



CAN I LOSE MY SALVATION?
Sermon preached by Pastor C. John Steer
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No. 4: Hot Potatoes
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:2-9

Today's Hot Potato is **CAN I LOSE MY SALVATION?**
Christians have been tossing this one back and forth since the earliest days of the Christian faith. It is not hard to understand why.

Here is **THE PROBLEM.**

I can illustrate it best with a story.

When I was in high school I had a good friend I'll call Tom. We were both in the church youth group.

Tom mostly came for the girls. But one summer he joined a mission team with Operation Mobilization.

He came back a changed person.

All he wanted to do was to read his Bible and share his faith. Frankly we thought he was a bit stuffy especially as he was rather judgmental of the rest of us who were still interested in carnal things like soccer and parties.

Tom went off to college and became a leading light in his InterVarsity group. He graduated with a degree in engineering but turned down a good job and instead went to Pakistan as a missionary. There he chose one of the most dangerous cities in which to serve God. Periodically he returned to our home church and reported on the great things that God was doing.

He met a Swedish girl who was equally passionate about Christ and they started a family.

Then news reached us that shattered our world.

Tom has renounced Christianity and had become a Muslim.

He left his wife and children and wanted nothing more to do with his home church. We were all devastated.

The head of his mission, who was an internationally known Christian statesman, became personally involved and we hoped that Tom would change his mind. But he didn't. Tragically he died a few years later without ever coming back to faith.

I expect most of us know people like Tom.

Folk who were once committed Christians who are now atheists or followers of some other faith.

Based on experiences like these it is easy to say, "Yes, of course, people can lose their salvation. You see it all the time."

But as Christians we don't base our doctrine on stories but on scripture. Yet even here we have a problem for there seem to be verses in the Bible which support the view that we can lose our salvation while other verses suggest we can't.

Let me give you some examples. Here are some texts that indicate that we can lose our salvation.

Ezekiel tells us, **"If a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits sin and does the same detestable things the wicked man does, will he live? None of the righteous things he has done will be remembered. Because of the unfaithfulness he is guilty of and because of the sins he had committed he will die."** (Ezekiel 18:24)

Then there is the parable of the vine and branches in John 15 where Jesus says, **"I am the true vine, and my father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit . . . if anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned."** (John 15:2 & 6)

Then there is that famously difficult passage in Hebrews chapter 6 which tells us, **"It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace."** (Hebrews 6:4-6)

In addition to this Paul tells of Hymenaeus and Philetus who departed from the truth and Demas who went back to the world. Then there is the tragic case of Judas Iscariot one of Jesus' own disciples.

Set against these are passages which teach that we cannot lose our salvation. So we find God promising in Jeremiah, **"I will make an everlasting covenant with them; I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me."** (Jeremiah 32:40)

Paul tells us, **"For God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted**

**as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.”
(Ephesians 1:4-5)**

In other words we are the object of God’s eternal love.

As a result of this confusion two different and opposing theological systems have developed.

Arminian theology says “Yes we can lose our salvation.” Reformed theology says, “No we can’t.”

This leads us to **THE CHALLENGE.**

This challenge is thrown down by both sides.

Reformed people say that Arminians are consigning Christians to **a life of uncertainty.**

To say “yes we can lose our salvation,” means we will never know where we stand with God.

We will have no assurance.

Every time we sin we will wonder if we are now outside the grace of God.

The Arminians counterclaim that Reformed folk are encouraging Christians to **a life of impurity.**

If we think that we can never lose our salvation than we can live any way we like. We can ignore God and his commands. There is no incentive to strive for a godly life.

There is truth in both these observations.

Some Christians have lived with dreadful uncertainty because they thought that at any moment they could lose their salvation.

There was a fellow who wanted something very, very badly. The thought came to his mind, “I would give my soul to the devil if I could have this one thing.”

Well he did get it and ever since that moment he has wondered if he has lost his salvation because of a thought.



Constantine was the first Roman Emperor to become a Christian. But he lacked assurance of his salvation.

He was afraid that any of his sins might separate him from God.

So he delayed his baptism until just before he died because he hoped his baptism would wash away his past and he didn’t want to

risk messing up again.

He thought he could lose his salvation with a sin.



A man called Bill Hyatt was recently in the news for refusing to wear the number 666.

The company where he worked in Georgia asked workers to wear stickers showing the number of days since the plant’s last accident.

As the figure climbed towards the Bible's mark of the beast, Bill told his boss he would be condemned to hell for wearing the number. As a result he was fired. Bill thought he could lose his salvation over a number.

But there are also Christians who live very carnal lives because they don't think it matters.

Their reservation for their mansion in heaven is booked and the contract is unbreakable. So never mind what God says let's have fun.

Some years ago I heard a lecture on this question, Can I lose my salvation? given by an eminent theologian.

He made the point that about 90 percent of the biblical passages teach that Christians are eternally secure while 10 percent teach that they are not.

He suggested this was God's way of keeping us on our toes so we do not presume on God's grace. I am not sure I agree with him but it is an intriguing perspective.

We have looked at the problem and the challenge of this question Can I Lose My Salvation?

Now it is time to consider **THE SOLUTION.**

To arrive at this we need to **dissect our conversion.**

In high school biology class we dissected frogs to understand how they work.

So now we need to dissect our conversion to see how it took place.

There are three parts of a conversion.

These are faith, regeneration and salvation.

How would you arrange them in order?

Some would answer that faith leads to regeneration (spiritual life) which in turn results in our salvation.

So the process looks like this: Faith → Regeneration → Salvation

Here faith is something we initiate.

We put our trust in Christ.

The act of faith is dependent on us and leads to God giving us spiritual life.

This regeneration ensures that we are saved.

Now if this is how our conversion takes place then it is fair to conclude that we can lose our salvation.

We made the initial decision to trust Christ so later on we can change our mind and make the decision not to trust him or to trust in some other deity.

Others would diagram their conversion differently.

They would say that first God must regenerate us.

He must impart spiritual life to us.

Once he has made us aware of our spiritual condition we then put our faith in Christ and this leads to salvation. So now the process looks like this:

Regeneration → Faith → Salvation

In this case the salvation is God's. He initiates it. He causes us to become spiritually alive. Therefore we can't lose our salvation because it is not ours to lose in the first place.

So which of these two analyses is correct?

To answer we have to ask what sin has done to us?

Has sin left us very sick and on life support but not quite dead so we can still move towards Christ?

Or has sin killed us so there is no life in us whatsoever?

Well what does the Bible say?

Romans informs us that, **"The wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23)**

Paul tells the Ephesians **"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sin." (Ephesians 2:1)**

A helpful picture of how our salvation takes place is seen in the story of Lazarus.

Lazarus was Jesus' friend. He died and had been in his grave for four days before Jesus arrived in Bethany. Jesus marched up to Lazarus' tomb and shouted, **"Lazarus come out!" (John 11:43)**



Now is that a reasonable instruction to give to a dead man? If you say "yes" can I encourage you to go over to Grandview Cemetery and try it. You may want to choose a day when there is nobody about.

The answer obviously is "no".

Lazarus is dead. He cannot hear Jesus' instructions and even if he could he has no ability to follow them.

Yet to everyone's amazement Lazarus does come staggering out of the tomb still wrapped in his grave clothes.

What's happened? Prior to the command of Jesus God has given Lazarus life so that he is both able to hear the command of Jesus and he has the ability to obey it.

Lazarus exercised his will to come to Jesus but it was only possible because God had first regenerated him.



A similar thing happens when the gospel is presented to an unsaved person. They are incapable of hearing, understanding or obeying the good news.

Even if they could, they have no desire to because their hearts are hardened to spiritual truths.

But the Holy Spirit regenerates them and gives them spiritual life so that they are now able to exercise faith in Jesus for salvation.

It is because of this spiritual reality that I would answer the question "Can I lose my salvation?" with a resounding NO. The Christian is secure in God's keeping and there are five great reasons for this.

First **the Christian is safe because of the purpose of the Father.**

Paul writes, **“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified, and those he justified, he also glorified.” (Romans 8:29-30)**

Here is the golden chain of God’s sovereignty.

The first link is foreknowledge, the second predestination, the third calling, the fourth justification and the fifth glorification.

None of those links can be broken for God’s purpose is that not a single one of his people can be lost.

Notice that word “glorified” is in the past tense.

As far as God is concerned the final state of our glorification has already been achieved in the purposes of God.

We are a Christian not because of something we did but because of something God decided.

We tend to think that our salvation is predicated on our decision for Christ.

But actually it is based on God’s decision for us.

Second **the Christian is safe because of the power of the Father.**

This was brought out in our scripture reading as Paul tells the Corinthians that his preaching was,

“A demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.” (1 Corinthians 2:4-5)

Peter makes the same point when he talks about those, **“Who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.” (1 Peter 1:5)**

That word “power” has military connotations.

It speaks of a sentry standing guard.

The idea is that God’s people are securely protected.

That is what God is doing for us now.

He is guarding our salvation.

He is the sentry who never sleeps.

So here is the question.

Whose power is stronger, God’s or ours?

If our salvation depends on us then we can lose it.

But it doesn’t. Our salvation is kept by the power of God.

Third **the Christian is safe because of the promise of the Son.**

Jesus promises, **“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.” (John 10:28-29)**



Donald Barnhouse was a famous preacher in Philadelphia. He loved to say of this text that Jesus didn't claim "I give them six months of life." Rather he declared "I give them eternal life." That means a life that is never ending and that is why we shall never perish.

So how reliable do we think are the promises of Jesus? Does he keep some of them, most of them, or all of them? I think we can stake our eternal souls on the word of Christ.

Fourth **the believer is safe because of the prayer of the Son.**

In his highly priestly prayer Jesus begs his Father, **"Protect them** (that's his disciples) **by the power of your name."** (John 17:11)

Not only did Jesus pray for us before he went to the cross he is interceding for us now.

The letter of Hebrews tells us, **"He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them."** (Hebrews 7:25)

Since Jesus returned to heaven he has had one main job. That is praying for his people.

There is a wonderful example of Jesus protecting his people through prayer. Just before he went to the cross Jesus informed Simon Peter that Peter would sin by denying Christ repeatedly. (John 13:28)

His words were, **"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."** (Luke 22:31-32) In that instance Jesus foretold Peter's denial but he also foretold his recovery. It was all because Jesus prayed for Peter.

Fifth **the Christian is safe is because of the presence of the Spirit.**

Jesus said, **"I will ask the Father and he will give you another counselor to be with you forever."** (John 14:16) Notice that word "forever".

The Holy Spirit does not come to be with us temporarily or until we mess up but "forever".

Perhaps we ask, "But cannot we grieve the Spirit?"

We certainly can. But while the Spirit can be grieved he cannot be grieved away. We can also quench the Spirit but we cannot extinguish the Spirit for he is with us forever.

The Holy Spirit enters our life when we put our faith in Christ. One of the first things he does is to seal it.

Paul tells the Christians in Ephesus **"Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our**

**inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession."
(Ephesians 1:13-14)**

A seal was used to signify ownership.

Ephesus was a timber center. People would come from all over Turkey for the timber sales.

Having made their purchase they would stamp their seal of ownership on their property.

It was an indelible mark.

They couldn't carry these huge logs with them so they left the timber in Ephesus and returned home.

At some time in the future they made arrangements to come and collect it. Nobody else could take it because the seal was there.

In the same way when God saves us he puts his seal upon us. He leaves us in the world, but we are not our own for we have been bought with a price.

One day Jesus will come and claim us.

In the meantime no one else can have us for we belong to Christ.

The wonder of our salvation is that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are totally committed to save us.

Nothing can frustrate their purpose.

We may slip and have our battles.

We may even do terrible things like deny Christ as Peter did. But Jesus prays for us and the Holy Spirit restores us and nothing can pluck us from the Father's hands. Together the Trinity will keep us strong to the end.

This doctrine is called the perseverance of the saints.

It declares that if we have saving faith we will never lose it and if we lose it we never had it.

John explains, **"They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us they would have remained with us, but their going showed that none of them belonged to us."** (1 John 2:19)

The doctrine of perseverance does not rest on our ability to persevere. Rather it rests on the promise of God to keep us. Paul writes to the Philippians, **"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ."** (Philippians 1:6)

But what do we say about people like my friend Tom? Rather than making a judgment on them we let scripture speak.

Perhaps they were never a Christian at all.

We remember that Jesus warned that there would be those who would sprout up and appear genuine or awhile but they would eventually fall away because they had no roots in the soil of God's grace.

Others are Christians who backslide in their faith, in which case they are still a believer.

They haven't lost their salvation although they may have lost their communion with Christ.

What do we do with those passages that seem to suggest we can lose our salvation?

We interpret them in the light of the full counsel of God. We remember that the story of the vine and the branches is a parable and we have to be careful in drawing our theology from a story.

The main point is that we are to abide in Christ.

The passage in Hebrews 6 is a very difficult one and scholars continue to wrestle with it but it does not say that the apostate person was ever born again.

Above all we must remember that salvation is not ours to lose. It was God's idea. It is his gift to us and he has promised that we cannot lose it.

So let's make this all wonderfully practically. Most of us wonder at some time if we are really saved. We can't depend on our feelings. It is the fact of God's word that matters. Have we put our trust in Christ? Do we believe in our heart that he is the Son of God and our Savior?

At our better moments do we long to live for him?

If so, then we are eternally saved.

Perhaps we haven't been living like a Christian. Life has got busy and God is not a priority. We may have done something we are desperately ashamed of.

But this does not mean that we have lost our salvation. We still belong to Christ. We can come back to him today and start living as a disciple of his.

But maybe we have never trusted Christ and so we do not have his gift of salvation. But is there a longing in your heart for it?

If so who do you think put it there? It was God himself. He started the work of regeneration.

You are like Lazarus dead in the tomb of your sin but God has quickened you so that you can now hear the invitation of Jesus to come to him.

You could stay in the tomb but why on earth would you want to?

Your very desire to be saved is evidence of the grace of God. You can respond now by trusting in Christ. You will receive his gift of salvation which is yours for all eternity.