

Can you Lose your Salvation?

John 10:27-29

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone 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 My Father’s hand.”

The Bad News

Do I Deserve a Cookie?

About thirteen years ago, when my oldest son Nicholas was about five years old, we went shopping at a local supermarket in Reading. This was typically fun for Nicholas, in particular because there were almost always free cookies available for kids at the bakery.

So, I told Nicholas that IF he was a good boy, that when we were done with shopping, he could have a cookie. We parents refer to this as an “incentive.”

Well, you’ve probably already guessed that he wasn’t such a good boy while we shopped; he was a typical mischievous boy. So, near the end of our shopping time I said something like this:

“Nicholas, you don’t deserve a cookie.”

There it was. Tough love. Kudos for me. But I didn’t expect what followed. Nicholas said something like this:

“You’re right Papai. The only thing that we deserve is to die and go to Hell.”

That’s right. He said:

“The only thing that we deserve is to die and go to Hell.”

And he was right. Nicholas didn't deserve a cookie. But neither did I! Apparently Nicholas had been listening to me after all! So, being once again reminded of God's grace I said:

"Nicholas, you can have a cookie." ☺ And he enjoyed that cookie!

While that's a true and funny story, it highlights two errors in culture today:

- 1) People tend to think that we deserve good things; and
- 2) People tend to downplay, ignore, overlook, or even deny the reality of Hell and the wrath of God.

Friends, God is intrinsically and entirely holy (completely separate and free from sin). He is also intrinsically and entirely just. God thus requires that there be punishment for sin, i.e., for thinking, feeling, doing, or not doing anything that is contrary to God's perfect, holy, just will & nature. As it is written:

"The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men,
To see if there are any who understand, who seek God.
They have all turned aside,
They have together become corrupt;
There is none who does good,
No, not one (Psalm 14:2-3)." ¹

"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)."

And "the wages of sin *is* death (Romans 6:23a)."

According to God, all people deserve death. People don't deserve "good things." People don't deserve a yummy cookie. People deserve death. But not only death, all people, all of whom sin, deserve God's wrath. As it is written:

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18)."

The wrath of God is real! And those who are consigned to God's wrath will one day be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15). And what is it like there? It is the place ...

- of outer "darkness (Matthew 8:12),"
- "shame *and* everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2),"
- where the "worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched (Mark 9:44),"
- where "there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12),"
- and people 'will be tormented day and night forever and ever (Revelation 20:10)."

This is Bad News. The eternal wrath of God is really Bad News.

The Good News

The apostle John put it this way (John 3:36):

"He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

While John reminds us that our sin merits death and being subjected to the abiding wrath of God (meaning that it is a wrath which remains perpetually), he also instructs us that belief in the Son leads to everlasting life. The apostle Paul further explains (Romans 5:6-9):

"For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him."

Friends, because we are sinners, we deserve death and God's eternal, abiding wrath. However, because God is love and He loves all of us sinners, He poured out His wrath on Jesus on the cross, so that through faith in Him, through believing in Him, we are not only forgiven and saved from God's wrath, but we are given the free gift of eternal life!

This is Good News. This is really Good News!

Faith

But what does it mean to “have faith” in Jesus? What does it mean to “believe” in Jesus? That’s a good question, so let me explain. First, it’s important to know that all people believe in something, and all people have faith in something, they just might not know it or admit to it. Second, it’s important to understand that while we often use the phrases “to believe” and “to have faith” interchangeably, they don’t necessarily mean the same thing, depending on the context. So, here’s a framework to help understand the differences.

Faith, in general, has four key aspects:

1. Object
2. Knowledge
3. Belief
4. Trust

Faith, any faith, has these same four aspects. For example, let’s consider an atheist.

1. The **object** of his faith is usually his intellect, his ability to reason;
2. The atheist **knows** what he can deduce, infer, or test, perhaps by application of the scientific method;
3. The atheist **believes** that what he has learned from these methods is true; and
4. The atheist **trusts** in his ability to make “right” decisions based on what he believes to be true.

Atheists have faith. Faith in themselves. Or faith in “the scientific method.” But let’s look at Christian faith. What does it mean to “have faith” in Jesus?

1. **Object.** Jesus is the object of our faith. Christians focus on Jesus Christ. We think about Him. We prioritize Him.

2. **Knowledge.** Christians know about Jesus. How? Primarily through the Scriptures. Better still, Christians know Jesus, personally. And because we know Jesus, we know the Father, and we know the Holy Spirit.
3. **Belief.** Christians believe that what the Scriptures declare about Jesus is true. Better still, Christians believe that Jesus is the truth (John 14:6).
4. **Trust.** Christians trust in Jesus. Christians trust in Jesus enough to submit to His will. That is, Christians have a desire to obey Jesus, and they obey Him (albeit imperfectly).

So then:

1. Do you focus on Jesus? Do you prioritize Jesus?
2. Do you know about Jesus? Do you know Jesus?
3. Do you believe that what the Scriptures declare about Jesus is true?
4. Do you trust in Jesus enough to submit to His will and obey Him?

If you honestly can answer yes to all of these questions, then you have faith in Jesus Christ. And if you have faith in Jesus Christ, then you have already been granted the gift of eternal life and will thus be saved from the wrath of God which is to come!

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).”

This is Good News. This is really Good News!

Eternal Security

Now while this is very Good News, it has raised many questions over the years. Such as:

- If I have faith now in Jesus Christ, is my salvation permanent?
- Alternatively: can I lose my salvation?

The simple truth is:

- Yes, salvation once granted is permanent, and thus
- No, a Christian cannot lose his/her salvation.

This is the doctrine of *eternal security*. But let's not just take my word for it, let's look at the Scriptures. Specifically, let's look at two common concerns about this doctrine:

- Can a Christian do something, some “work,” which causes him/her to lose salvation?
- Might God change His mind and thus “revoke” the gift of salvation?

These questions are answered when we look at:

- The Nature of God and Salvation

The Nature of God and Salvation

Dear Christian, “for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).”

That really settles the matter. Salvation, though requiring faith on the part of the individual, is an act of God's sovereign grace *from before the foundation of the world*! It is not a result of human effort, i.e., of human works. And just as there is nothing that can be done to earn salvation, there is nothing that can be done to lose salvation. Why? Because God has guaranteed it. It is written of Christians that:

God “has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee (2 Corinthians 1:22).”

Dear Christian, the Holy Spirit has been given to us as a guarantee of our eternal salvation. A guarantee! And how good is God's guarantee?

“He who promised is faithful (Hebrews 10:23b).”

God is faithful. He is perfectly faithful. And He will not revoke His guarantee, for it would violate His perfect nature and will. Jesus once said:

“This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing (John 6:39a).”

Nothing, i.e., no one! This passage means that Jesus will not lose anyone who has been saved by grace through faith in Him. In addition, Jesus said that:

“My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand (John 10:29).”

Christians are being held, figuratively speaking, in the hand of God the Father, and no one, absolutely no one, has the power to snatch a Christian out of God’s hand. That includes Satan, and that includes Christians. Christians don’t have the power to do some work which causes the Father to let go.

But what if God simply changes His mind and He chooses to let go? Would God, could God, change His mind?

No, as that would be contrary to God’s nature. For as it is written:

“God is not man, that He should lie,
or a son of man, that He should change his mind.
Has He said, and will He not do it?
Or has He spoken, and will He not fulfill it?
(Numbers 23:19, ESV).”

- God doesn’t lie.
- God doesn’t change His mind.
- If God has said that He saves by grace through faith, then He does.
- If God has said that He won’t change His mind, then He won’t.

Thankfully, the doctrine of eternal security for the Christian rests on the nature of God and salvation, and not on the frailty of man. And thus the old saying:

“Once saved, always saved.”

Assurance of Salvation

But this raises other questions, the most important one being:

*How can I be assured of my salvation?
How can I be certain that I'm eternally saved from God's wrath?*

This question often arises when people read the following passage in Hebrews (Hebrews 6:4-6):

“For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame.”

Does this passage teach that a Christian can “fall away” and lose his / her salvation? No! We just covered that question. A Christian cannot lose his / her salvation. However, this passage does teach, as do others in Scripture, that there are people who congregate with the body of Christ, who for a time look like, talk like, and act like Christians, who:

“have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come”

but who aren't actually Christians, and who at some point “fall away,” never to return. These people didn't lose their faith in Christ. They never had faith in Christ. The apostle John wrote about such people (1 John 2:19):

“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out* that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.”

The intermingling of *authentic* Christians (i.e., those in the true Church of Jesus Christ) and *nominal* Christians (i.e., those merely in a church), is alluded to throughout the New Testament.

But how are they differentiated? How can I know if I'm merely a nominal Christian (i.e., a Christian in name only), or an authentic Christian (i.e., truly saved by grace through faith)? Let's look again at the guarantee given to Christians:

God "has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee (2 Corinthians 1:22)."

One way to discern as to whether or not you're an authentic Christian or a nominal Christian is to look for evidences of the Spirit of God within you. Specifically, you can look for evidence of:

1. Conviction of the Spirit
2. Truth from the Spirit
3. Fruit of the Spirit
4. Walking in the Spirit
5. Gifts of the Spirit

1. Conviction of the Spirit

One key evidence that you're an authentic Christian saved eternally from God's wrath is **conviction**. Jesus Himself has said that the Holy Spirit "will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment (John 16:8)." In this regard, the apostle John shared the following way to discriminate between a nominal and authentic Christian (1 John 1:8-9):

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

That is to say, an authentic Christian is acutely and consciously cognizant of his / her sin and sinful nature, the need for confession, and the need to trust in Christ for forgiveness and salvation from God's just wrath.

So, the questions are:

- To what extent do you feel convicted of sin?
- If and when you're convicted of sin, how do you respond?
- Do you confess? Do you repent?

2. Truth from the Spirit

A second key evidence that you're an authentic Christian saved eternally from God's wrath is your understanding of **truth**, specifically, truth in Scripture. As it is written (1 Corinthians 2:14):

"But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned."

Simply stated: an authentic Christian knows and understands Scripture. So, the question is:

- To what extent do you know and understand the truth in Scripture?

3. Fruit of the Spirit

A third key evidence that you're an authentic Christian saved eternally from God's wrath is **fruit** (Galatians 5:22-23a):

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."

An authentic Christian exhibits the fruit of the Spirit. So, the question is:

- To what extent does this fruit characterize your life?

4. Walking in the Spirit

A fourth key evidence that you're an authentic Christian saved eternally from God's wrath is your **walk**, specifically, whether or not you live in obedience to God's will. As it is written (1 John 2:3-5):

“Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.”

That is to say, an authentic Christian trusts in Christ enough to submit to His will and obey Him.

Now, am I saying that obedience to Christ leads to salvation? Am I saying that salvation is by human effort? No! However, the gospel is clear that salvation by grace through faith produces obedience, i.e., it produces good works:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:8-10).”

If you are an authentic Christian, then you will trust in Jesus as Lord and obey Him. So, the question is:

- To what extent do you obey Jesus’ commands?

5. Gifts of the Spirit

A fifth key evidence that you’re an authentic Christian saved eternally from God’s wrath is your **gifting**. An authentic Christian receives one or more spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:7-11):

“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another *different* kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.”

So, the questions are:

- Do you have any spiritual gifts?
- To what extent do you employ these gifts for the edification of the body of Christ?

Interim Summary

Therefore, if you profess faith in Jesus Christ and experience:

1. Conviction of the Spirit
2. Truth from the Spirit
3. Fruit of the Spirit
4. Walking in the Spirit
5. Gifts of the Spirit

Then you should have assurance that you've been eternally saved from the wrath of God which is to come.

Perfection or Direction?

But this raises other questions. In order to be assured of eternal security:

- Do I need to attain a certain “degree” of maturity?
- Do I need to display a certain level of Christian “perfection”?

The simple answer is this:

No! It all boils down to direction, not perfection, i.e., to the posture of the heart.

Prosperity

As a relevant tangent, let's look at Christian **prosperity**. The Greek root word for **prosper** in the New Testament, such as in 3 John 2 --- εὐοδόω (yoo-od-o'-o) --- is formed from two Greek words: εὖ (yoo), which means good or right, and ὁδός (hod-as), which means path, way, road, or journey.² True Christian prosperity is the amalgam of these two things, it's

moving along the right path, as defined by God. This is why early Christianity was known as “The Way (e.g., Acts 9:2, 19:9, 19:23, 24:14, 24:22).” And remember in John 14:6, Jesus identified Himself as:

“the (hod-as) way!”

The Christian life is largely about direction, not perfection. This is the process known as sanctification, i.e., becoming increasingly like Jesus, and less like “despicable me.”

So then, when evaluating these five evidences of the Spirit of God within you, ask yourself:

- What’s the posture of my heart?
- What direction am I moving in?
- What way am I following?

For example, over the past few years:

1. To what extent do I respond to sin by confession and repentance?
 2. Have I been growing in my understanding of Scripture?
 3. Have I been becoming more joyful, loving, gentle, and kind?
 4. To what degree do I joyfully submit to and obey God’s word?
 5. To what extent do I seek to understand and use my spiritual gifts for the edification of the body of Christ?
- What’s the posture of my heart?
 - What direction am I moving in?
 - What way am I following?

Summary

The encouragement, friends, is that if you have indeed placed your faith in Jesus as your Savior and Lord, then you are saved, eternally, from the wrath of God which is to come. You will be prosperous. Your life will move in the right direction. You will be more like Jesus over time. And you will not fall away, ever! As Jesus once said (John 10:27-29):

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone 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 My Father’s hand.”

So then, if you’re an authentic Christian assured of your eternal security, what’s your main application for today?

Forget those things which are behind, reach forward to those things which are ahead, and press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:13b-14)!

However, if you either don’t profess faith in Jesus, or your life is not moving in the right direction, then, what’s your main application for today?

Repent! Turn from your sin, run toward King Jesus, and follow Him.

¹ All Scripture quotations from the New King James Version (NKJV) unless otherwise noted.

² <http://www.blueletterbible.org>