

Blotting Out

Q –

Can you please explain to me why the bible says that God can blot out names from the book of life, yet Calvinism teaches that your names were written before the foundation of the world and once in there you are saved?

Jim –

This is a common question, so I'm grateful for the opportunity to address it.

You stated that "Calvinism teaches your names were written before the foundation of the world and once in there you are saved." While it's true that Calvinism affirms that concept, it is not the result of creativity on our part. We are simply teaching what the Bible actually says.

So, let's start at the start and establish a textual and theological basis for our understanding.

Theological Considerations

The Bible does indeed say that certain names were written in the Lamb's book of life before the foundation of the world:

"All who dwell on the earth will worship him [the beast], everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain." (Rev. 13:8)

"The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come." (Rev. 17:8)

If we get nothing else from those two verses, we get the plain statement that those who worship the beast are lacking one essential characteristic -- their names were not written in the Lamb's book of life "from the foundation of the world." So, that's not a uniquely Calvinistic teaching. We are simply being biblically consistent.

Now, this really should not be all that surprising. God is eternal and all-powerful. Therefore, He can and does decree what will happen in His kingdom. And a great many things were determined before "the foundation of the world."

In Matthew 13:35, we read that Jesus uttered things that were kept hidden since the foundation of the world. Matthew 25:34 says that the kingdom of the saints was prepared for them since the foundation of the world. And, in His high-priestly prayer, Jesus described the glory He had with God as being evidence of how He was loved before the world was formed –

"Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world." (John 17:24)

Because God loved Christ eternally, those who are elected to eternal life are similarly chosen "in Christ" so that the Father's eternal love extends to them as well. Consequently, Paul would write –

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as *He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world*, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." (Eph. 1:3-6 Italics added)

So, the Biblical view is that God has loved Christ since all eternity. God chose some people and placed them "in Christ" before the foundation of the world. He wrote the names of those He had chosen in the Lamb's book of life. And He did that writing before the foundation of the world. This is simply consistent exposition of what the Bible clearly states and should not be as controversial or difficult to comprehend as some people make it.

The Books

There are several books mentioned in the Bible and they are not all synonymous with the Lamb's book of life. For instance:

"And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." (Rev. 20:12-15)

This passage mentions several books. One of them was the book of life. The other books appear to be a record of the works of evil men, who were judged

according to those deeds. By contrast, all those who were judged and thrown into the lake of fire did not have their names in the book of life. So, there's a clear contrast struck in this passage. Either your name is written in the Lamb's book of life or you will be judged according to your deeds.

The question then is: Can a name be written in the Lamb's book of life since before the foundation of the world and then later be erased (or blotted out) so that the person God chose to eternally love, and who was placed "in Christ," will ultimately fall under His judgment and condemnation? What would it take to make God change His eternal decree, withhold His eternal love, and take someone away from His Son after giving them to Him? Could someone do something so bad that it would require God to change His original intention and turn that person from grace to wrath? And, if God has infinite knowledge of the future, how could He have missed the fact that one of His chosen people was going to rebel so badly that He would have no option but to condemn them and take them out of the book of life?

The implications of God blotting someone out of the Lamb's book of life are enormous. It would imply, foremost, that God made a mistake when He first wrote the name and the God who is defined biblically as being immutable would have to change His mind and admit to the error. Heavy stuff.

Examining the Evidence

Here's a simple reality. Nowhere in the Bible -- not once, not anywhere -- do we read of God actually erasing a name from the Lamb's book of life. A clear, unambiguous example of God wiping His elect out of His eternal decree does not exist.

So, where do people get the idea that "the bible says that God can blot out names from the book of life"? It comes from inference. And that's why we need to dig into the details and clear up the misconceptions.

The key text that people point to when discussing God's ability to blot names out of the Lamb's book of life is Revelation 3:4-5.

"But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. (Rev. 3:4-5)

We'll discuss this text in detail momentarily, but we need to add some historic perspective to the discussion. The author of the Revelation of Jesus Christ was the Apostle John. His primary ministry was not to the Gentile church. His target audience was Israelite believers. The Apostle Paul explained:

“But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) -- well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me. But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised (for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. (Gal. 2:6-9)

Consequently, the book of Revelation is loaded with Old Testament references, symbols, allusions, and parallels. If we miss these vital connections we will not fully understand John’s meaning or context. For example, I have always contended that you cannot unlock the Revelation if you do not study the book of Daniel, which also describes a book of names; and those found in the book inherit everlasting life.

“Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.” (Dan. 12:1-2)

Not to bog down in eschatological details, but this passage from Daniel tells us that Michael, the archangel, stands guard over the sons of Daniel’s people – the children of Israel. When Michael arises to protect those people, the time of greatest distress – the Day of the Lord, or the Great Tribulation – will occur. When it does, Daniel’s people, “everyone who is found written in the book,” will be rescued. At the same time, dead saints of Israel will resurrect to receive either everlasting life or judgment. These themes resonate throughout the book of Revelation. But originally the concept of the book of life referred specifically to righteous members of national Israel.

The Old Testament is also replete with genealogies and records listing the Israelites by family and tribe (see Numbers 1:18ff, 3:43, 26:54; 1 Chron. 5:1ff, etc). In Deuteronomy 25:6 Moses explained,

“The first son [that a widow] bears shall carry on the name of the dead [man] so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.”

The Old Testament understanding of the book of life was that it listed faithful Israelites, God's chosen people (whom David will call “the righteous”). This book

essentially documented their citizenship in the commonwealth of Israel and ensured their inheritance – which was primarily land ownership resulting from God’s promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. To be “blotted out” in this context meant to lose your heritage among the chosen nation.

So, as an example, when David prayed of his enemies: “*May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous*” (Psalm 69:28), he was petitioning God to remove them from the Earth and not include them in the promises and inheritance that belonged to righteous Israel.

Psalm 69:28 is often cited to prove everything from “Righteous people can become unrighteous and then God blots them out of His book” to “The original book of life contained the names of everyone who ever lived, but those who prove themselves to be unrighteousness are removed, leaving only the righteous to be saved.” Both of those statements were made by Christian men attempting to grapple with this text.

Context helps. When David penned these words, he did not have the church in mind. In fact, the mystery of the church would not be revealed for another 1,000 years. David was writing about national Israel in Psalm 69 and his comments must be understood in that framework.

So when considering if, or how, a name can be erased from the book of life, it is helpful to understand the Old Testament pattern. Generally, to “blot out a name” is another way of stating that someone will have no remnant or heritage left on Earth. An example of this is found in Psalm 9, which says of God:

“You have rebuked the nations and destroyed the wicked; you have blotted out their name for ever and ever. Endless ruin has overtaken the enemy, you have uprooted their cities; even the memory of them has perished.” (Ps. 9:5-6)

One last point that requires additional emphasis: the language of Scripture forces us to conclude that the various books referred to in the Old Testament and the Lamb’s book of life mentioned in Revelation are different records compiled for different purposes. While the OT books refer to existence on Earth within the framework of national Israel, the Lamb’s book of life includes people from every kindred, tribe, tongue and nation. While it appears people can be blotted out of the books mentioned in the Old Testament, names written in the Lamb’s book of life are placed there permanently. Those distinctions are vital. If we mix-and-match references to various books we are bound to become confused.

An Old Testament Survey

As we continue our overview of the phrase “blot out” in the Old Testament, with each verse we examine we need to ask this question: Does this verse or the

surrounding passage actually say that God has removed, or intends to remove, someone from the Lamb's book of life?

I'm going to be exacting, specific, and perhaps a bit redundant with that question because the only way we can conclude categorically that God does indeed remove names from the Lamb's book of life is if we can find that language somewhere in the Bible. If that language is missing, then we can rest in the assurance that every name written in the Lamb's book of life is everlastingly secure.

The first place where the phrase "blot out" appears in the Bible is in Genesis 6, as God is intending to flood the world and start over with Noah.

The LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them." (Gen. 6:7)

That verse sets the tone for what it means when God says He will "blot out" something. He is going to destroy, erase, or take it out of its original condition. In this case, all mankind and the animal kingdom would be wiped off "the face of the land." In the next chapter, God continued:

"For after seven more days, I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights; and I will blot out from the face of the land every living thing that I have made." (Gen. 7:4)

The meaning is clear. The Hebrew word "*machah*" (translated "blot out" in the NASB and "destroy" in the KJV) has to do with wiping out or erasing. In this instance, God intends to wipe life off the Earth.

Next, in Exodus 17, God tells Moses:

"Write this in a book as a memorial and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." (Exo. 17:14)

This verse explains the purpose of writing something in a book. It was done in order to establish the memory of an event or rule. That is why God gave Israel "the book of the Law." Writing something down makes it more permanent.

In this passage God is promising to blot out the memory of Amalek for his rebellion. And, to this day, there is no living remnant of this people-group. In fact, they were so completely annihilated that critical historians claim this must be a fictional story.

Okay, those passages are obvious on their face. They are not referring to the Lamb's book of life. Now let's turn our attention Exodus 32, because this is one

of the passages where people start building their assumptions concerning God's ability and willingness to blot people out of the Lamb's book of life.

Then Moses returned to the LORD, and said, "Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves. But now, if You will, forgive their sin -- and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!" The LORD said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book. But go now, lead the people where I told you. Behold, My angel shall go before you; nevertheless in the day when I punish, I will punish them for their sin." (Exod. 32:31-34)

There are two references to blotting out in this passage. As Moses played the role of intercessor in this exchange, he stood between God and the rebels of Israel. He offered His life for theirs -- foreshadowing what Christ would do for His people. Moses asked God to forgive the people and "please blot me out from Your book which You have written." Commentators have argued about whether Moses was referring to the Lamb's book of life. I would argue that such a conclusion is impossible.

Here are the facts: The Lamb's book of life had not yet been revealed in Scripture or history; the sacrifice of Christ was 1400 years in the future and even the theology of Christ's substitutionary atonement would not be developed until Isaiah's writing in the early 700's B.C. So, whatever book Moses was referring to, there is no conclusive evidence that it was the Lamb's book of life, nor is it historically probable that he would have had knowledge of that book.

More likely, Moses was asking that God kill him in place of killing the people, or take away his part in Israel's inheritance rather than withhold the promised blessings from the chosen nation. God's response was that He would "blot out of My book" those who had sinned against Him and promised to punish them for their sin. And, sure enough, verse 35 tells us that God smote the people for their sin, removing them from life and from the inheritance.

If Moses indeed had some knowledge of the Lamb's book of life and the consequences attendant to being excluded from that book, then what we have in Exodus 32 is Moses' request to be eternally stricken from God's presence and a plea for His most severe punishment. It's difficult to believe that anyone with genuine knowledge of God's eternal vengeance and wrath would request to be placed under them. Nevertheless, when we read this story contextually, being blotted out of the book, in Moses' reckoning, meant to be killed, as opposed to relinquishing eternal life and ending up in the lake of fire.

As we'll see, evidence of that conclusion is also provided by later texts. But, evidence is also provided in this immediate text. God declares that whoever sinned against Him "I will blot out of My book." Then God smites those sinners.

So, the punishment is instant, serving as the fulfillment of God's intention to blot them out of His book. Additionally, this understanding of what it means to be "blotted out" is consistent with the usage of the term in the passages we've reviewed thus far, when God blotted out both mankind and the memory of Amalek.

Finally, If -- and this is a big IF -- being blotted out of God's book in Exodus is tantamount to be blotted out of the Lamb's book of life, we would need to see some irrefutable evidence from the text itself. But, the details don't line up. In Exodus 32, God's retribution takes the form of physical eradication, not eternal vengeance. So, this reference to "Your book" is not synonymous with the Lamb's book of life for three reasons:

- (1) The nomenclature of "Lamb's book of life" is different from "your book" or "My book"
- (2) The Lamb's book of life had not been revealed historically or scripturally.
- (3) The punishments are not the same.

To conclude from Exodus 32 that God can and does remove names from the Lamb's book of life is to go far beyond what the text actually says into areas of conjecture and assumption.

The next reference to blotting out clarifies our understanding of Exodus 32. It occurs in Deuteronomy as Moses is recounting his exchange with God on Mt. Sinai:

"The LORD spoke further to me, saying, 'I have seen this people, and indeed, it is a stubborn people. Let Me alone, that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make of you a nation mightier and greater than they.'" (Deut. 9:13-14)

This verse is a parallel telling of the events surrounding Israel's golden calf. In fact, the same conversation was recorded in Exodus 32:

The LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation." (Exodus 32:9)

"Blot out" then is synonymous with "destroy." And it become patently obvious that the phrase "from under heaven" is synonymous with "on Earth," since God was going to raise up a nation to replace erring Israel and that new nation would be where Israel was: on Earth. So, to blot someone out from under Heaven means to destroy them off the planet, not to erase their name from the Lamb's book of life.

Moving on ... in Deuteronomy 25, God reminds Israel about His earlier rule concerning Amalek:

"Therefore it shall come about when the LORD your God has given you rest from all your surrounding enemies, in the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you must not forget. (Deut. 25:19)

I've always found that verse ironic. Israel must not forget to not remember Amalek. Actually, what God was driving at was that Israel should not assign any land to Amalek's posterity, no matter how remote. Inasmuch as this verse is a repetition of God's earlier command, the earlier argument also holds and this verse obviously has no connection with the Lamb's book of life.

Continuing in Deuteronomy, God gave a rule concerning stubborn-hearted people who refused to do things His way:

"The LORD shall never be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the LORD and His jealousy will burn against that man, and every curse which is written in this book will rest on him, and the LORD will blot out his name from under heaven. Then the LORD will single him out for adversity from all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the covenant which are written in this book of the law." (Deut. 29:20-21)

In this passage, the anger of God results in the curses written in the book of the law falling on the rebel and the Lord blotting out his name from under heaven. Now we're beginning to see the consistency of the language. One of God's punishments when dealing with rebels is to erase their memory from the history of Israel, effectively removing their heritage from the history of the world. However, this is a far cry from being removed from the Lamb's book of life.

The next occurrence of the phrase "blot out" appears in 1st Kings in response to Jeroboam's ordination of priests for the high places:

"This event became sin to the house of Jeroboam, even to blot it out and destroy it from off the face of the earth." (1Kings 13:34)

Then, it occurs in 2nd Kings:

"For the LORD saw the affliction of Israel, which was very bitter; for there was neither bond nor free, nor was there any helper for Israel. The LORD did not say that He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, but He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash." (2Kings 14:26-27)

Although this is a positive statement -- The Lord did not say that He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven – the meaning is still the same. To be blotted out is to be erased from existence on planet Earth.

But, this verse is also important to our understanding of Revelation 3:4-5. Despite the fierce affliction Israel was undergoing, God did not say that He would blot out the name of Israel. This statement was meant to be a comfort to the faithful within Israel. God never said that He would blot them out; therefore they would survive the bitter affliction. Hold on to that idea as we approach the verses from Revelation.

Next, we read in Nehemiah:

“Remember me for this, O my God, and do not blot out my loyal deeds which I have performed for the house of my God and its services.” (Neh. 13:14)

The meaning in this passage is unambiguous; Nehemiah prayed that God would remember and not erase the deeds he had done in service to the house of God. Once again, this verse, like the two from 1st and 2nd Kings, has nothing to do with the Lamb’s book of life.

And the last Old Testament reference to blotting out occurs in the Psalms, from the pen of King David:

“Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.” (Psa. 51:1)

“Erase my transgressions,” David wrote. That’s a prayer to which every believer can say “amen.”

Now, I went through that exercise of listing every occurrence of the term “blot out” in the Old Testament to prove a point. None of these passages declare that God has, does, or will blot names out of the Lamb’s book of life, specifically. So, as concerns our original question, the Old Testament is devoid of any evidence that would lead us to conclude that God wrote names in that particular book before the foundation of the world only to recant and erase them later. If we are going to conclude that God does act like that, we are going to require additional evidence.

The New Testament References

There are several passages in the New Testament that refer to names written in Heaven. For instance, Jesus adjured his disciples when they returned from their journey:

The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." And He said to them, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven." (Luke 10:17-20)

Paul recommended his friends to the church at Philippi by writing:

“Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in *the cause of* the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.” (Phil 4:3)

We have listed other references to the book of life in the New Testament earlier in this article. And all of that brings us to the only reference to blotting out we find in the New Testament. It appears in the book of Revelation as part of the letter to the church at Sardis:

“But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. (Rev. 3:4-5)

In reality, the whole argument comes down to this passage. What did Jesus mean when He assured the church at Sardis that those who overcame would be clothed in white, their names will be confessed before God and the angels, and Jesus “will not erase his name from the book of life”?

The argument in favor of God’s ability to blot names out of the Lamb’s book of life normally goes like this: Well, if Jesus had to assure the church that He would not blot out their names, then that means that the possibility exists that He could blot out their names. And if He could blot out their names, then that means that He probably has blotted out names before or else He will blot out names at some point in the future. Otherwise, why would He even bring it up?

And that line of thinking inevitably leads to your conclusion, “the bible says that God can blot out names from the book of life.”

But, this passage is actually a series of positive affirmations concerning the saints at Sardis – a few people. They have not soiled their garments. That’s a good thing. They will walk with Christ in white. That’s a good thing. They’re deemed worthy. Good thing. They that overcome will be clothed in white garments; very good stuff. And two things will happen to their names: they will

not be blotted out of the book of life and they will be confessed before God and the angels. Good, good, good. Like the earlier citation from 2 Kings 14 – "The LORD did not say that He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven" – this is a positive declaration of something God and Christ will not do.

Yet, people seem dedicated to stretching this verse beyond its actual language to conclude things that the verse itself never says. For instance, on the website *The Arminian*, a publication of the Fundamental Wesleyan Society, (<http://www.fwponline.cc/arminiandex.html>) Dr. Vic Reasoner attempts to undermine the doctrine of Eternal Security in his article "*Does God Have an Eraser?*" In it, he writes:

Perhaps Revelation 3:5 could be more easily understood if we did not approach it with so much extra baggage. Let's consider a seventh possible interpretation. If God already knows who will be saved, why does he bother writing down names that he knows will later be erased? The only consistent answer is that their names were written down because they were once saved; their names were erased because they fell away. "The names of the good are often represented *as registered in heaven* (Luke 10:20). But this by no means implies a certainty of salvation, but only that at that time the persons were *on the list*, from which (as in Rev 3:5), the names of unworthy members might be erased" [McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopedia*, 1:852].

Wesley taught that "if any who are saved make shipwreck of the faith, God will blot them out of his book, although they were written therein from before the foundation of the world." Howard Marshall wrote, "The possibility of failure to endure is mentioned. Christians who fail to persevere will come under judgment and their names will be blotted out of the book of life. There is no reason to suppose that these warnings are purely hypothetical, directed against non-existent dangers; the reverse is the case. Moreover, the reference to the book of life indicates that John is addressing his warning to believers" [*Kept by the Power of God*, p. 175].

Yet we need not fall away. "This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4). Yet John describes this faith in the next verse as a present tense faith. The person who keeps on overcoming is the one who keeps on believing with active, trusting, obedient faith. Those who do not persevere will have their names blotted out of the Book of Life. Adam Clarke wrote, "Is it not evident that a soul could not be *blotted out of a book* in which it had *never been written*? And is it not farther evident from [Exodus 32:32-33] that, although a man *be written in God's book*, if he *sins* he may be *blotted out*?"

In ancient times city registers contained the names of its citizens. There were two reasons why a name could be erased: committing a capital offense or death. Physical death can never separate us from life in Christ (Rom 8:38-39). Yet the church at Sardis had many who had grown careless and were about to die

spiritually. Their names were about to be erased. Only a few were overcomers. Joseph Benson wrote, "This passage plainly implies, that some names shall be blotted out from the book of life: this is, some who, in consequence of their adoption and regeneration, were entitled to and fitted for eternal life, shall, through falling from grace, lose these blessings, and come again under guilt, condemnation, and wrath."

Note how frequently the pericope cited here, in an effort to explain Revelation 3:5, declares such things as:

- “their names were erased because they fell away”
- “unworthy members might be erased”
- “God will blot them out of His book”
- “their names will be blotted out of the book of life”
- “Those who do not persevere will have their names blotted out of the Book of Life”
- “a soul could be blotted out of a book”
- “although a man be written in God’s book, if he sins he may be blotted out”
- “Their names were about to be erased”
- “some names shall be blotted out from the book of life”

All of these statements are drawn from the single positive declaration “I will not erase his name from the book of life.” At best, this is eisegesis. At worst, it’s a purposeful distortion of the words on the page. But, this is the sort of traditional reading and interpretation that permeates much of contemporary Christianity, representing a very low view of God’s ability to save and an extremely high view of man’s ability to overthrow even the most eternal intentions of a Sovereign God.

So, I say again, nowhere in the Bible does Christ say that He will, has, or intends to erase names from His book of life. Instead, what He says, in order to reassure His overcoming saints, is that He will not do that very thing.

And here’s the most important point in this whole discussion: if we are going to draw conclusions about God’s activity, especially where matters of salvation are concerned, we must be careful to align our conclusions with what the text says, without going beyond what the text says or drawing conclusions based on inference, suggestion, or interpretation. The only solid conclusion we can draw from Revelation 3:4-5 is that those who overcome will not have their names removed from the book of life and Christ will declare those same names before God and His angels. To conclude anything else – especially to conclude the exact opposite -- is go beyond what the text states into the arena of error and confusion.

Tree or Book?

Now, the last passage that the advocates of God's ability and willingness to blot people out of His book use is from Revelation 22, which the King James Version renders thusly:

“And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. (Rev. 22:19)

Meanwhile, the New American Standard Bible reads:

I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book. (Rev. 22:18-19)

The NLT, NIV, ESV, RSV, ASV, Darby, and HNV all agree that Revelation 22:19 refers to the “tree of life” as opposed to the “book of life.” The Greek manuscript evidence for the reading "book of life" (*biblou tes zoes*) is hard to trace, for although it appears in the Textus Receptus, another reading, "tree of life" (*tou xulou tes zoes*), is in UBS-4 (without comment) and in the Majority Text in the NKJV Interlinear.

For the book of Revelation Erasmus (the author of the Textus Receptus, on which the KJV is based) borrowed a copy from his friend Reuchlin, dating from the twelfth century. But, it lacked the final leaf, which had contained the last six verses of the book. For these verses Erasmus depended upon Jerome's Latin Vulgate, translating these verses into Greek. The corruption of "tree" into "book" had apparently occurred earlier in the translation of the Latin text when a scribe accidentally miscopied the correct word "lingo" ("tree") as "libro" ("book").

According to Dr. William W. Combs, Academic Dean and Professor of New Testament at the Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, in his article *Erasmus and the Textus Receptus*:

Because Codex Ir was missing its last page and thus the last six verses of Revelation (22:16–21), Erasmus retranslated these verses from the Latin Vulgate, and he honestly admitted in the Annotationes that he had done so. But again, this produced, by my count, twenty errors in his Greek NT which are still in the TR today. They have no Greek manuscript support whatsoever.

...

Some say "Book of Life" is found in the Greek manuscripts noted by H. C. Hoskier as 57 and 141. [H. C. Hoskier, *Concerning The Text Of The Apocalypse*, London: Quaritch, 1929; vol. 1, 474-477 and vol. 2, 454 and 634.]

Hoskier's second volume, p. 634, does use "book of life" instead of "tree of life." This is the (Greek) text of Stephen's third edition of 1550, the text with which all Hoskier's collations are made. However, Hoskier's lists manuscript evidence for "tree" and does not appear to list much evidence for "book."

The King James Version also says "book of life" because the Textus Receptus says it. So there is some manuscript evidence for it. It appears to be little enough, however, that the Nestle-Aland critical text (ed. xxvii) does not even mention it.

The New King James itself, which follows the old King James pretty closely, differs with it on this verse by using "tree" instead of "book."

Manuscript evidence must favor "tree" over "book."

(http://www.dbts.edu/journals/1996_1/ERASMUS.PDF)

Consequently, any argument in favor of God removing names from the book of life based on Revelation 22:19 must first prove that the text they are quoting is accurate. Given the weight of textual scholarship arguing for the alternate reading ("tree of life"), this is a very tenuous platform from which to mount such an argument.

We ought, then, to understand Revelation 22:19 in light of similar warnings found in the Old Testament, such in Deuteronomy 29, mentioned earlier. God states:

"Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the Lord our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison. When such a person hears the words of this oath, he invokes a blessing on himself and therefore thinks, I will be safe, even though I persist in going my own way. This will bring disaster on the watered land as well as the dry. The Lord will never be willing to forgive him; his wrath and zeal will burn against that man. All the curses written in this book will fall upon him, and the Lord will blot out his name from under heaven" (vs. 18-20).

Compare those words with:

"... and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book."

Revelation 22 describes the splendors of the New Jerusalem, including access to the tree of life – the very access that caused God to drive Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. But, if anyone were to tamper with the revelation given to John, changing the words and obscuring its meaning, then God will remove them from any participation in the blessings of the holy city. In other words, He will

wipe out their life and any memory of them. Just as God threatened Old Testament rebels with elimination from national Israel, He equally threatens New Testament enemies with elimination from the eternal promises of Israel found in the New Jerusalem.

But what is clear in this text is that, once again, there is no irrefutable evidence that proves God has ever removed any name from the Lamb's book of life.

Final Thoughts

If God were to remove someone from the Lamb's book of life, then what are we to say of James's description, "With whom there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning."? (James 1:7) Or, Malachi's statement, "I am the Lord, I do not change." (Mal. 3:6) Or, Hebrews 13:8, which declares, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." In the book of Numbers we read, "God is not a man, that he should lie, neither the son of man, that he should repent; hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or, hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? (Num. 23:19)

If God did write and then erase names from a book authored before the foundation of the world, then He changed. He changed His mind, He changed His intention, and He changed the eternal destiny of those people who were in the book and then out of it. How is it that a righteous, holy, all-knowing God would have to admit that He made a mistake? How could He speak it and not make it good? Or, is this just a capricious side of God that is not revealed in Scripture that makes Him intend to save some people and then erase their names?

I'm certain that you agree and believe that salvation is a gift of God, given to us by His grace. That means that there is nothing within the saved person that attracted God. Rather, it is the definite, powerful outworking of God that results in any person's salvation. And, inasmuch as nothing within a man caused or obligated God to save him, then just as equally nothing within that person can cause God to release him, or turn him over to the forces of destruction. Just as it takes a powerful, miraculous act of God to regenerate a sinner, it would take an equally powerful, miraculous act of God to degenerate a believer back to his former state.

You see, the heart of the issue is really the question of eternal security. 1John 2:25 reads,

“And this is the promise that He has promised us, even eternal life.”

That is not a conditional promise based on later contingencies. Life that is given and then taken away is not “eternal.” It's temporary.

When God intends to save someone, His determination is sufficient. Or would you say that His decree is always subject to the changing whim of His creature's will? Your question, "Can you explain to me why ... Calvinism teaches that your names were written before the foundation of the world and once in there you are saved?" is really asking why we are convinced that a truly sovereign God can do whatever He pleases.

So, here's the essential answer: The bible repeatedly states that God can and does save whomever He chooses. The bible does not say that God can or does remove names from the Lamb's book of life. Those facts should be sufficient to settle the argument. But, let me "seal the deal," so to speak. If God did indeed ever remove someone from the Lamb's book of life, it would mean that He acted in direct contradiction to the following passages:

I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever; nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him. That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past (Ecclesiastes 3:14-15).

"And, this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day" (John 6:39).

Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life." (John 17:1-2)

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. (John 10:27-29)

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called. And, whom he called, them he also justified. And, whom he justified, them he also glorified. (Rom. 8:29-30)

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither

death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:35-39)

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. (Phil. 1:6)

Any position that runs contrary to that many clear Biblical statements needs to be examined and scrutinized. And any position that makes God act contrary to His own word needs to be utterly discarded.

The facts are plain. The texts have been examined. The conclusion is inescapable. Nowhere in the Bible does God say that He has, does, or intends to remove names from the Lamb's book of life. And, many passages declare the eternal security of those He has chosen "since the foundation of the world."

I hope that helps you work through the issue.

Yours for His sake,

Jim Mc.