

Good Question! Can you lose your salvation?

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Brian R. Wipf

Too often, it seems, the question we are addressing today is asked with the wrong motives. Our question is: Can you lose your salvation? Maybe you're wondering: what might be the wrong reason to ask this question? How about this: this is a bad question if you're looking to be comforted while doing something wrong. Do you know what I mean by that? What if someone wanted to find an answer to this question so they could carry on being satisfied pursuing deceitful desires while refusing to repent and turn to God? Let me give you a case study.

Trent is an angry man. He hides pretty well... in public, but he lets it out when he's at home. His family are regularly afraid of him. Sometimes, he will lash out verbally; sometimes he gives his family the deathly silent treatment; he's even destroyed property and household items. A year ago, he crossed a line he didn't think he would ever cross; he hit his wife. He knew it was wrong; he apologized profusely promising never to do it again. She forgave him; then he did it again. Trent offered the same apologies and promises. But a few days later in another fight, he was physically abusive again. And now, this their ugly pattern. Trent knows what he's doing is wrong, but he refuses to ask for help. But lately he's not as bothered or shocked by his abusive behavior. "She's just so difficult," he tells himself. "If I had a better wife, I wouldn't be doing this." He blames her. Far too embarrassed and ashamed to bring this up to any of his friends or his pastor, Trent starts searching the internet for articles or sermons that might answer his question - "Can you lose your salvation?" The most frequent answer he finds is "no," you can't lose your salvation. That's made him feel a lot better. He was feeling a little anxious and fearful, but now he still feels confident of where he's going when he dies.

If the reason you want to know if you can lose your salvation is to find a sense of peace and confidence that you will still go to heaven when you die, that your sins will be forgiven, and that God still accepts you as his child while you carry on living in persistent sin, you most likely don't have a faith that will save you on the day of judgment. Do you know what I mean by that? People who know God, who have been saved by his grace, who have been given a new heart by the Spirit of God care about God's way. They care deeply about obeying God's word. Speaking of those who experience the promise of the New Birth, God's new covenant love that saves us, Ezekiel prophesies of them in 36:27, "And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules." That's a New Covenant promise. People who are saved don't look for ways to justify sin; they walk in God's ways. They are careful to obey God's word. They repent and turn away from sin. People who are saved don't ignore a guilty conscience; they see their guilty conscience as God's mercy calling them back to himself and to his excellent way. Unrepentant people, regardless of their past religious experiences or decisions, should take no comfort in the answer to the question - *Can you lose your salvation?*

Why is this an important question for us? One reason is because there appears to be a number of passages in the Bible that warn us about falling away from the faith. Falling away from the faith sounds like you once had it. Why would God warn Christians, people forgiven by God, about his coming judgment? Maybe it's because you can lose your salvation.

- Heb. 6:4-6 ~ "For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened... and then fallen away, to restore them again to repentance." So, if they can't be restored after they've been enlightened to see and believe God, does that mean they lost their salvation?
- 1 Tim 4:1 ~ "Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons." Well, to depart the faith means you were once in it. That might sound like losing salvation.
- Psalm 51:11 ~ "Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me." So, does this verse mean God would take a sinner and remove them from his presence? And take the Holy Spirit away from a person?

The Bible is filled with these kinds of warnings. Warning about falling away; warnings about God's judgment for sin. These warnings are given to Christians, to people who have been saved. So, how does that work, then? It seems like these warnings imply that you can lose your salvation. If you can't lose it, then how are these warnings genuine? Is God like a parent who starts counting to 3, but never gets past 2 ½ and 2 ¾ .

Why does God give warnings about falling away, warnings about God's judgment to people who have been saved? Here's why: to keep the faithful faithful. When people who are saved hear the warnings about falling away, when they see in the scriptures the fearful words about sliding back into sin, the Spirit of God quickens their conscience and arouses the fear of God in them to turn back to God. The warnings of falling away, the blunt words about God's judgment are the means by which God keeps us faithful. God is loving us with these warnings; God is keeping us close to him by honestly sharing to us the danger of turning away from him. It's how he keeps us in the fold.

If you're a follower of Jesus, you should hear the warnings of punishment for sin, being excluded from the life of God, separation from his presence and experience a quickening of your conscience to a renewed sensitivity to staying close to God. That's a promise of the New Covenant; it's one of the ways God causes us to walk in his ways and rules. We drift in our faith, don't we? There's no plateau in the Christian life; there's no staying the same. We need to grow and for us to grow we need to keep seeking the things that are above where Christ is. But we don't always, do we? We start drifting. We start growing comfortable in our sin. God himself, his word, his church begin feeling unimportant. Obedience isn't too high on the priority list. But when we hear the warnings, God's Spirit within us jumpstarts our spirit with a spark that says, "This isn't good! Turn back to God! Don't keep drifting away!" The warnings call us home; his warnings are a gift of grace to his children.

There are solid, biblical reasons to believe that you can not lose your salvation. If you have been saved, if God has forgiven you of your sin, if you've been regenerated (which means you have experienced the life-giving power of God saving you from your sins) you can not lose your salvation. Here are some of the key verses.

The first passage is John 10:25-30 (READ). Let me comment on a few key points.

- First, notice how Jesus is comparing his own to the Jews antagonizers. Jesus says, "You are not my own; you don't believe in me. My sheep, my followers, do believe me. They do hear my voice. I know them and they follow me" (that should give you some clarity of what true faith looks like).
- What Jesus does next is emphasize how secure his followers are in him. They will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. Why? Because the Father has given them to me and, guess what (how glorious!) no one is greater than him.

So, if God the Father has given you to God the Son you are secure. Your soul is safe forever. Why? Because no one is greater than the Father; nothing has the power, the resourcefulness, the trickery, to take you from your home with Jesus.

The next passage is Romans 8:28-30 (READ). Paul is trying to help suffering Christians, which is actually a very important point we will come back to in a minute. But the key portion of this passage for us is vs. 30. Notice the chain of events, or the links of God's work in a person's life. Those God predestined for salvation, he called to salvation. Those God called, he justified (meaning, he declared righteous... that word is often linked to our forgiveness of sin). And those God justified, he glorified. Now, that word *glorified* is a very important word for our consideration. The word glorified has to do with being perfectly changed by God when we see him face to face on the Day of the Lord. If you've been glorified, that means you've made it! It means you've endured to the end and are saved. Earlier in Romans 8 Paul says this in vs. 18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Look at the contrast: sufferings in this present time in comparison to what - the glory (the excellence, the splendor, the perfection we will have) that is to be revealed to us (well, when's that? When's the revelation of the Sons of God? In the end! In heaven!) So, to be glorified is to make it.

Here's the point: if you've been called (meaning, if God has summoned you to himself through the proclamation of the gospel), if you've been justified (meaning, if God has forgiven you of your sins) that means you will also be glorified (meaning, you will be ushered into heaven where your home will always be with Jesus). Now, just to underscore this reality - the reality that everyone who has been saved will make it, listen to what Paul says next in Romans 8:37-39 (READ). What's the point? Nothing, nothing, nothing can separate you from the love of God. That sounds a lot like nothing can snatch you out of the Father's hand to me.

These two verses alone provide very solid, biblical support and evidence that you can not lose your salvation. Now, I can imagine two objections possibly emerging in a person's

mind. Here's the first one: But Brian, I've been so unfaithful. When I look at my behavior even after I've been saved, I'm so ashamed. I've done so many bad things. I can't possibly still be forgiven; God won't save me still." The verse that comes to my mind is 2 Tim. 2:13 where we're told, "if we are faithless, he remains faithful - for he cannot deny himself." Friends, God's salvation of your soul, God's forgiveness of your sins, is not dependent on your faithfulness, it's dependent on God's faithfulness. We're not faithful; let's just admit it. While we will be made perfect, we're not perfect yet. The key issue is making sure we don't use our imperfections in this life as an excuse to keep sinning; to be unconcerned about obeying God's word. We've already said: followers of Jesus won't be ambivalent to their sins; it's a promise of our new covenant faith.

Secondly, maybe some of you are thinking, "But Brian, I've seen it. I had a friend like Trent. He believed in Jesus; we went to Bible studies together for years. I was there when he gave his life to Jesus; I remember his tears. But now, he doesn't follow Jesus. He's told me himself he doesn't believe in Christ anymore. It sure seems he's lost his salvation." Thankfully, God gave us a verse to help us understand this very thing. Turn in your Bibles to 1 John 2. 1 John is a remarkable little book because it helps us understand what authentic faith looks like. And in chapter 2, John is concerned with people who have rejected Christ, especially people who once "believed," but don't anymore. He tells us how to understand what happened with such people in vs. 19 (READ).

John is helping people scratching their heads about their friends; they used to follow Christ, they used to walk with him, but now they don't. What happened? The text is pretty clear, isn't it? They didn't lose anything. It's not that they had saving faith and that was lost somehow. No, they never had it. If they truly had saving faith, they would have continued; they would have remained in the faith. But because they didn't remain faithful to God, because they didn't endure, the conclusion is that they never had it.

This verse rebukes two of our common mistakes. The first common mistake is thinking that our friends lost faith. They truly did have it, but now they don't; therefore, they must have lost their salvation. We're learning today that you don't lose salvation.

Here's the second mistake we make: we think our friends still have saving faith. They initially had faith, but they don't walk with Jesus anymore. But because we know they had it at first and we know that people can't lose their salvation, therefore, they must still have it. That's not what the passage says either.

Do you know what the common error is with both of those mistakes? We're too sure we know that they received Christ. We think we've correctly discerned that they did receive Christ when we actually don't know the answer to that. We're so confident that because we saw someone check a box, or say a prayer, or cry some tears when they went forward during an altar call that we know they are saved. That's not the best evidence of saving faith. Put your thinking caps on, FBC: according to 1 John 2:19, what's the evidence a person has genuine,

authentic, saving faith? Do you see it? *Continuing!* If they were of us, they would have continued with us. According to his passage, continuing is the evidence of genuine faith.

Oh, I know that some of you struggle with doubt. You wonder and question if you're saved. You're afraid that you lost it or that you never really had it. But, look at you: here you are - continuing! You're striving for God! You're turning from sin! You're eager for more of God in your life. Your continuing on encourages me to say: you have the evidence of saving faith. You're continuing on in spite of your suffering, in spite of your fears, your doubts, and your confusion.

That's why this is an important question. I hinted at this before so let me answer it with the hopes that you will be encouraged: do you know why God has these verses in the Bible that assure us that you can't lose your salvation? It's because there is so much trouble, so much darkness, and so many challenges in our world that it's a wonder why all of us don't question if we've lost our salvation. Sin so easily entangles; Satan so frequently tempts; the world grinds at our faith every single day. Why wouldn't we wonder if we've lost our salvation; that actually sounds like the right conclusion to make. It is until we read in God's word, "Nobody can snatch you out of my hands; nothing can separate you from the Love of God. If you've been called, justified, sanctified, you will be glorified - you will make it!" God has a firm grip on your eternal life. I know some of you understand what I'm getting at. Life has been so hard, the challenges of faith are so overwhelming, and then on top of that, we've been unfaithful at times, which make us wonder, "Is God going to be through with me?" The answer to our question - can you lose your salvation? - is not about satisfying some intellectual curiosity; neither is it meant to comfort us in our sin. No, the goal of God is to keep us encouraged, hopeful, and resilient in our faith in the midst of all the challenges.