

CAN A PERSON LOSE THEIR ETERNAL SALVATION?

This is an ongoing debate, as to whether eternal salvation can be lost, or once a person is saved they are always saved.

There are scriptures that appear to be in contradiction regarding this subject. One thing seems certain, you cannot be saved today and lost tomorrow. If one can be lost it must follow a course of sin or disobedience against God.

First, following is a list of scriptures that argue for "once saved always saved":

Matthew 16: 18 *"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* The 'rock' here being the revelation in Peter's soul that Jesus is the Son of God. Hell's administration cannot destroy it therefore Peter could never be lost.

John 10: 28, 29 *"And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, who gave them me, is greater than all; --- no one is able to snatch them out of the hand of my Father."*

This would indicate that the sheep that hear his voice and follow Him are eternally secure.

Romans 4: 5 *"But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."* Verse 6 *"Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works."*

There is no doubt that we cannot come into salvation on the basis of our own works or righteousness, -it must be by grace through repentance. If not, none could be saved for it says in Romans 3: 23 *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Verse 24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."*

Now the question is what, after having received this salvation, we continue in a sinful life. Paul addresses this in Romans 6: 1,2 *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, who are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"*

This chapter and chapter 7 help the new Christian to overcome the sinful habit of our old life. It doesn't say what happens if we wilfully revert to a sin life of disobedience.

Following are scriptures that may indicate that we can lose our eternal salvation:

Hebrews 6: 4-8 *"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,*

5 And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,

6 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.

7 For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God:

8 But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned."

This scripture is strongly indicating that a person who was once enlightened, been a partaker of the Holy Spirit and had repented of their sins; but have fallen away (wilfully continued in a course of disobedience) are lost.

Revelation 3: 5s *"He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels."*

This shows that one whose name was written in the "book of life" could have it blotted out, therefore losing their salvation eternally.

These could be ones who were chosen from before the foundation of the world (see Revelation 17: 8 "whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world ---.")

There are those whose names are written in the book of life and those are not, but there are those who were written in and are no longer.

John 15: 2, 6 "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."

This passage shows that a person (branch) who has been in Him, the Vine, can be cut out and burned if it does not bear fruit. Is this not showing that one can lose their eternal salvation?

Matthew 25: 15 "And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey."

Note Verse 25 "And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine."

Result of not using his talent ---Verse 30 "And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The passage here would be a picture of each Christian receiving a talent or talents with which to trade spiritually. If they don't, the end seems to show that such a one loses their eternal salvation.

Matthew 25: 31-46 Indicates that works that follow salvation are essential for our final acceptance. The sheep on the right who serve the less fortunate are blessed by the Father with inheriting the eternal kingdom, and the goats on the left who show no works towards the needy are cursed with everlasting punishment.

Hebrews 10: 36-39 "36 For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.

37 For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.

38 Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

39 But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul."

This shows that a believer who once served Him can draw back into perdition or destruction. Belief can be lost through hardships, but to our eternal loss.

1 Peter 1: 6-9 bears this out. If we come through the fiery trial we are eternally rewarded by: "Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls."

James 2: 20-26 "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

25 Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?

26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."

There is no doubt that to receive Christ and his eternal life initially we cannot obtain it by our own righteousness or works. However, if we are neglectful in hearing (obeying) and following Christ we run the risk of losing, not only our eternal rewards, but our eternal salvation.

1 Corinthians 9: 27 "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

What does 'castaway' mean here? It would seem to say that even Paul could lose his eternal salvation if he fell back from following Christ.

If we can lose our salvation, then how do we view the earlier scriptures indicating that once saved we are eternally secure?

There is one thing very important that can be gained from this study, that is, we cannot afford to be light about our eternal salvation. If those who have been followers of Christ and are now backslidden say that they are eternally secure, I think they could be in for a terrible shock on judgement day.

It could be argued that such were never saved in the first place. That is possible, but there are scriptures quoted in this study showing one can be saved and later be lost.

The Father's hand is strong and none can pluck a person from that hand, but a person can choose to let go of it. The Father never overrides our choices, he regards highly a person's free will. But note that it is the sheep that hear His voice who won't be plucked out of His hand.

Regarding our acceptance, it is always in Christ, never through our own righteousness, but we have to stay in Christ to be acceptable before God.

Yes, we are justified by faith, never by our works, but we have to stay in faith. Believing is active and ongoing. That is why Peter says that the end of our faith is the saving of our souls.

If the Matthew 16 scripture does not mean that because Peter confessed Jesus was the Son of God he could never be destroyed, it means that the gates of Hell can never destroy the foundation stone Jesus Christ. If we are on that stone we are safe.

by Pastor John Walton

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