individual believer and there is nothing  a person can do to influence his or her salvation. Dr. Stanley even takes this to the point that once a person is saved there is nothing the believer can do to* **undo** *his or her salvation, even if this seems to happen at the expense of the sanctification of the believer’*.
We feel that this point needs further clarification. As said before, I admire Dr. Stanley’s wisdom a lot and I really enjoy listening and watching his weekly message on the In Touch Ministry’s website. It is true, in his messages Dr. Stanley talks a lot about the necessity of sanctification in the life of the individual believer. Yet I have the feeling that Dr. Stanley’s knife of sanctification by far does *no*t cut deep enough from a biblical point of view. To outline this, here is a quote from Dr. Stanley’s book *‘Eternal Security: Can you Be Sure?*’. In a chapter called "For Those Who Stop Believing", Dr. Stanley says: "*The Bible clearly teaches that God's love for His people is of such magnitude that even those who walk away from the faith have not the slightest chance of slipping from His hand”* (p. 74). Earlier in the book Dr. Stanley writes: *"Even if a believer for all practical purposes becomes an unbeliever, his salvation is not in jeopardy… believers who lose or abandon their faith will retain their salvation”*. When I read this I really had to rub my eyes? Is this statement of Dr. Stanley really backed up by the Scriptures? So if this were true, you may even renounce your faith and denounce the Lord and still you will be saved because obviously at one time in your life you confessed your faith in the Lord? But then I wonder what the true value is of such a confession, if it is not followed by a life of sanctification? If I understand Dr. Stanley well, then the justification of the believer – through the blood of Christ – is not always necessarily followed by the sanctification of the believer.
Now the concept of ‘sanctification’ has two important aspects. The first one is ‘separation’. The word ‘sanctification’ is derived from the Greek word ‘hagios’ which means ‘holiness’. Once you are **truly** saved you receive an entirely new position, you become ‘separated’ from all evil and tied to Christ and you are His property. The second aspect of sanctification is ‘devotion’. You devote your life to Christ. Once you are **truly** saved, The Holy Spirit enters into your life and turns you into a devotee of Christ. The Holy Spirit brings ‘holiness’ into your life but the Holy Spirit does so in a progressive way. The Holy Spirit starts up a process of inward renewal, a process which brings you both pain and tremendous joy. Pain because more and more you start to realize what is wrong with you, more and more you become aware of the fact that you are a sinner and that you need daily cleansing from your sins. But at the same time, you also start to feel more and more a tremendous and abundant joy, more and more you will find great comfort in the forgiving arms of Jesus Christ and within you, you will more and more find the fruits of an awakening new life and this will fulfil you with great joy. This is not a static thing but a lifelong process, just like a branch of a vine is continuously pruned by the vinedresser so that it may produce abundance of fruit (John 15: 2). But once thing is certain: this will only happen to those who abide **in** (the vine) Christ and ***only*** those (John 15:4) can and **will** bear fruit.
However, what will happen to the believer who does not abide in Christ, what will happen to the ‘believer’ who, like Dr. Stanley says,‘ *for all practical purposes becomes an unbeliever’?.*John 15:6 makes it very clear what will happen to such a ‘believer’: ‘*If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered into the fire and burned’.* Is the salvation of such a ‘believer’ **not** in jeopardy like Dr. Stanley suggests?
Is it really true that branches which are cut off from the vine Christ will retain their salvation, just like Dr. Stanley says: “*believers who lose or abandon their faith will retain their salvation”?*.
It often happens that during mass meetings where the Gospel is preached to large crowds, in the heat of the moment, numerous people step forward, confess their sins, and publicly accept Jesus as their Saviour. But will it last? Thank God: Sometimes it lasts! But unfortunately, often enough it does not last. This is made clear by Jesus in the parable of the sower (Matthew 13-1:23). The gospel, the word that is sown in the heart of many people is snatched away by the devil (verse 19). Somebody receives the word with great joy. However verse 21 says: ‘*yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation and persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.* Somebody else (verse 22) *‘hears the word , but the cares of the world and the delight in riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful’.* Verse 23 says that only the seed that was sown on good soil, ‘*he who hears the word and understands it, he indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty’.* Only such a believer is ***truly*** saved! And only to such a believer the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints applies. God will never give up such a believer. Such a believer may fall into sin, like David and Peter once fell into sin, but the grace of God will sooner or later always be there to make him or her repent and restore him or her into His grace.
Dr Stanley has said: *"Even if a believer for all practical purposes becomes an unbeliever, his salvation is not in jeopardy… believers who lose or abandon their faith will retain their salvation”*. Does Dr. Stanley give any scriptural back up for his extreme stance on this issue?
Yes he does. Dr. Stanley refers to 1 Corinthians 3:14 and 15 where it says:’*If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward.* *If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire’.* So seen from Dr. Stanley’s point of view, the only thing a Christian may lose is his reward but not his salvation. Even if a Christian produces nothing but rubbish and worthless things on the foundation (Christ) – which is the same as becoming an unbeliever for all practical purposes - yet he cannot lose his salvation but only his reward. So if I understand Dt Stanley correctly, on the new earth to come there will be children of God with a reward and children of God who have suffered a loss and have no reward at all. However we don’t think that this is what 1 Corinthians 3 tries to make clear to us. When we read the pericope 1 Corinthians 3:10-17 as a whole, we note the following: 1. Paul does not deal here with the individual believer but speaks here of his work as an apostle ( a skilled master) in comparison with other evangelists (verse 10). 2. But more importantly: Verse 11 makes it clear that all builders mentioned here, build on the same foundation and this foundation is Jesus Christ. Not all builders build in the same way and some building material cannot stand the test of fire. However, all the builders have in common that they build on the foundation Jesus Christ. They all have the intention to build on the foundation of Jesus Christ. God is merciful and will cleanse their imperfect work on the Latter Day - he will cleanse it by fire – and in this way they will be saved. But what happens to believers who once confessed their faith in Jesus Christ but have abandoned their faith and denounced the Lord? Well, for all practical purposes, they do **not** build on the foundation Jesus Christ but they sow to their own flesh and they will reap corruption (Galatians 6:8). The question in 1 Corinthians 3 is: do you as an apostle or evangelist build on the foundation Jesus Christ? If you do you will be saved, no matter how imperfect your work may have been. 3. This pericope ends with a serious warning: *‘if anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him’,*(I Corinthians 3:17). So if you are a builder, take care!. As a builder, an apostle or evangelist you bear a great responsibility. When you destroy the work of God, His temple, God will destroy you and then you have much more to lose than just your reward.
1 John 3:7 still stands: *‘Little children, let no one deceive you. He who does right is righteous, as He is righteous’.* And what about Matthew 7: 21: *‘Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven’.* You cannot at one time put your trust in Jesus and then become an unbeliever ’for all practical purposes’ and still be saved. Such a confession must have practical consequences, otherwise such a confession does not have any value. Therefore, from a biblical point of view “Once saved always saved” should be understood as “Once **truly** saved, always saved”.