

## Once Saved, Always Saved?

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This belief has raised many questions over the years, but it is still quite widespread. A recent email for clarification promoted me to look again at this idea. A number of different texts are given in support, particularly John 10:28, 29 (TEV):

“I give them eternal life, and they shall never die. No one can snatch them away from me. John 10:28. TEV.

Clearly this is speaking about those who are already experiencing eternal life—for we still die... As for the consistent witness of the New Testament, much of what is written by the apostles is to counter the ever-present danger of choosing sin, and distrusting God once more... In fact, the real issue almost seems to be the very opposite: “once lost, always lost” even!

“For how can those who abandon their faith be brought back to repent again? They were once in God’s light; they tasted heaven’s gift and received their share of the Holy Spirit; they knew from experience that God’s word is good, and they had felt the powers of the coming age. And then they abandoned their faith! It is impossible to bring them back to repent again, because they are again crucifying the Son of God and exposing him to public shame.” Hebrews 6:4-6 TEV.

Clearly the Bible considers it possible for people to “abandon their faith.” Similarly there are warnings against “turning back” to previous unchristian ways:

“Do not lose your courage, then, because it brings with it a great reward. You need to be patient, in order to do the will of God and receive what he promises. For, as the scripture says: ‘Just a little while longer, and he who is coming will come; he will not delay. My righteous people, however, will believe and live; but if any of them turns back, I will not be pleased with him.’ We are not people who turn back and are lost. Instead, we have faith and are saved.” Hebrews 10:35-39 TEV.

We hope to be those who do not turn back and are lost. But it’s a definite possibility! We can choose to go back to a life of sin, we can abandon God and “no longer have the truth”:

“Whoever teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the true words of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the teaching of our religion is swollen with pride and knows nothing. He has an unhealthy desire to argue and quarrel about words, and this brings on jealousy, disputes, insults, evil suspicions, and constant arguments from people whose minds do not function and who no longer have the truth. They think that religion is a way to become rich.” 1 Tim. 6:3-5 TEV.

Think of the many different ways this concept is expressed in Scripture: losing the first love; people who have “gone out from us,” those who need to pay attention “lest they fall...”

The whole of Galatians is Paul writing to those who had accepted the truth of the gospel but had now fallen away from it and had gone back into the bondage of the law.

In the parable of the sower of Matt. 13 Jesus speaks of those who accept the truth of the gospel—they are saved—but then lose their salvation.

Then how about a couple of verses from Revelation, where God threatens to “take away” a previous state of salvation in response to sinful actions:

“Think how far you have fallen! Turn from your sins and do what you did at first. If you don’t turn from your sins, I will come to you and take your lamp-stand from its place.” Rev. 2:5 TEV.

“And if anyone takes anything away from the prophetic words of this book, God will take away from them their share of the fruit of the tree of life and of the Holy City, which are described in this book.” Rev. 22:19 TEV.

God threatens to remove the candlestick—the light of his salvation. He also says he will “take away” from those who alter the words of the book of Revelation “their share in the fruit of the tree of life.” Notice this—they did once have a share in this, but God will take away this from them if they do this. So salvation is certainly not unchangeable!

Similarly there are many texts about people giving up their faith in God, abandoning their trust in him. This means they will be lost—you cannot abandon faith and expect to be saved. Nor can it be argued that “they didn’t really believe in the first place...”

“The Spirit says clearly that some people will abandon the faith in later times; they will obey lying spirits and follow the teachings of demons.” 1 Tim. 4:1 TEV.

“If people have escaped from the corrupting forces of the world through their knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and then are again caught and conquered by them, such people are in a worse state at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been much better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than to know it and then turn away from the sacred command that was given them.” 2 Peter 2:20, 21 TEV.

Many more texts could be added. But the clear teaching of the Bible (both Old and New Testaments) is that you can “sin away your day of grace” and lose your salvation.

(For further study see: Ezekiel 18:24; Hebrews 4:6, 7; 13:12, Romans 11:22, 1 Cr. 9:26, 27; 10:12; 15:2; 2 Cor. 5:10; Phil. 2:12; 1 John 1:6; 2:15, 16; 3:9; 3:15)

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