

Is It Possible to Lose Your Salvation?

The modern grace message would tell us that, as believers in Jesus, nothing we do (or do not do) can ever change our standing before God—even willful, persistent, unrepentant sin and unbelief. Numerous Scriptures challenge that view (see, for instance, John 15:6; 1 Cor. 15:2; 2 Tim. 2:12 and Heb. 10:26.) But does that mean we cannot be secure in our salvation? Absolutely not!

But rather than asking if it is possible to “lose” your salvation, let’s ask the question, “Is it possible for you to walk away from God? As a follower of Jesus, do you still have a free will? Can you still make choices? If so, can you choose to deny Jesus and choose a life of sin instead?”

When viewed from this angle, it should be obvious that the answer is, “Yes, I have still have a free will, and I can still make choices as a believer, so theoretically it would be possible for me to deny the Lord and abandon Him.”

You might say, “But I want to live for the Lord all the days of my life. I’m just afraid I could mess up in some way and lose my salvation.”

Well then, let’s focus on that word “lose” for a moment. There’s a reason I prefer not to use it.

Normally, you lose something accidentally, like losing your car keys, your glasses or a business card. “Where did I put those keys? I can’t find them anywhere.”

That is not the way things are with God and salvation. You don’t simply “lose” your salvation, as if it were as easy as that. God has promised to keep us, assuring us that nothing can separate us from His love (Rom. 8:31–39) and that no one

can pluck us out of His hand (John 10:28–29). He is the author and the finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2), and He who began a good work in us will see it through to completion (Phil. 1:6).

Jesus is our Savior; we do not save ourselves. And just as we didn't get saved by accident, we can't lose our salvation by accident.

This means that if you want to live for the Lord, you have nothing to worry about in terms of "losing" your salvation. He will keep you, help you, empower you, guide you, correct you, and deliver you until you see Him face-to-face.

Think of it like being a passenger on a plane that is guaranteed to reach its destination overseas. Unless you choose to do something crazy and open the emergency door and jump, you will arrive at your destination safely.

It's the same thing with salvation.

The "plane" you are flying in is manned by a perfect pilot, and there is nothing that can bring this plane down—not enemy fire, not bad weather, not anything—and you can enjoy the ride without fear of crashing. If you choose to do something crazy and walk away from the Lord—in the case of the plane analogy, open the emergency door and jump—then you choose to forfeit your salvation. But as long as you want to reach your destination and stay on the plane, you have nothing whatsoever to worry about. In fact, you can even enjoy the ride.

You might say, "But that's what scares me. If I have any choice in the matter, then I could be lost forever."

The fact is, you do have a choice, and there is not a verse in the Bible that says that once we become believers, we do not have a free will in Jesus and are no longer capable of making spiritual decisions. If that were the case, the entire New Testament would make no sense at all, since the Word constantly calls us to make choices as believers. But God has

promised to keep you, so if you put your trust in Him rather in yourself, you have nothing to worry about.

Now, you may be thinking, "But the modern grace message makes me feel so much more secure, since it tells me that no matter what I do, no matter how many times I sin, even if I deny the Lord, He will not let me go."

Perhaps it makes you feel more secure, but what you're hearing is not true. That's what makes the message so dangerous: It exaggerates wonderful truths about God's love, kindness and long-suffering and goes beyond what Scripture says.

Why in the world would you want to take comfort by believing in something false? That would be like going to a doctor who says, "You are now cancer-free, and that cancer will never come back," only to die one year later from cancer because the doctor misled you. What kind of help is that?

Some say, "But once you have eternal life, it cannot be cut short. And once God makes you His child, you can't cease to be His child."

But that's not what the Word says (which I will illustrate shortly), and we must base our beliefs on the Scriptures (not our logic), letting the Word speak for itself.

To repeat: Our Father has given us wonderful promises, and our salvation is not some flimsy thing that can be found one day and lost the next, nor is our salvation dependent on our ability to "stay saved."

It is God who is at work in us, and He will finish what He started. He will hear your cry for help, He will have mercy on you in your weakness, and He will forgive 100 times a day if you come to Him for cleansing. But He will not keep you against your own will, which is why the Lord gives us so many warnings in the New Testament.

- And you, who were formerly alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and blameless and above reproach in His sight, if you continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and are not removed from the hope of the gospel, which you have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant (Col. 1:21–23).
- For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than to have known it and then turn back from the holy commandment that was delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb, “The dog returns to his own vomit,” and “the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mud” (2 Pet. 2:20–22).
- Therefore we should be more attentive to what we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken by angels was true, and every sin and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation, which was first declared by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him? (Heb. 2:1–3)
- Be attentive, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, and you depart from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence firmly to the end, while it is said: “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the

rebellion" (Heb. 3:12-15).

The New Testament authors had no trouble issuing strong warnings to believers, sometimes putting these warnings side by side with God's glorious promises. Both are true, and both should be taken to heart. That's why Hebrews 12:2 (NET) can speak of Jesus as "the pioneer and perfecter of our faith," while Hebrews 12:25–29 can warn us about the dangers of refusing to obey God's voice. In the same way, Philippians 2:12–13 (MEV) put our responsibility side by side with God's responsibility, saying, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but so much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For God is the One working in you, both to will and to do His good pleasure."

To help put all this in perspective, let me give you some further background. Within evangelical circles, there are three main beliefs concerning the possibility of a child of God forfeiting his or her salvation, and countless thousands of pages have been written debating the question. These are the three main views:

1. The teaching commonly known as "once saved, always saved" (OSAS) states that once you are truly saved, no matter how you live or what you do, even denying Jesus and turning your back on Him, you cannot lose your salvation. Although your sin might shorten your life or lessen your future rewards, you will still be eternally saved.
2. The teaching called "perseverance of the saints" states that a true believer will not ultimately turn away from the Lord, and therefore if you claim to be born-again and die in sin, denying the Lord, you were never truly saved.
3. The final teaching doesn't have one specific name associated with it, but it states that a true believer can choose to apostasize, reject God's grace and forfeit

salvation. Although we are secure in Jesus, if we ultimately reject Him, we forfeit our secure standing.

Those holding to the first view point to verses like Romans 8:28–39, which state that nothing that can separate us from God's love, or John 10:26–29, which state that Jesus' sheep have eternal life and no one can pluck them out of His hand.

Those holding to the second viewpoint emphasize those same passages but also point to verses such as 1 John 2:19, which states that those who left the church were never really part of it, or 1 John 3:6, which states that those who continue to live in sin have never really known the Lord.

Those holding to the third viewpoint look to verses such as Colossians 1:21–23, which state that our salvation is assured if we persevere in faith to the end, or 2 Peter 2:20–22, which state that it would be better never to have known the Lord than to know Him and then turn away from Him.

For the most part, modern grace (also called hyper-grace) teachers emphatically hold to the doctrine of "once saved, always saved" (viewpoint number one), although some seem to hold to the doctrine of "perseverance of the saints" (viewpoint number two) making comments such as, "It is totally impossible for a true Christian to reject Christ, since true Christians are one in spirit with Jesus. If someone claims to be a follower of Jesus and then denies Him and chooses a life of sin and rebellion, that person was never saved, no matter what they claim." (This is a paraphrase of some common hyper-grace teachings. You can find exact quotes in my book, *Hyper-Grace*.)

Of course, there is an irony when modern grace teachers hold to views like perseverance of the saints, since it ultimately puts the emphasis back on the believer's "performance." In other words, "If I claim to be a believer and I'm living right then I'm saved, but if I claim to be a believer and have

turned away from God, I guess I was never saved.” This is obviously the last thing intended by hyper-grace teachers, but again, it is the logical conclusion to statements like the one just quoted.

How then do we sort things out?

It’s really very simple.

God’s promises are to believers—to those who want to follow the Lord and whose lives belong to Him—not to rebels who have chosen sin and rejected His lordship. Put another way, there is not a single promise anywhere in the Bible that God will bless us with eternal life if we ultimately reject Him and choose rebellion, and we give people false assurance when we make that claim. (In other words, viewpoint number one is not true.)

Find me one verse anywhere in the Bible—just one—that gives assurance of eternal life and blessing to an unrepentant rebel who is living in willful, persistent sin, denying the Lord in an ongoing, hardened way, and I will invite you to join me on national radio or TV and tell the whole world that I was wrong. Just one verse!

Without a doubt, you’ll find many verses promising mercy and forgiveness to those who turn back (thank God) and you’ll find many verses assuring us of God’s keeping power, but note clearly that the promises are given to Jesus’ sheep—to those who know His voice and follow Him (John 10:27)—rather than to those who reject His voice and walk away from Him. In short, viewpoints number two or three could be right, but number one cannot.

So, on a practical level, it comes down to this: If you have put your trust in the Lord and desire to serve Him, He has given you absolute assurance that He will never leave or forsake you, that He will keep you safe to the end, and that no one and nothing can separate you from His love. Rest secure

in Him. He is the author and finisher of your faith (Heb. 12:2).

But if you believe that since you were once saved—even if you reject Him and live in unrepentant sin—you are still saved, then you have deceived yourself and are in danger of falling under God's judgment. (That's why Jesus and Paul often warned us not to be deceived; see, for example, Matt. 24:4-5 and 1 Cor. 6:9-10.) If you walked away from the Lord, either you were never saved or you have forfeited your salvation, so turn back to Him now, knowing He is quick to forgive, that He loves to show mercy and that He can restore you to Himself with life, hope and purpose through Jesus. To repeat: The promise of eternal life is only to Jesus' sheep, those who know His voice and follow Him.

But why would we ever want to walk away from Him? Everything we need is found in Him, and in Him alone is life—true, abundant life—so drink deeply of His incredible love. Be assured that He who began the good work in you will bring it to completion (Phil. 1:6). And if you find yourself playing games with sin and growing distant from the Lord, get sober, get serious and turn back to the cross. The cleansing blood of Jesus will never lose its power. {eoa}

(Adapted from Michael L. Brown, *The Grace Controversy: Answers to Twelve Common Questions*.)