

INTRODUCTION

This is a very important issue for each person to settle for themselves: Can I be saved and then lose my salvation? Our Catholic friends say you can lose your salvation by committing a mortal sin that shatters your state of grace. Our friends in the Assemblies of God and some other Pentecostal denominations believe you can be saved and then lose your salvation if you continue to willfully sin.

But we believe in the doctrine of eternal security. That means that once you are truly a child of God you can never do anything to change your status as a child of God. Some people call this, "Once saved; always saved." But I don't like that term, because it breeds misunderstanding.

Through the years I've heard people say, "You Baptists believe 'once saved always saved.' If I believed that I'd go out and sin all I wanted to. They don't understand salvation. I actually sin MORE than I want to. Once you meet Jesus, you don't want to sin anymore.

Many people read our passage here Hebrews 6 and are confused because it seems to say that someone can be saved and fall away. However, we must always understand scripture in its original context. The writer is addressing Hebrew Christians who had come out of a system of temple worship and sacrifices. But it's clear from the grammar that there were some Hebrews who had been interested in the Gospel, but had since turned away from the church and had returned to their religion of Judaism. The people he is addressing are no longer even in the church. We know this because of the obvious change of pronouns. The writer has been using first and second person pronouns. In the previous verses he uses "we, you, us" six times. But notice in our text, he changes to the third person pronouns and starts talking about them and they. Then at the end, he returns to addressing those in the church.

Hebrews 6:4-9. "It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace. Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned. Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in YOUR case—things that accompany salvation."

In case you're still wondering about the answer to this important question, "Can a Christian lose their salvation?" I believe the clear answer in the Bible is an unqualified NO. Now let me tell you why I believe this. In these verses the writer is suggesting an impossible hypothesis. He begins by saying, "It is impossible. If someone COULD fall away, they COULD never be restored because that would be like crucifying Jesus over and over and over again and subjecting Him to public shame again. That's impossible. There is no way someone could crucify Jesus again. That

happened one time outside of Jerusalem 2,000 years ago. Jesus died ONCE FOR ALL and it's impossible for anyone to crucify Him again.

But why is there so much confusion about this passage? And why do some people who call themselves Christians teach that someone can be saved and lost again? Let me clarify by making four statements about eternal security.

1. True believers and make-believers both start out on a pathway to God.

Here's how the writer describes those who have fallen away. They are "Those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away..." (Hebrews 6:4-6)

Those are the same initial steps everyone takes when they are on the pathway to God. Those who continue on those steps meet Jesus and are true believers. But some stop short, and we can call them make-believers.

When I was growing up in South Alabama, one of my best friends was named Forest, and no his last name wasn't Gump. Forest and I didn't have a lot of toys, but we could entertain ourselves by playing "make believe." I'd say something like, "Let's make-believe that I'm a cowboy and you're an Indian." Or "Let's make-believe that I'm a cop and you're a robber." Make-believe is fun for kids, but some people grow up and instead of being a real believer they are make-believers.

Peter writes about these make-believers in 1 Peter 2. He says they KNEW the way to salvation, but they just didn't take it. If you wanted to go to Whitehouse, I could tell you that you just get on Troup Highway headed and you will reach Whitehouse. Now you can know the way to Whitehouse, and still never go there. I could even point you in the right direction, but you could choose to turn left or right, or even choose to turn north and go in the opposite direction. If someone asked you the way to Whitehouse, you could even tell them without going yourself. Make-believers can know Jesus is the way to heaven. They can even tell others that Jesus is the way to heaven, but, sadly, they never make it themselves.

How do you know who is a true believer and who is a make believer? You can't know with ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY about anyone's salvation except your own. But Jesus said we could look at people and get an idea of their salvation by their fruit. Jesus said, "By their fruit you will recognize them. Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 7:20-21)

The writer mentions two different kinds of fields; one is fruitful, and one is unfruitful. That's a parable about people. Jesus told a parable about different kinds of soil to represent how different people accept the seed of the Word of God. Some people's hearts are like rocks and there is no root and no fruit. Some peoples' lives are so shallow there's a little root, but still no fruit. Other people are like dirt full of weeds and thorns. The seed takes root, but the worries

and cares of this world choke out the fruit. All of those people are make-believers. But one kind of person receives the word and the one thing that identifies them is fruit.

There are fake Christians the same way there are knock-off products. Thousand of fake Rolex watches have been sold, but the prevalence of fakes points to the value of the real thing. Have you ever seen anyone trying to sell fake Timex watches? "Hey buddy, wanna' buy a Timex watch for only \$30?"

I often quote one of my spiritual mentors, Ray Stedman. When he preached on this passage from Hebrews 6, he talked about how he was convinced that a true believer couldn't lose their salvation. But he makes a keen observation that some people on the way to being born again are actually stillborn. He wrote: "Is there in the spiritual life, as in the natural life, a gestation period before birth when true Spirit-imparted life can fail and result in a stillbirth? Is there not a time when those seeking Christ are more like embryos, forming little by little in the womb, fed by the faith and vitality of others? Perhaps this is what the Apostle Paul means when he writes to the Galatians, 'My little children, I stand in doubt of you. I am travailing in birth again until Christ be formed in you.' (Galatians 4:19) We see an example of this in Judas who for three years accompanied the Lord in his ministry, was sent out with the Twelve, and given power to heal, to cast out demons, to preach the gospel. But at the end, despite the manifestations of Spirit-given power, there was no faith and he turned and went out into the dark night of betrayal."

So, there are true believers and make believers. Which one are you?

2. Make-believers are revealed when they indicate no desire for the things of God.

This book is full of warnings about turning away from God earlier we read, "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God." (Hebrews 3:12)

Every church roll contains the names of people who at one time claimed to trust Christ, but now they display no spiritual hunger, they never attend, they never give, and they feel no need to make a change. The sad thing is that some of these people are Baptists and they've heard that phrase "once saved, always saved." So they are deceived into thinking that just because they walked an aisle and shook the pastor's hand and got dunked they're going to heaven. But they're as lost as a ball in high weeds. I not only believe in the security of the believer, but I believe in the INSECURITY of the UNBELIEVER. There might be people whose names are on a church roll but they haven't darkened the doors of a church in decades. If they are hiding behind a "once saved always saved" belief, they are deceiving themselves.

The Apostle John also writes about these make believers who turn away from God. "They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us." (I John 2:19)

Can you show me a true born-again believer who was saved and lost their salvation? There are plenty of prominent people who once identified themselves as Christians who have renounced their faith. One of the co-founders of the Christian rock band Newsboys is George Perdakis. He turned away from Christianity in 2007 and is living as an atheist in Australia. He claims that only about 1 in 10 Christian rock bands are truly believers.

Tony Campolo's son, Bart, was a leading evangelical and now claims to be an atheist. Frank Schaeffer, the son of the evangelical theologian, Francis Schaeffer, now claims to be an atheist. Actors Tom Cruise and John Travolta used to be practicing Catholics before they were duped into the Church of Scientology. The novelist, Anne Rice, who wrote *Interview with the Vampire* and many other novels, was a devout Catholic for many years. But in 2010 she posted these words on her Facebook page: "Today I quit being a Christian. I'm out. In the name of Christ, I refuse to be anti-gay. I refuse to be anti-feminist. I refuse to be anti-artificial birth control. I refuse to be anti-Democrat. I refuse to be anti-secular humanism. I refuse to be anti-science. I refuse to be anti-life. In the name of Christ, I quit Christianity and being Christian. Amen."

So is that possible? Can a person be a Christian one day and lost the next day? I don't think so. It's like this: Have you ever seen a falling star? What you saw might have looked like a falling star, but it was a meteorite burning up in our atmosphere. Stars don't fall. Like our sun, stars are massive flaming spheres with solar systems orbiting them. So if you think you saw a falling star, you can be sure it wasn't ever a start at all. So if you think you've seen a falling Christian, the same can be said—they weren't truly believers.

I've never forgotten what one of my professors in seminary used to say. There are a lot of "F's" in his fantastic formula. He would say, **"The faith that fizzles before the finish was faulty from the first!"**

But enough talk about "them" and "those" people who have become spiritual dropouts. They aren't here anywhere. So when you see "them" this week, tell them that the pastor talked about "them." Now let's talk about you and me and us.

3. A true believer is identified by his/her perseverance.

A true believer will stay faithful to the end. We read, "For if we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as firmly as when we first believed, we will share in all that belongs to Christ."
(Hebrews 3:14 NLT)

The best way to know you're saved is that you are still walking with the Lord. Don't get the cart before the horse: You don't HAVE to persevere to BE saved. Your perseverance doesn't EARN your salvation. It is just a Biblical fact that true believers WILL persevere.

James wrote, "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him." (James 1:12)

I believe the climax of Hebrews is found in chapter 12:1. It says, "Seeing that we are surrounded by so great a crowd of witnesses, let us lay aside the weight and the sin that so easily entangles us, and let us run with patience the race set out before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus."

Salvation is a race, but we aren't competing against each other. We are all moving toward the finish line, which is when we will meet Jesus. We will either meet Jesus in death or when He returns, but He is our finish line.

This race is not a sprint. It is an ultra-marathon. That's why there are so many admonitions in scripture to persevere to the end. Over and over again we are told, "Don't quit. Don't stop. Don't turn back."

In the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City, John Stephen Akhwari was running in the marathon representing his home country of Tanzania. Halfway through the race, he suffered severe leg cramps. He fell and cut his leg and dislocated his knee. But he didn't quit. He continued to hobble toward the finish line. He finished hours behind the other runners and only a few people remained in the deserted stands to cheer as he hobbled across the finish line. When a reporter asked him why he didn't quit he said, "My country didn't send me 5,000 miles to start the race, they sent me to finish the race."

And you can be sure that "He who began a good work in you will keep on completing it until the day of Jesus Christ." True believers persevere to the end. That's just what we do.

4. An important level of spiritual maturity is having assurance of your salvation.

Remember the context of Hebrews 6 is moving on to maturity. And after the writer talks about "those" make believers he writes, "WE are confident of better things in YOUR case—things that accompany salvation." (Hebrews 6:9)

God wants you to have absolute assurance of your salvation. The devil wants to make you doubt your salvation. The enemy knows if he can keep you doubting your salvation, you won't be an effective servant of the Lord. Sadly, some groups say you can't KNOW for certain if you are going to heaven. If you ask some people, "Are you going to heaven?" They will say, "I hope so." Or "I think so." But it's not enough to have a "hope so" salvation or a "think so" salvation. You can have a KNOW SO salvation.

The fifth chapter of 1 John is devoted to the affirming the assurance of salvation. "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may KNOW that you have eternal life." (1 John 5:13 NKJV)

Jesus said, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand." (John 10:27-29)

One of my most painful memories as a young dad was when Laura Grace was about two years old. She was holding my hand as we were walking out of a stadium after a high school football game. There were people in front of us and behind us, and we were trying to keep up with the pace of the crowd. It was a hot night and my hands were sweaty and her hand was sweaty. We were walking on a pathway of loose gravel, and her hand slipped out of my hand. She fell forward and her little forehead hit one of those sharp pieces of gravel. It was just a small cut, but it bled a lot. Of course, she was screaming and I picked her up and tried to wipe away the blood, sweat, and tears. Everybody was watching us, and many stopped to help. I thought, "I can just see the headlines. 'Local Pastor arrested for child abuse.'" That night, I failed her as a father. She slipped out my hand, and I felt awful.

But I want to assure you that we have a Heavenly Father whose grip never gets sweaty. He will never let of you. He will never fail you.

That reminds me of a story I heard about a young boy who gave his heart to Jesus. He was so excited. He was telling his uncle about it. His uncle just happened to belong to a group of Christians who teach that you can lose your salvation. The little boy said, "It's so wonderful to be saved. God is holding me in His hand and I know that He will never let go of my hand!" The uncle said, "Yes, but what if you slip out of God's hand?" The little boy thought for a moment and said with simple childlike wisdom, "Oh, that could never happen because I'm one of His fingers!"

CONCLUSION

One of the greatest engineering and construction projects of the 20th Century was the Golden Gate Bridge across the San Francisco Bay. Construction began in 1933. It was a controversial project that was opposed as being too dangerous. It was predicted that at least thirty-five workmen would die during the construction. That was a typical loss for this type of construction at the time.

Eleven men fell to their deaths in the water below, and the project was halted. The designers came up with a solution. They built a safety net under the work areas. It cost \$100,000, and as a result, nineteen men's lives were saved when they fell into the net. Those men claimed to be members of the "Half-Way to Hell Club." To everyone's surprise, after the net was built, the project was finished under budget and ahead of schedule.

The workmen reported that the presence of the net didn't make them more careless. Instead, it gave them much more confidence in their work, and it led to greater efficiency.

The same can be said of the Christian life. When you KNOW you are saved that gives you the confidence and assurance to serve the Lord with gladness. It's a great blessing to be saved. But it's a greater blessing to be saved and SURE that you're saved! Then you can work with confidence knowing that "underneath are the everlasting arms." (Deuteronomy 33:27) Even when you're saved, you may fall but you won't fall away. The Psalmist says, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord. And he delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholds him with His hand." (Psalm 37:23-24 NKJV)

It's all about God's grace; not my ability. As that great song says, "Through many dangers, toils, and strains; I have already come; 'Twas grace that brought me safe thus far; And grace will lead me home!"

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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