

ETERNAL SECURITY

“they shall never perish”

Key question

Can a Christian lose his or her salvation?

Key text

John 10:27-30

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”

Introduction.

1. **The doctrine of eternal security defined.**
 - a. Those who are regenerated by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God will persevere in the one true faith and faithfulness by God’s grace until His return or until the death of their temporal bodies.
 - b. “The perseverance of the saints” is to be preferred to the popular but misleading - “Once saved, always saved”.
2. **The disputed issue defined.**
 - a. What is the basis of a believer’s perseverance in Christian faith? Is it the sovereign will of God, with no reference to the person’s will or conduct, or is it the faith and faithfulness of the person? Is it possible for a person who is genuinely born of God to lose their place of salvation and be ultimately lost, or is this an impossibility based on the sovereign work of God in salvation?
 - b. This issue is important in that it can encourage postures that are unhealthy. If a person is eternally secure and cannot lose their salvation, this can lead to disregard for proper Christian discipline and orthodox confession. If on the other hand, a person’s security is based upon their performance, there can be a tendency to live in fear, never knowing if they have done something or believed something that would put them outside God’s family.
 - c. The issue of security is related to one’s understanding of salvation. If saving faith is inseparable from faithfulness to the moral law of God then moral failure might indicate the absence of true faith and the salvation that comes through it.
 - d. Historically, the church has been divided on this issue. Following the teaching of John Calvin who emphasized the work of God in the saving process, many have concluded that once a person has truly been born again of the Spirit, they will also persevere in true

faith and faithfulness, never losing their salvation. Others have followed the teaching of James Arminius and concluded that a truly born again person can renounce the faith or fail to be faithful, and thus lose their salvation.

- e. It should be noted that both an Extreme Calvinist and the Arminian positions share many things in common. Both agree that:
1. The believer cannot know if he or she will ultimately be saved because they have not yet persevered in obedience through life.
 2. False believers exist.
 3. There is no such thing as a fruitless or carnal believer.
 4. Fear of ultimate perdition is a major motivation for moral behavior.
 5. They tend to interpret some of the same proof texts in the same way.

3. Distinctives of the two popular positions.

a. The special concerns and emphasis of the **Calvinist position**

1. The doctrine of God's sovereign unconditional **election** of some individuals to eternal life logically implies that they will persevere in faith and faithfulness until they are united with Christ at death. A distinction can be made between the **preservation** of the saints by God and the **perseverance** of the saints by the saints. Calvinists believe that the two are inseparable.
2. God's salvation is described as **indestructible**. I Pet.1:3-5
3. God's salvation is described as **eternal life**.
4. God's **love** is described as persistent and powerful. Rom.8:31-39; Phil.1:6; Heb.7:25.
5. God's **power** to enable believers to persevere is adequate. Rom.14:4; I Cor.10:13.
6. God **promises** to keep the believer.
Jn.10:27-30 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand",
II Tim.1:12 "for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day."
7. A common Calvinistic notion is that one cannot know whether one is among the elect until they have persevered in faith and obedience. In this respect the Calvinist lives with greater anxiety than the Arminian. The Arminian at least knows that he is presently saved. The Calvinist cannot know this until the end of life.

b. The concerns and emphasis of the **Arminian position**

1. There are many **warnings** against apostasy that would be meaningless if apostasy were not a possibility. Matt.24:3-14; Col.1:21-23; I Cor.9:27; 10:12; Heb.2:1; 3:12-14; Heb.6:11-12.
2. The **Biblical record** indicates that people can indeed apostatize. **Heb.6:4-6** "For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame." (Heb. 10:26-27).

3. There are Biblical **examples** of apostasy. Acts 5:1-11; I Tim.1:19-20; II Tim.2:16-18; II Tim.4:10; II Pet.2:1-2.
 4. Human **freedom**, which is implied in man's responsibility before God, is violated if he cannot choose apostasy.
 5. **History** is full of cases of apostasy.
4. **The Arminian and extreme Calvinist understanding of faith and obedience:**
- a. Faith and obedience are seen as inseparable. Those who claim to truly believe and claim to be "born again" can lose their salvation by failing to "keep up" a standard of faith and obedience. In the case of extreme Calvinism, those who live in sin demonstrate that they were never a part of the elect.

NOTE: No one is going to disagree with the proposition that a person who does not claim faith in Christ is to be considered outside His family (the family of faith). It is the issue of faithfulness that is the point of dispute. Can a person be guilty of grave sins that actually disqualify them from participation in the family of God?
 - b. **A responses:**
 1. If it is my conduct that gains or secures my relationship with God how does this not threaten the fundamental doctrine of forensic justification or salvation by faith apart from works?
 2. There can be no real peace and joy unless one chooses not to look very deeply into their own depraved heart. How can I be "anxious for nothing" Phil.4:6 if my conduct or purity of heart is always in question?
 3. How holy must a person be before they are safe? How pure must my motives be?
 4. This looks very much like the Old Covenant as the Pharisees of Jesus day understood it - the bottom line is always our performance.
 5. How does one deal with the First Corinthian letter where Paul addresses as "saints" those who are living (present tense) in sin? John reminds us in I Jn.1:8 that if we say we have no sin (present tense) we lie and the truth is not in us. It is as we confess our sin that we are forgiven and walk in the light. Confession of sin is not the eradication of sin from our lives but rather the forgiveness of sin so that it is not held against us.

A. Objections to the doctrine of eternal security:

1. **THEOLOGICAL** - It is inconsistent with the free choice that all people have to turn from God and the true faith.
2. **SCRIPTURAL** - It is contradicted by many passages of Scripture.
3. **ETHICAL** - It logically leads to irresponsible and careless conduct.
4. **ECCLESIASTICAL** - Many great & Godly theologians have not accepted this as scriptural teaching.
5. **False security is a reality.** We cannot know for sure that our faith is true.
 - **Matt.7:22-23** "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; (not, "I no longer know you.") depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"

- **Acts 2:29-30** “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.”
- **II Pet.2:22** “It has happened to them according to the true proverb, ‘a dog returns to its own vomit,’ and , ‘A sow, after washing returns to wallowing in the mire.’”
- **II Cor.13:5** “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you – unless indeed you fail the test.”

B. Scriptures that are used to support eternal security:

- **Jn.6:35-40** “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives Me will come to Me; and him who comes to Me I will not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me; and this is the will of Him who sent Me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given Me, but raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”
- **Jn.8:34-35** “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. And the slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever.”
- **Jn.10:27-29** “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”
- **Rom.4:16** “For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.”
- **Rom.5:5-10** “the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us, for while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly . . . But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life”
- **Rom.8:28-30** “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified;” (also read vs.31-39)
- **I Cor.3:1-3** “and are you not walking like mere men?” These men were addressed as “saints” in chapter one. It is clear that they were regarded as believers in spite of their worldly life style.
- **Eph.1:3-14** “He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,” (vs.5)

- **I Pet.1:4-5** “. . . to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”
- Also read - Isa.43:1-3; Isa.54:10; Jer.32:40; Matt.18:12-14; Jn.3:16; Jn.3:36; Jn.5:24; Jn.6:35-40; Jn.6:47; Jn.17:11,12,15; Rom.5:8-10; Rom.8:1; I Cor.1:7-9; I Cor.10:13; II Cor.4:14-17; Eph.4:30; Col.3:3-4; I Thess.5:23-24; II Tim.4:18; Heb.9:12,15; Heb.10:14; Heb.12:28; I Jn.1:3-5; I Jn.2:19,25; I Jn.5:4,11-13,20; Jude 1; Jude 24,25

C. Abiding faith, not holiness is the issue in eternal security.

Rom.11 “¹⁷ But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, ¹⁸ do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, {remember that} it is not you who supports the root, but the root {supports} you. ¹⁹ You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” ²⁰ Quite right, **they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith.** Do not be conceited, but fear; ²¹ for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you. ²² Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God’s kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. ²³ And they also, **if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in;** for God is able to graft them in again.”

1. There are two mistakes we can make in seeking eternal security.

Mistake #1

The only issue is seeing God’s responsibility to “keep us”

We are here responsible for too little.

I must abide in faith.

Mistake #2

The issue is man’s responsibility to “be holy”

We are here responsible for too much.

I can only abide in faith.

2. Our security in Christ is not conditioned upon our fulfillment of the Law but it is conditioned upon our faith in Christ. If personal holiness is the basis of security, we need to ask:
 - a. How holy must we be?
 - b. For how long must we be holy?
3. We cannot claim to be a Christian if we are not openly confessing faith in Christ. It is a fact that many people who once professed faith in Christ, no longer hold that faith.
4. The Gospel of grace is conditioned on faith apart from works. This means that we do not obey in order to be saved by Christ nor do we obey in order to be secure in Christ.
5. Those who believe that unrepentant Christians lose their position in Christ or never had a position in Christ, often link true faith with faithfulness to the Law. They sight the Biblical passages that warn believers about disobedience. It should be noted that these passages could also be sited in arguing against salvation by grace period.
6. While obedience to the moral law of God is very important and a natural and normal fruit of true faith, personal holiness is not always evident to others as the church at Corinth illustrates.
7. Three views of the relationship of faith and faithfulness contrasted.

<i>Roman Catholic</i>	<i>Reformed Protestant</i>	<i>Radical Protestant</i>
Faithfulness is the same as faith	Faithfulness is the marker of faith	Faithfulness is a fruit of faith
Unrepentant sinners lose their salvation.	Unrepentant sinners are not elect or have fallen away from grace.	Unrepentant sinners invite discipline but do not lose their position in Christ.

8. There is no security for the person who is not clinging to Christ in faith. This faith may be real without perfect faithfulness or obedience.

Col.1 “²¹ And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, {engaged} in evil deeds, ²² yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach--²³ **if indeed you continue in the faith** firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.”

Gal.5:4 “You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.”

9. It is possible for a person to be unfaithful, even to continue to act in disobedience, and not lose their salvation. The Christians at Corinth are a case in point. Note: I Cor.3:1-3,15; 5:1-13; 11:17-34; Matt.13:22; Heb.6:7-8; II Pet.2:7
10. In one sense, both of the above positions come very close to each other with respect to the practical pastoral matter of how we should live. Both the Calvinist and the Arminian continue in faith and good works through discipline and respect for God in order that they might show themselves to truly be numbered among the elect. They disagree as to the dynamic and object of divine election, but not on our call to responsible faith. Both gain security in knowing that it is God working through them to persevere in faith.
11. Those who once confessed Christ and followed Him and then later renounce Him even to their grave are to be understood as outside the community of the redeemed. That is, they are not to be received by the Christian community as true believers. Whether they truly fell away, were never really born of God in the first place, or are saved in spite of their poor confession, only God knows for sure.
12. How do I know if I have true faith?
- Do I trust my relationship with God to Christ or am I holding on to my own merit?
 - Has there been a change in my life direction?
- ILLUSTRATION:** If I am issued a credit card I must (1) activate it and (2) put it to use by purchasing goods and services with it in good faith that it will be honored. If I fail to activate it and fail to use it, it is of no value and one could question whether or not I really have it. The same is true of faith. I can claim to have faith but if it is never activated (baptism) or used (influencing the direction of my life), it could be argued that it is hardly a living effective faith. I know I have real faith when I use it.
13. Does not faith require repentance? Repentance that leads to salvation and repentance that leads to holy living are distinct. (See Apttoteach.org, theology file #707 for more details)

Justification
Repentance from dead works (pride of self righteousness) to faith in Christ's righteousness.
Turning from self (generally) to Christ
Mk.1:15; Heb.6:1

Sanctification
Repentance from sinful habits to a walk that conforms to the glory of God.
Turning from specific sins to obedience.
II Cor.12:21

D. Who is responsible for abiding faith?

God's preserving power (Decree)
Phil.2:12 "God is at work in you"
Jn.1:13 "who are born of God"
Rom.11:5 "according to God's choice"
II Thess.2:13 "God has chosen you"

Our persevering power (Diligence)
Phil.2:13 "work out your salvation"
Jn.1:12 "as many as received Him"
Rom.11:20 "you stand by our faith"
II Thess.2:13 "through faith"

E. Sins committed after conversion.

1. All sin is forgiven.

Mk.3:28-29 "Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin." (This unforgivable sin is the refusal to respond to the convicting work of the Spirit so as to bring a person to saving faith.)

Col.2:13-14 ". . . He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross."

2. Eternal life is not probationary life. Heb.5:9, 9:12, 9:15.

3. Partial obedience is not enough. It is all (perfect holiness) or nothing. This mandates the need for radical grace.

James 2:10 "for whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all"

Gal.3:10 "for as many as are the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them'"

4. The motivation for obedience is the grace of God not the fear of rejection.

II Cor.5:14-15 "for the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf"

Titus 2:11-12 "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men teaching us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,"

F. **Difficult Biblical examples examined.**

1. **Judas** - Like Peter he felt remorse for what his sin had done to Jesus but unlike Peter, he did not abide (Jn.15) to see what Jesus would do to his sin.
2. **Simon** (Acts 8) - Even though he “believed and was baptized” (vs.13) it became evident (vs.23) that he was not freed from his sin. Just because a person “believes and is baptized” at a point in time does not mean that they are secure or that their faith is saving faith.
3. **The immoral man of I Cor. 5** - This man is a “so-called brother” (vs.11) who is turned over to Satan “for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” By his conduct, his salvation seems to have been held in question.
4. **Ananias and Sapphira** (Acts 5:1-11) - This is an example of God’s discipline more than a case of apostasy so as to lose salvation.
5. **Hymenaeus and Alexander** (I Tim. 1:19-20) - Again this may be an example of God’s discipline.
6. **Hymenaeus and Philetus** (II Tim. 2:16-18) - Again, we have an example of false teaching but not loss of salvation.
7. **Demas** (II Tim. 4:10) - This is a reference to a backslidden believer not a non believer.
8. **False prophets** (II Pet. 2:1-2) - There is no indication that these individuals were ever saved.

G. **Problem passages**

1. **Matthew 13:20-21 “the man who hears the word, and immediately receives it ... but falls away.”**

It is not at all clear that the reception of the seed constituted true saving faith. The word did not have roots that enabled it to persevere.

2. **Luke 12:41-48 “the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him, ... and will cut him in pieces.”**

The parable of the unfaithful steward speaks of four postures – 1) Disciples who were fruitful vs.42-44, 2) Followers who are identified with the unbelievers who persecute the disciples vs.45-46, 3) Disciples who knew what to do but did not do it vs.47, 4) Disciples who were ignorant and thus did not perform vs.48.

It is not at all clear that the second group were anything other than false disciples.

3. **Hebrews 3:7-19 “Falling away from the living God”**

In this passage, we find a number of warnings that can be very unsettling for the one who is not living a life of perfect obedience and holiness (see vs. 10-12). If we are to correctly understand this passage, we must note that the clear Old Testament parallel of the Israelites in the wilderness is a model to warn us (vs. 7-11,16-19). But how is our spiritual experience parallel to theirs? What is the meaning of “rest” for us? Is it heaven, the victorious life here on earth, or something else? Were those Israelites who left Egypt, but failed to enter Palestine, true believers with a weak faith or were they apostate?

Without taking the time to present a detailed exposition, let me offer an explanation that seems to fit the historical and literary contexts. A careful reading of the New Testament will reveal that the salvation of God has many aspects. It is something we have (complete) in Christ and yet it is something we are (growing) in (Phil. 2:12) and do not

yet have in its completed form (I Thess. 5:9, I Peter 1:5). It can be compared to physical adoption into a new family. Even though the adoption may be legally complete, there is much to learn and “grow into” with respect to living like a son or daughter with new privileges and responsibilities.

Part of our problem with this passage stems from our tendency to view salvation as a completed act (only) and see everything subsequent to our initial commitment to Christ as relatively insignificant or secondary. The New Testament portrait, however, is more wholistic and emphasizes the outworking of salvation as a vital part of the initial response to Christ.

The best understanding of the spiritual state of the Israelites in the wilderness sees them as true believers (covered by Passover blood) who have not followed through in their faith to experience all that God had for them. This rebellion brought God’s discipline just as it did in I Cor. 11:27-34 (see also Hebrews 12). In the same way, we today can fall short of entering into all that God has for us when we become hardened by sin, fall away from vibrant trust in God, and force Him to discipline us as a father would a wayward child. Heaven and hell are not the issues here, but growth and retardation, feast and famine.

4. **Hebrews 5:9 “All who obey”**

This text links eternal salvation with obedience; suggesting that works, not faith, is the real issue. The real question has to do with the meaning of obedience in this context. Is it obedience to every command of Christ or is it the obedience of faith? If the former is correct, then not one of us has eternal life. If the latter is correct, then we have no contradiction with justification by faith. The text says nothing about partial obedience or trying to obey. The text either teaches “works salvation” or refers to the obedience of faith.

5. **Hebrews 10:26-31 (Hebrews 6:4-12) “Sinning willfully”**

Hebrews 6 and 10 can be addressed together because, in my estimation, they refer to the same basic issue — we cannot and need not be reconverted every time we sin.

The Old Covenant prescribed repeated sacrifices for sins (as sins were committed). Some Jewish believers may have asked, “Do we need to retrace our steps in converting to faith in Christ, every time we sin?” The writer of Hebrews instructs his readers that with the New Covenant of grace in Christ, the old covenant was terminated. The Old Covenant no longer is available as a means of handling guilt. “There no longer remains a sacrifice for sins” (vs. 26). If you go on willfully sinning and do not cling in faith to the finished work of the Christ of the New Covenant but try to make atonement via the relics of the Old Covenants repeated sacrifices, you are living in a fantasy world (see vs. 29). The old covenant provision has been terminated and replaced by the New Covenant provision — faith in Christ who is a “once for all time” sacrifice for sins. Without that faith, one is left to face the righteous judgment of God (vs. 29-31) with no hope.

Hebrews 6:4-9 addresses the issue with different language. Let me summarize or paraphrase the basic idea of the passage. If a person embraces all the benefits of the new covenant of grace (vs. 4-5) yet rejects the cornerstone of that covenant (Christ, vs. 6) by disobedience “falling away”, he or she need not and cannot go back and be baptized into the faith all over again. These Hebrew believers came out of a background in which every time they sinned they had to bring a new sacrifice. It was insulting to the Cross of Christ to demand that he be crucified over and over again. There is only one way to go and that

is to continue on and grow to maturity. Verses 9-12 emphasize the author's confidence and hope in going on.

One closing note on Hebrews 6:4-12. The term "impossible" in verse 6 creates a seemingly insurmountable obstacle to most traditional interpretations in that it precludes the possibility of a change of heart. This seems to defy all that we know of the Biblical portrayal of man and all that we observe about man from our experience. It is far more likely that the "impossible" has to do with the logic of the issue, not the will of the person. This is why I interpret the text in the way I have outlined above.

6. **I Corinthians 5:5 "that his spirit may be saved"**

The salvation of the spirit in the day of the Lord Jesus is a parallel to 1:8, "*who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" The "*blameless*" here was probably a reference to the confirmation of the Corinthian's faith. Their conduct certainly was not blameless. The phrase "*that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*" suggests that the person in question who is a "*so called brother*" (vs. 11) might be an unregenerate hypocrite in need of saving faith which, given his conduct, he appears not to have. A Christian who acts this way is expected to have shame.

This would suggest to us that the purpose of the disciplining of the immoral person in 6:5 was to bring him to true faith. In Matt.18:17 we are told that a brother who does not respond to discipline should be treated as a nonbeliever.

Questions that you should be able to answer.

1. Specific facts you should know.

- a. What key texts of Scripture offer security to a believer?
- b. What are the arguments used for and against the eternal security of the believer.?

2. Issues that you should be able to discuss.

- a. How are the Calvinist and the Arminian positions alike and different with respect to eternal security?
- b. What are some of the difficult Biblical examples and how would you address them?

3. Questions you should wrestle with.

- a. How much does and should this issue affect fellowship among believers?
- b. What is clear about this issue in Scripture? What is not so clear?