

Is Someone You Love Not Walking With the Lord?

If someone you know or love deeply has professed Christ but now isn't walking with the Lord, you *never* have enough information to say, "They are not a Christian anymore." You don't know that—no matter how bizarre or painful their behavior. That's drawing a conclusion.

All you can do with certainty is make the observation, "They are not walking with the Lord." You can make the observation but not draw the conclusion. That's because, as Scripture says, "Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7, ESV).

God has an altogether different way of thinking about His sheep when they go astray. The idea is simple: No one who has believed in Christ can ever fall so far that the hand of God will not rescue and restore him. Jesus put it this way:

"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. ... And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day" (John 6:37-39).

Theologians call this concept "the perseverance of the saints." Or sometimes "eternal security." It's the doctrine some of us refer to as "once saved, always saved." The Westminster Confession of Faith explains the details of perseverance like this:

"They, whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.

"This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own

free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ; the abiding of the Spirit, and the seed of God within them; and the nature of the covenant of grace: from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof.”

That doesn’t mean we’re immune from falling into sin. Nor does it mean we’ll get a pass on paying a David-like penalty for those sins. The confession goes on:

“Nevertheless, they may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalence of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins; and, for a time, continue therein: whereby they incur God’s displeasure, and grieve His Holy Spirit, come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts, have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded; hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves.”

For these reasons, we must *never, ever* give up on anyone. We simply do not know what God will do or when. So do not grow weary and give up. Hang in there. Keep the faith. Trust God. What else can we do? God wants that person to love Him more than we ever will.

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