



## **“Once Saved, Always Saved?”**

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It’s one of the most widely debated theological questions of the centuries. You hear it preached all of the time, and it deeply divides the religious world, and has for centuries. It’s a question that all of us who are saved should be very interested in, because it has eternal implications. The question is, once a person is saved, will he always be saved? That is, can a child of God ever fall from grace and be eternally lost? Is the Calvinistic doctrine that is widely held in many churches today called “final perseverance of the saints” or “once saved, always saved” true? Keep in mind that a technical or impressive name for some point of theology doesn’t make it a truth. Does it hold up under the scrutiny of the scriptures? That is the question.

One of the passages that many say proves the impossibility of apostasy is found in **John 10**.

**John 10:27-29 “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 no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.”**

Is Jesus affirming the Calvinistic doctrine of “once saved, always saved”? We’ll examine that passage along with several others pertaining to this very important topic in this study.

One of the great points of contention in modern theology is this: does a person have free will? That is, does God leave it up to you and me to choose to accept or reject His word? And if man CAN choose, then can he, as a Christian, choose to forsake Christ and thereby abandon his inheritance as a child of God? It would stand to reason that if a man is saved because God determined that he would be, with no free will or choice on man’s part, then no, nothing he of his own accord chooses to do or not to do would have any bearing on his eternal destiny. If God chose to save him, then God, being sovereign, could not let that same man prevent his own salvation.

But if God, a sovereign God, gives man free will, that is a different matter. The issue at hand is not whether a child of God is always a child of God. Yes, a person who has been born again is always a child of God. Does that mean that he cannot lose his inheritance or salvation though? The issue is not how many times can a person be born again. The Bible teaches that there is only one new birth (**John 3:3-5**). In **Ephesians 4:4-5**, Paul taught that there is *one baptism*. When a person is born into the family of God by baptism into Christ, he will thus be a child of God from then on. My children can never biologically cease to be my children, but they CAN be disinherited. The story of the prodigal son illustrates that (**Luke 15**). When the young son left father and home for the far country, he never ceased being his father's son, but he did sever his fellowship with the father and he forfeited the blessings of his father's estate until he returned in repentance and the broken relationship was restored.

The fact is, one can so sin and commit apostasy until he forfeits his eternal salvation. Let's look at some passages that are vital to this issue. Let's begin in the book of **Hebrews**. This powerful letter was penned to the early church to exhort them to remain faithful to Christ and the new covenant economy, despite the severe persecution that was weakening their faith and their resolve. That is the whole premise of the Hebrew letter. Because of the pressures of persecution, many of these people were tempted to abandon the church of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice, and go back to keeping the law of Moses. That was very tempting. This letter showed that the new covenant, established by Christ, was far better than the old covenant that came by Moses that they had been under. Christianity offered a better sacrifice and was built on better promises, and the writer had strong words for those who were turning away from the Lord and going to Judaism.

**Hebrews 3: 8-11** “(...Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.)”

Here, we are reminded of the rebellious Israelites during the forty-year trek from Egypt to Canaan. We are aware that the whole generation of those who left Egypt, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, died without entering the Promised Land. The bodies of the people were left strewn throughout the wilderness because of their faithlessness and their rebellion against the Lord. Why does the writer mention that? Let's continue reading to find out.

**Hebrews 3:12** “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.”

Catch that word *departing*. Before I can depart from something or some place, I have to be there to begin with. I can't leave a place where I've never been. But yet, the person who subscribes to Calvinist theology says that if a person sins and is lost, that means they were never saved to begin with. They say that would be evidence that they were not a part of the elect, drawn by the Holy Spirit and saved by the grace of God. But Paul said that it was possible for these brethren to *depart from the living God*. Not merely to depart from the teaching of truth, not merely to depart from the true practice of Christianity. He implies that they depart from God Himself. Let's read on.

**Hebrews 3:13-14** “But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end;”

There is that conditional word *if*. *If we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end*. He tells them they can partake of the blessings and the eternal inheritance of Christ if they steadfastly cling to the faith they had in the beginning. The beginning of what? The beginning of their walk with Jesus Christ, their introduction to salvation through Christ Jesus. Paul is most certainly warning them that it is possible to abandon the faith and forfeit all of the blessings of being in Christ. But he isn't finished.

**Hebrews 6:4-6 “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.”**

The Hebrew writer is not telling us that there is some unpardonable sin that is so grievous and so terrible that God doesn't have the capacity to forgive it. He is not saying that even if a person sins knowing that he shouldn't sin that there is never an opportunity for him to repent of that sin and have a change of heart and be restored to God. That is not what he is teaching at all. Rather, these Christians are being warned that if they abandon Christ, they are going back to a system that is insufficient to save and unable to produce repentance and forgiveness. Those sacrifices that they are going back to are unable to redeem them from sin. He plainly says *if they shall fall away...* yet the advocate of “once saved, always saved” says that you cannot fall away so far as salvation is concerned. The Bible says they could. They would abandon and forsake the very efficacy of the blood of Jesus Christ if they went back to a system that provided for inferior and insufficient sacrifices. And, again, he is clearly talking about people who were saved, because he says they were *enlightened*. He says they had *tasted of the heavenly gift*, they were *made partakers of the Holy Spirit*. He says they had tasted of the word of God and the triumph and victory that the church would experience after Jerusalem fell and the old system was completely disintegrated and the new was firmly in place. That doesn't sound like he was talking to hypocrites or people who only thought that they had been saved, but really weren't. He's talking to people who were saved, but would later succumb to the temptation of the devil and leave the faith and forfeit their salvation in Christ.

And then, there is **Hebrews 10**.

**Hebrews 10:24-25 “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”**

The writer says that there were some who were absenting themselves from the assembly of the church because they were afraid of their persecutors and they were growing weak in their commitment to Christ. However, they needed to be encouraging one another by coming together, because the ultimate decision to abandon the faith had an awful consequence.

**Hebrews 10:26-27 “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.”**

Again, he is saying that if you go back to that system, there is no sacrifice for sin under that system. He says *but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries*.

**Hebrews 10:28-31 “He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”**

Friend, those words really stand on their own. Does that sound like it is impossible for a Christian to fall from grace and be lost? How would you explain that? What is the Holy Spirit warning them of if a saved person can never leave the faith and be lost?

The Galatian letter was written on much the same premise. Paul had some stinging words for those who were buying into the false doctrine of the Judaizers.

**Galatians 5:2-4 “Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.”**

Carefully notice how he says *Christ is become of no effect unto you*. That implies that Christ HAD been of effect to them. In other words, at one time they HAD enjoyed the spiritual power and benefit that Christ brings into the lives of the saved, but now Christ had become of no effect to them. They had defected, they had fallen from grace. Again, something many denominational preachers today tell you that you cannot do. Yet Paul says that you can.

Then there are the words of the apostle Peter.

**II Peter 2:20-22 “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.”**

Friend, if that's not teaching that it is possible for a child of God to sin, so as to finally be lost, I am at a loss as to what the Bible really says about anything. The apostle Peter talks about those who *turn back*—not those who remain in. They turned back to the sin out of which they came.

We could go on and on with numerous other passages, but what about some of the proof texts of some of the Calvinists? That is, doesn't the Bible seem to indicate the opposite in other passages? That it is impossible for a Christian to sin and be lost? For example, take the scripture that we read earlier.

**John 10:27-29 “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 no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.”**

That is a very comforting and wonderful statement from our Lord. The fact is, however, the impossibility of apostasy on the part of the Christian really has no bearing on this passage. Jesus was simply pointing out that the Good Shepherd was a faithful protector of His fold of sheep, and that under His care, they were safe from predators and assailants. That is very true. Did you know that no man, nor any power under heaven can prevent you from being saved, unless you grant them that power? The devil cannot steal you away from Jesus Christ, if you are content to abide IN Jesus Christ. But what if you wander away from the Good Shepherd? Sheep can do that, you know. A good shepherd will protect his sheep, even to the point of giving his life, but sheep can leave the fold and in so doing, they face the perils of the wilderness away from the shepherd's supervision. The apostle Peter warned us of this.

**I Peter 5:8 "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:"**

Peter wrote that to Christians, to people who were saved—not those who were unsaved. He said *seeking whom he may devour*—not harm or inflict spiritual damage—*devour*. Satan knows there are those he cannot devour because they stay close to the Good Shepherd. He is looking for those who stray and become weak and vulnerable. So **John 10** is in no way teaching that it is impossible for a Christian to decide for himself to leave the Lord and be lost. If you want to live for the Lord, if you will allow God's Spirit through His word to transform your life to become what God wants you to be, in the image of Jesus Christ, Satan can't pluck you from His hand. The world can't pull you away from Jesus Christ. But YOU can decide to abandon Him, succumb to temptation, forsake the Lord...But Satan or the world can't come and take you away from Him. You see, the choice is YOURS: whether or not you will submit to Jesus Christ or rebel against Jesus Christ.

**Romans 8:35-39 "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."**

Once again, the Bible gives us the assurance that no power on earth or in hell beneath can take away God's love and care for us. But he says nothing about the person who is not content with God's love and who chooses to forsake God's blessing and turn back into sin. The proponent of the doctrine of eternal security is making Paul's words much broader than they actually are. I am very thankful that I don't have to worry about someone or something else taking my salvation away from me. I am ever aware that I am dependent on Jesus Christ for my salvation and I must walk by faith, clinging to Him and walking in the light as He is in the light so that I can have fellowship with Him. I am also ever aware that if I relinquish my faith in Him, I am forfeiting the blessings that He, by grace, has afforded unto me. That is a very serious, serious threat.

Then again, there are the words of John.

**I John 3:8-9 "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."**

This is an interesting passage. Some will say that it teaches that a person who has become a child of God can never be lost. That's not what John says. He says that the person born of God not only does not sin, but that he *cannot* sin. Well, does a Christian who has been saved ever sin? Will anybody deny that a Christian can sin on occasion? That sin can enter his life if he is not careful? That from time to time, we all succumb to some temptation in life and perhaps stumble along the way? Of course a Christian can sin, and from time to time, unfortunately, a Christian DOES sin. So, what is John saying in this passage? Some say that the regenerated man cannot sin. That it is impossible for him to sin so as to be lost, and that this verse goes to prove that. But does it really prove that? Is that what John is saying? If so, that puts John at odds with Peter and Paul in the passages that we've already studied. But context is everything. The word *seed* is the key to understanding this passage. He is talking about the seed of Abraham. By the time John wrote this, an antichrist movement had begun (**verse 18**). Christians were being belittled by Jews, who rejected Jesus, and these Jews were trying to persuade people that these children of Abraham were committing sin by being born again and they were thus forfeiting the promises made unto the seed of Abraham. John is showing that that is not the case, that one in no way forfeits the blessings of Abraham by becoming a Christian. Rather, he *realizes* those blessings. That is the teaching of this wonderful passage.

Friend, we should all be warned of the danger of departing from Christ thereby forfeiting the wonderful blessings that Jesus Christ came to earth to bring to those who would turn to Him in faith and obedience. It behooves us to walk in the light, to remain in fellowship with Jesus Christ, because the cost is too great if we turn our backs upon, and forfeit the blessings found through faith in Him.

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