

Once Saved Always Saved?

Table of Contents

- Once Saved Always Saved: Is It True?
- Is There Any Scriptural Evidence That We Can Give Away our Salvation?
- But Doesn't God Promise to Keep Us?
- Won't This Produce An Unscriptural Insecurity?
- OK, So How Does a Person Get Out? (Of Salvation)
- So, What's the Application to Us Christians?
- To Sum It Up

Once Saved Always Saved: Is It True?

Please note that the purpose of this short paper is not argumentative, polemic, or intended to induce fear, guilt or condemnation. It's a warning primarily. It's also an attempt at a scriptural response to the often asked question, "Can the Christian fall away from his salvation and thus be in peril of going to hell?"

I'll try to be objective if you will!

Let's all do our best to just read what the Bible says and take it at face value. Let's compare Scripture with Scripture and try not to rely primarily upon a few pat-answer-proof-texts. Let's do our best to obtain the big picture - "the whole counsel of God" on the subject.

It might help you to know that the doctrine known as "Eternal Security" (or Perseverance) is most commonly associated with a system called "Calvinism" (named after its theologian founder, John Calvin). Calvin proposed a five point system of theology which spells out the acrostic T.U.L.I.P. which stands for:

Total Depravity
Unconditional Election
Limited Atonement
Irrresistible Grace
Perseverance

Total Depravity means that we humans are so totally sinful and decadent that we're unable to even respond to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit to be saved. (This is the only one of these points with which I partially agree.)

Unconditional Election means that God "elected" some to be saved; and all those not elected, He chose in eternity past to be damned.

Limited Atonement means that Jesus only died for those He elected to be saved. His blood was only shed for them and not for the non-elect.

Irrresistible Grace means that since man is totally depraved and unable to come for salvation, and God has elected certain ones to come, and

Jesus died only for those; then it follows that those He chose to be saved can do nothing but come. In other words, when God draws the elect, His grace is “irresistible” and the elect cannot resist.

Perseverance means that if you’re one of the elect, one of those for whom Jesus died, one of those He drew irresistibly, then, once you’re *in*, your obviously not getting *out!* You have “eternal security” since you’re part of the few God chose, paid for, and drew to Himself.

From my vantage point then, the doctrine of “eternal security” is the final link in a fundamentally faulty chain. It is a building standing on an untrue foundation. Although “Total Depravity” can be proven from the Bible, the others are, in my opinion, not at all biblical. (That will have to be addressed in another writing).

First we’ll look at the passages in which God promises to keep us from falling. Then we’ll show what the Bible has to say about the peril of falling away. After that we’ll warn you about the problem of a potential insecurity which could arise from belief in the possibility of walking away from Christ. We’ll need, after that, to discuss how one gets out of the Kingdom after first getting in. Finally, we’ll show the practical application to us as Christians (i.e. What’s it all mean to us?)

IS THERE ANY SCRIPTURAL EVIDENCE THAT WE CAN GIVE OUR SALVATION AWAY?

These passages are not designed to undermine one's sense of security in his salvation. They point us to persevere in doing *our* part (saving faith), while trusting that God will continue to do *His* part. Let's look at them one at a time.

- 2 Peter 2:20-22 *If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud."*

Peter is talking about people who have “escaped the corruption of the world by knowing” Jesus. These sound an awfully lot like Christians to me! Of them he says they become “again entangled” in the world, “overcome by sin,” “turn their backs” on God, and are therefore “worse off” than before they came to Christ in the first place. My question is, how bad off is the unbeliever at his death? Hell is pretty *bad off*, wouldn't you say? How can a believer who can't give his salvation away be “worse off” than he was as an unbeliever? Could his punishment be greater? If so, how can a person whose room in heaven is secure be worse off than one in hell? Peter is warning Christians about turning their backs on God lest they lose their reward and receive instead a greater judgment in hell for their greater knowledge!

- James 5:19-20 *My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.*

James is talking to “brothers” about brothers (he says, “if *one of you* should wander”). The wanderer, he says, is in danger of being renamed a “sinner” (instead of a “brother”) and is said to be worthy of “death.” Restoring the fallen brother saves him from such a plight. It doesn't

stand to reason that James is talking about a backsliden believer simply physically dying prematurely. It seems clear that James is referring to eternal death, not just a physical.

- Hebrews 6:4-6 *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.*

It's important to note that the entire book of Hebrews is written to warn Jewish Christians who are in peril of leaving Christ to go back to the world and their Judaism. Repeatedly the author says, "hold on," "hold firmly," "don't throw away your confidence," "persevere" (3:6, 14, 4:14; 10:23, 35-39). You'll be happy to know also that this great Epistle also has many references to God's faithfulness. This indicates that He will be there for you if you'll go to Him for help in persevering. He's always faithful to do His part. But it doesn't mean that no matter what you do with our walk with Christ that He'll take you to heaven. You still have a responsibility to "persevere."

Whatever the author means by being "brought back to repentance," at least it's clear that it is possible to "fall away." (My thought on this is that he's saying that it's impossible for these to re-repent because they are *unwilling to do so*. The thought is that they can't receive the benefits of repentance while living in an unrepentant state.) Nevertheless, the passage does clearly show that a person who is a Christian (one who has "been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, and shared in the Holy Spirit...") can find themselves in a "fallen" state.

- Hebrews 10:26-31 *If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son*

of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace. For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

This passage states even more clearly the danger of the Christian walking away from Christ. Again, the author of Hebrews is writing to Christians about Christians. He describes them as having “received the knowledge of the truth.” His point is that it is possible for such a person to “deliberately keep on sinning,” and thereby merit only a “fearful expectation of judgment and raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.” Does that sound to you that we can be saved by Jesus, proceed to live anyway we want from that point, and then have no danger of going to hell when we die?

- Revelation 3:5 *He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.*

These are the words of Jesus through the Apostle John to the Christians in the city of Sardis. He makes it clear that it is incumbent upon them to “overcome” so as not to get their names “blotted out” of the book of life. Now, if it’s impossible to lose one’s reward of heaven after becoming a Christian and get one’s name “blotted out” of the book, why would Jesus (the Keeper of the book Himself!) warn us of that very possibility?

Revelation 22:19 *And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.*

To my knowledge, no one has a “share in the tree of life and in the holy city” who hasn’t been given that share by receiving Jesus as their Savior in the first place. Again, why make the threat of losing one’s share if it’s impossible to do so?

- 2 Timothy 2:11-13 *Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.*

Note the all-important “*if*’s” here which show how our responsibility to maintain saving faith plays a crucial role in God doing His part to not disown us. Note also that there is a qualitative difference between being “faithless” (i.e. weak in faith and stumbling as a result) and “disowning Him” (i.e. rejecting Him and walking away). With the “faithless” disciple, Jesus “remains faithful,” but those who “disown Him” He “disowns them!” For Him to “disown” a person means that He doesn’t “own” them anymore. That sounds an awful lot like losing the saved status to me.

People often argue that those we call “fallen” were never saved to begin with. But you can see that in each of these passages, Christians are clearly being addressed. These verses are talking about those who have at one time “escaped from the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” These are those who we call “brothers,” those who have “shared in the Holy Spirit,” and those who have “received the knowledge of the truth.” Granted, many of those who appear to have “fallen away” never were truly saved people to begin with. They went to church, read the Bible, prayed prayers, but never repentantly believed in Jesus and received Him as Lord and Savior. But these passages are obviously referring to another category of people, that of the saved.

Another often used argument for “eternal security” is the biblical language which describes our salvation. For instance, saved people are called “sons of God.” The question is then, “How does a son become not a son? When your son sins he doesn’t become less of a son!” The problem with this reasoning is that the comparison is *too human*. Yes, we’re called *sons*, but that is not to imply that everything which is true of home and family life here on earth is true of sonship in the family of God. The Bible seems to clearly indicate the possibility of a true Christian giving away his sonship.

BUT DOESN'T GOD PROMISE TO KEEP US?

- John 10:28 *I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.*
- Jude 1 *Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James, To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ:*
- Jude 24 *To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy--*
- 1 Peter. 1:5 *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.*
- John 6:39-40 *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. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."*
- John 17:12 *While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.*
- 1 Thessalonians. 5:24 *The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.*
- Phil. 1:6 *being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*
- 1 Corinthians. 10:13 *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are*

tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

- Romans. 8:35-39 *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

These are fantastic verses. Nothing which ensues is intended to take anything away from these great promises. But while these are all wonderful assurances of God's care and protection for our souls, they each have human conditions upon which their fulfillment is predicated. As with *all of God's provisions*, they each *require man's conditions*. What we do with God's gifts has everything with our enjoyment of them.

As for these promises of divine protection, while they are incredibly comforting to know that God will always do *His* part to keep us, they don't rule out the possibility that we may still rebel and refuse the protection. Jesus promised that no one can "snatch" us from His hand. This means that there is *no extrinsic force* which can come and take away our salvation. But it doesn't preclude us jumping out of His hand by our own will. We can rest assured that God will always do His part to "*keep us from falling,*" but there's always our part to take into account.

Notice that it's "*through faith*" that we're "*shielded by God's power.*" Our continuance in saving faith is key to receiving the benefits of the shielding power of God. As Jesus said, He won't "*lose*" any He's been given. But that is not to say that some He's been given won't walk away by their own power of choice. The fact that He "doesn't allow us to be tempted above what we are able" doesn't rule out our choice to succumb (which, in fact, happens every time we sin). Nothing from the outside "*trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword, or angels nor demons, nor powers, nor anything else in all*

creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The only thing which God has sovereignly chosen not to control is the will of man. He will plead and woo and convict and magnetize, but He’s decided not to force the decisions of men. In other words, divine protection doesn’t rule out the need for human vigilance! The power of Jesus doesn’t automatically prevent people from falling away, it preserves only those who continue in saving faith.

A famous person or dignitary may have the world’s most reliable bodyguards surrounding them 24 hours a day. There is no way anyone or anything could get by these men who are protecting their employer. But if the dignitary chose to walk away from, or even fire, the bodyguards, there would be little to nothing that could be done. The person has the prerogative to step outside of the protection provided.

WON'T THIS PRODUCE AN UNSCRIPTURAL INSECURITY?

Some seem to feel that the alternative to “*Eternal Security*” is “*Internal Insecurity*.” They’re afraid that if we open to door to the possibility of losing one’s salvation, we’ll live in craven fear that we can lose it – almost misplace, it at any moment. From my vantage point, both these views (that we’re unconditionally secure or we’re inconsolably insecure) are equally false and equally extreme. In my opinion, the viable alternative to these two unscriptural positions is what I call, “*Conditional Security*.”

<i>ETERNAL SECURITY</i> says:	<i>INTERNAL INSECURITY</i> says:	<i>CONDITIONAL SECURITY</i> says:
“Once saved - <i>always</i> saved.”	“Once saved - <i>hardly</i> saved.”	“Once saved, thoroughly saved and pressing in for growth!”
“Now that I’m in I can live as I want” *	“How do I know I’m really in?”	“Now that I’m in, I’m going to be diligent to stay in!”
“No problem!”	“No peace!”	“No presumption!”
“It’s dangerous to doubt!”	“It’s dangerous to trust!”	“It’s dangerous to drift!”

* This is not to say that all who believe in unconditional eternal security would take this attitude.

Can you see the difference? *Conditional Security* means that I am secure in His grace, conditioned upon my responses to that grace, in the same way that my original salvation was conditioned upon my response of repentant faith. His protection and strength is available to me. The question is, will I continue to take advantage of it?

Please notice that though it’s *conditional* it is still a great place of *security*. Jesus *does* want us to feel secure in His care. He wants us to “***rejoice because our names are written in heaven!***” I think Paul modeled to us that joy and assurance. He spoke confidently of his future rewards and yet at the same time, guarded against being “disqualified for the prize” (2 Timothy 4:8; 1 Cor. 9:27). He knew that when he died he would go straight to heaven, and yet warned that “one who thinks he stands should take heed lest he fall” (Phil. 1:23; 1 Cor. 10:12).

OK, SO HOW DOES A PERSON GET OUT (of salvation)?

Rephrased, the question might be, “How do I know if a person has gone too far? What is the thing which earmarks someone giving away their eternal life? What is the ‘door out’?”

I believe *you can walk out the same door you walked in for salvation in the first place.* You don’t enter one door and then exit by another. There’s only one way *in* and one way *out*.

The “way in” is through repentant faith, saving faith. The way we access salvation is by repenting and believing. The “way out” *is when you stop believing repentantly* and continue to live in an unrepentant state.

Many people who’ve been saved and then backslide continue to “believe” in Jesus but they’re living an unrepentant lifestyle.

Unrepentant believing (intellectual assent versus turning from sin and trusting for salvation) doesn’t receive salvation to begin with, and it won’t hold on to it in the long-haul.

Saving faith is not a one time event. It’s something which needs to continue and to grow and to deepen. That’s why Paul could say such things as ***“But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation--if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.”*** (Col. 1:22-23). He’s saying that Christ’s sacrifice is sufficient for you to be counted holy in God’s sight. And you will be before Him (today and on “that day”) “free from accusation” if, AND ONLY IF you “continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved away from it!”

In 1 Corinthians 15:1-2 Paul also says, ***“Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.”*** Don’t miss the Apostle’s warning to those who have already “received” and “taken their stand” on the gospel. He states that they are “saved” **IF** they hold firmly “to the truth.” “Otherwise they have believed in vain,” that is their former believing will not be enough to ultimately save them. If they discontinue exerting saving faith in Christ, then the saving faith they once had is for naught.

This is also what James was referring to in the second chapter of his Epistle, when he said “faith without works is dead.” He’s saying that the kind of faith that it takes to appropriate salvation is a repentant, fruit-bearing type of faith. If you have any other type of “faith,” then it won’t *grasp* Christ’s salvation, nor will that kind of faith *keep* it.

SO, WHAT'S THE APPLICATION TO US CHRISTIANS?

First of all, there are three things which are NOT true about what we're saying.

1. **IT'S NOT TRUE** that we must be internally insecure about our eternal salvation. The fact that you can possibly give away your relationship with God is not to imply that you are to walk in constant fear that it's practically inevitable that you will do so! It's also possible that you could decide to quit your job and start robbing banks for a living - but I wouldn't worry myself about it actually happening if I were you! Just plan to live responsibly for Christ and faithfully to His Word, and you'll be fine.
2. **IT'S NOT TRUE** that though it is possible to walk away from our salvation, that we do so every time we sin, and therefore need to be born again, again and again. It's not true that though we live in an unrepentant state for a minute, an hour, or even a day, that we have lost our eternal salvation and need to be saved and baptized again. Our position with God is much more durable than that!
3. **IT'S NOT TRUE** that we should go around judging others' salvation. Though we should be conscientiously aware of our brothers' and sisters' spiritual condition so that we can be used by God when called upon to "**restore such a one in the spirit of meekness**" (Galatians 6:1-2). It's not true that we must feel responsible to be God's little helpers and set ourselves up as heaven's fruit inspectors! Don't take this truth, and with it, become a judgmental Christian!

Now, let's look at a few of things we MUST do in light of this truth:

1. **WATCH YOURSELF!** That is, be diligent about your spiritual life. "**Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you - unless, of course, you fail the test?**" (2 Cor. 13:5) "Examine yourself - test yourself," so that you don't "fail the test!" In the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25) the five foolish girls failed to notice their deficient condition (their lack of oil) and ended up missing the Bridegroom altogether. The Lord warned His listeners, "**Therefore keep watch because you don't know the day or the hour**" (verse 13). So, that's my counsel, "Watch yourself!"

2. **WATCH OUT FOR YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS.**
Though we're not called to be spiritual fruit inspectors and judges, we are called to "*bring back wandering brothers and "turn the sinner (fallen brother) from the error of his way"*" (James 5). Paul said "*Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.*" (Gal 6:1). The stakes are too high for us to hide our head in the sand as it relates to the spiritual destiny of our brothers and sisters. "*Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt.*" (Lev. 19:17).
3. **KEEP REPENTING!** If repentant faith is what you did to appropriate God's grace and forgiveness in the first place, I counsel you to keep repenting when sin arises in your life. Retain that posture of humility, brokenness and ruthlessness with your sin.

Jude 21 says to "*Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.*" Now, what could that mean when we already know that God's love is not conditioned upon our actions. He loves us no matter what. But the question is, are we always *recipients* of that love? Do we always benefit from His love, even if we're living in total disobedience? Obviously that's not the case. Those who ultimately choose to reject the Lord and His free offer of grace will *not* be beneficiaries of the love of God. God loved them, but they weren't where that love could reach them.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son gives an example of someone who is loved by the Father God, but chooses to live outside of the sphere of that love's influence. His father loved him even when he was feeding the pigs in the "far country," but he didn't benefit from that love. He wasn't at home to enjoy it. So, let's *stay home* so that we can enjoy the love of the Father!

Jesus put it another way in John 15:1-6, "*I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a*

man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 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.

Notice what happens to those who fail to “remain.” You can’t “abide in Christ” until you’re “in Christ” in the first place. But once you’re in Him, it’s imperative that you remain there in order to continue to receive eternal life benefits. And, remaining/abiding in Christ entails, along with other things, continual repentance.

So, keep repenting! Continue living the repentant lifestyle!

TO SUM IT UP...

I hope that it is clear that we're NOT saying that if you are a Christian, your salvation is in constant jeopardy; and if you sin, then you've automatically lost your salvation. That's NOT at all true, and is not at all what we're proposing! Please don't misconstrue what's being taught as the "internal insecurity" of the believer. We're not saying "Once-Saved-Hardly-Saved."

Rather, our point is that it *is* possible for someone who has genuinely entered the Kingdom of God to leave through the same door through which he entered. He can reject the same Christ he received. He who chose to repent and receive Christ can choose to fail to continue to live repentantly and give back the salvation he once received!

At what point has that individual crossed that line, so to speak, and is no longer a son of God? Only God can determine that. We're just not equipped to make those kind of judgments.

We are told though, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you -- unless, of course, you fail the test?" 2Corinthians 13:5.