

CAN TRUE SALVATION BE LOST?

(If a Christian Leaves the Lord is He Still a Christian?)

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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.” (John 10:27-28)

His Apostle John wrote 60 years later,

“They went away from us because they were not really one of us. If they were really one of us, they would have stayed with us. Their leaving showed that none of them were one of us.” (1 John 2:19)

When we give Jesus Christ our sins to forgive (faith) and our lives to change and control (repentance) we are saved (Acts 2:38). The word “save” means to deliver or rescue. When *Peter* was drowning he cried, “Lord save me!” (Matthew 14:30) We speak of how a *fireman* saves (*delivers*) someone from a burning building. Salvation involves three great deliverances. First, we are forgiven by God. This is deliverance from sin’s *penalty* (**justification**). The Bible says:

“The wicked will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. The immoral / idol worshippers / adulterers / homosexuals / thieves / drunkards / slanderers. **And some of you were like that!** But, you were **washed**, you were **sanctified**, you were **justified**, in the name of the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 6:11)

We are changed into people who desire and truly try to live for God. This is deliverance from sin’s controlling *power* (**regeneration**). It is called “**dying to sin**” as a way of life (Romans 6); a “**resurrection**” to new life (Romans 6); a new “**creation**” (2 Corinthians 5:17); receiving a “**new heart**” (Ezekiel 36:26); “**conversion**” (Repentance and Faith / Acts 3:19); receiving a “**childlike spirit**” (Matthew 18:3); being “**born again**” (John 3) and “**regeneration**” (Titus 3:5). One little boy said after accepting Christ, “Either the whole world has changed or I have.” W. T. Conner says our character and fundamental moral disposition is changed. Love for God and man becomes the ruling factor in life. We still sin, but are so changed that we can never rest again in a life of sin. Third we go to heaven when we die. This is deliverance from sin’s *presence* (**glorification**).

The Question

Christians are divided over whether or not a person who receives salvation can lose it, either by returning to a life controlled by sins or by losing his or her faith in Christ. The Methodist Church, relying on many Scriptures, believes that a person can make such choices and forfeit

salvation (1 Corinthians 15:2 / Hebrews 6, etc). Most Pentecostal churches go a step further and teach that every time a Christian sins he or she loses salvation and has to be saved again by repentance and faith. No major Protestant denomination, including the Methodists, agree with this

Presbyterians and Baptists see salvation as the work of God in us that can never be undone. The life He gives is eternal and we have the promise that He will keep us (John 10). We may sin like David (2 Samuel 11-12); but because of our converted nature it will break our hearts and the guilt and shame will drive us to God in repentance and faith (Psalm 32 and 51). We receive “forgiveness”, but it is family forgiveness from our heavenly Father. Jesus teaches Christians to pray, “Our Father” before praying, “forgive us our trespasses” (Matthew 6). When David came back to the Father, he did not pray for salvation to be restored, but asked for the “**joy of salvation**” to be restored. They also believe with John that people who leave Christianity were “**never part of it**” to begin with (1 John 2:19).

Our Response

When good and great denominations disagree we must be wise enough to see truth on both sides. As I, like you, make my way through the trials and temptations of life; I know that I need to keep on believing in Jesus; to keep on confessing my sins; and to keep on asking God to help me overcome them (1 John 1:7-2:3 / 1 Corinthians 15:2). This is not just something I *have* to do, but in my heart of hearts *want* to do because of the change God worked in me at conversion.

A man asked his pastor, “Does once saved always saved, mean I can sin all I want to and still go to heaven?” The pastor answered, “Yes, it does.” Then he said, “How much do you want to sin?” When the man answered, “*I don’t want to sin at all.*” the pastor said, “I don’t either. That’s the secret. We who are saved sin *more* than we want to.”

That’s the key. Christians are free to sin and sometimes want to do it and then do it. Throw a cat in the mud and he hates it, wants out, and cleans itself for days. Throw a hog in the mud and it is in “hog heaven.” A Christian in sin is like a cat in the mud. There is very little difference between Christians who disagree over this. True Christians live lives of continual repentance and faith. Some of us believe God will always enable us to desire and do this; others believe they “have” to do it. The important thing is that we do it.

(For more on this subject and all the teachings about salvation see our Pastor’s book, “Salvation – Why Jesus Came” in the *Bookstore* section of this site.)