

CAN A CHRISTIAN LOSE ETERNAL LIFE? ¹

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I know how much you Kiwis love our Australian possums! Top import from Oz! Cute, cuddly, furry, lovable creatures of God! You would never try to deliberately run them over, or shoot them, or harm them in any way, would you?! So, what would you do if all of a sudden Mardon Road Church of Christ had a sudden infestation of possums? ²

Well, I heard about the [Presbyterian](#) church that called a meeting to decide what to do about their possum infestation. After much prayer and consideration, they concluded the possums were predestined to be there and they shouldn't interfere with God's predetermined will.

At the [Baptist](#) church the possums had taken an interest in the baptistry. The deacons met and decided to put a water-slide on the baptistry and let the possums drown themselves. The possums liked the slide and, unfortunately, knew instinctively how to swim so twice as many possums showed up the following week.

The [Lutheran](#) church decided that they were not in a position to harm any of God's creatures. So, they humanely trapped their possums and set them free near the Baptist Church. Two weeks later the possums were back when the Baptists took down the water-slide.

But the [Anglican and Catholic](#) churches came up with a very creative strategy! They baptized all the possums and made them members of the church. Now they only see them at Christmas and Easter.

Not much was heard from the [Jewish](#) synagogue; they took the first boy possum they could get their hands on, and you know what they did to him! The synagogue hasn't seen a possum since!

Last week I spoke on the doctrine popularly called '[Once Saved, Always Saved](#)'. And if I may put it this way, we have the equivalent of a possum infestation in the modern churches where lots of people who believe just because they made a decision in one great moment some years ago to "accept Christ as their personal Saviour" that they now live in a state of predestined, irrevocable grace.

They imagine that just because they stepped onto the "salvation escalator" (to use our metaphor from last week) they are automatically guaranteed to arrive at the top floor of heaven's glory, regardless of how they behave in the meantime. Just because they made a "decision for Christ" years ago and now belong to this church denomination or that one, they are predestined to salvation --- all's automatically well with their souls for time & eternity. But ...

They are sadly, fatally deceived. Last week we saw that we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest at any time we drift away. We saw that we must emulate the apostle Paul who strained every sinew in his body to **attain** to the **out-resurrection out from the dead.** We saw that

¹ This is a message I preached at the Mardon Road Church of Christ (Life Only in Christ) in Hamilton, New Zealand on Sunday 7th July, 2019.

² New Zealand has an infestation of possums that have devastated it's populations of native wildlife. They are considered vermin and fair game. It's entertaining to have a bit of fun with one's audience "across the Ditch"!

we must examine ourselves to ensure we are abiding in Christ, otherwise we run the risk of being **adokimos**, rejects, reprobates, disqualified from participating in the salvation of the Kingdom of God.

You will remember **David Pawson's** challenge to the Christian man who imagined he could divorce his wife for another woman for no better reason than that he had met, and 'fallen in love with' another woman: "You can either live with this woman for the rest of this life, or with Jesus for all the next, but you can't do both." If we will not have Jesus save us from our sins, then he cannot be our Saviour!

Today, I want to ask a follow-up question. It's a serious question. Big time serious! *Can a Christian lose eternal life? Can a Christian forfeit eternal life?*

Some people get upset as soon as the preacher starts rocking the boat by raising such things. They just want to have the peace of believing *once saved, always saved*. But ...

I wonder what they would think of Jesus's parable about **THE WEDDING GUEST** who turned up in the wrong clothes (**Matt. 22: 1-14; Lk.**)? ³

You remember the parable. **The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. Again, he sent other servants saying, "Tell those who have been invited: 'Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.'**

But they made light of it and went away making all kinds of excuses for their non-attendance ... I've married a wife, I've bought a farm, I've bought a tractor (well that's the modern equivalent for a couple of oxen to plough with!). The king is pretty upset, as you would imagine. So he tells his servants to go out into the streets and invite everybody and anybody they could find and persuade them to come to the wedding banquet.

Finally, the banquet hall is filled with guests. The big day for his son the prince's wedding banquet has arrived. **But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?' And he was speechless.**

Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called but few are chosen.

What does Jesus mean? I think he is making the sobering point that, it is not enough to accept the king's invitation to join the great banquet. His point is, *all guests who accept his royal invitation need to change into appropriate wedding apparel.* Get dressed for the occasion.

The man who was rejected and tossed outside had plenty of opportunity to dress properly. We know this because when the king challenged him as to how he got in there without a wedding robe, his silence condemned him. The king would have provided robes at the front door! So this invited guest had been just either plain negligent or worse, disrespectful for the occasion. That's why he stood there **speechless**.

This *invited guest lost his place* at the feast because he did not change his clothes --- a symbol of his attitude --- and so he was **bound hand and foot** (meaning there was no escape!) and he was promptly thrown into **the outer darkness** where his remorse was so intense he wept and ground his teeth.

³ Cf Luke 14: 15-24.

Now, although this parable was initially addressed to the Scribes & Pharisees, Matthew clearly includes it in his Gospel as having a universal message for the disciples of Christ for all time. And we know it is a universal message for Jesus says, **For many are called but few are chosen**. And God is still calling people to believe His Gospel today.

The whole point of the parable is that to be chosen means more than accepting an invitation; Evidently the apostle Peter reflected on the parable's intended meaning, for he wrote;

Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things (i.e. godliness, kindness, Christian love) you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you (2 Peter 1: 10-11). So, it's our responsibility to make our election sure so as to guarantee our entrance into the Kingdom of God!

Just because we have initially accepted the Gospel invitation of the King to enter His kingdom, doesn't mean we don't have to live an appropriate life (a sanctified life) in readiness for the King's royal wedding banquet. Just because you are now in a state of being saved, doesn't mean you can live a life of willful selfishness and disobedience in the meantime. Jesus' parable teaches we must **walk worthily of our heavenly calling!**

Grace is not only a gift --- it's a grave responsibility. The door of grace is open for all, but the door will not stay open for the person who will not abandon his sins. A man cannot go on living the life he lived before he met Christ. The believer must be clothed in a new purity, a new goodness, a new holiness.

The great principle of the parable is this: **Acceptance of the gospel invitation must be followed by a changed attitude & life before final admission to the marriage feast is granted.** If we will not have Jesus save us from our sins, then he cannot be our Saviour!

THE KING IS COMING BACK!

And who wouldn't want to prepare for that great Marriage Supper in the Kingdom? For Jesus the Son of God is coming back; **Hallelujah! For the LORD our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready (Rev. 19: 7).**

The King is literally coming back to planet earth. He is coming in the glory of His God and Father, he is coming with the shout of the archangel, he is coming with the trumpet of God, he is coming with the mighty flaming angels of heaven.

Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so. Amen (Rev. 1: 7).

Yes, Jesus is coming back riding a **white horse** --- code for triumphant return -- and he **doth judge and make war** --- all anti-God opposition is put down. And Jesus wears **many crowns** --- metaphor for him being the head of all governments. His **eyes are as a flame of fire** --- nobody is hidden from his all-knowing gaze. **And the armies in heaven follow him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean (Rev. 19: 14).**

So, king Jesus and his army are dressed in their white robes. The question is: Are you dressed for the company that's coming? Are you clothed with a pure life that won't be out of place?

Furthermore, the Bride (the redeemed people of God) is said to have **made herself ready**, and to be clothed **in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints (vs. 7-8).**

If we claim to be citizens of that eternal kingdom then we better be living by the values and the standards of that Kingdom. we better be dressed properly, and have our wedding robe of practical righteousness on. Only those who walk with him now --- in these days of his absence --- will inherit eternal life and everlasting joy.

THE SHAME OF BEING UNDER-DRESSED! Have you ever been to a function where you have been under-dressed? All eyes are upon you. There are some weird stares and whisperings! You wish the floor would swallow you. You wish you could race home and change. Too late!

And now little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears we may have confidence and not be put to shame before him at his coming (I John 2: 28).

All of which is to say, make sure you are dressed for the Lord of lords and the King of kings! Prepare yourself. Put on the kind of clothes, the life(style) that will give you confidence to stand before your Lord. Are you dressed in your banquet robe? The Bible says we are to **put off your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4: 22-24).**

OBJECTION! Now, as we think about the question as to whether a Christian may forfeit eternal life, you may hear the argument that that is impossible ---

“How can one possibly become unborn? Yes, I may become a disobedient child, but I am still the Father’s child. What kind of human parent says to their rebellious child, you are no longer a part of my family? And all the more so, when ‘eternal life’ by definition must be eternal, must be forever, otherwise it’s not eternal life, right?”

Bit, is it wise to assume that what is true of physical birth is automatically true of spiritual birth? To answer this genuine objection, let me give you two essential differences between physical birth and spiritual birth. ⁴

1. WHEREAS PHYSICAL BIRTH BRINGS AN INDEPENDENT LIFE INTO THIS WORLD, SPIRITUAL BIRTH PRODUCES A RELATIONSHIP ALWAYS DEPENDENT ON CHRIST.

What do I mean by that? Well, in physical birth, as soon as a baby is born into this world, what’s the first thing that happens? Right. The umbilical cord is cut. And assuming the baby has a healthy heart and set of lungs, s/he cries out to the effect, “I’m here. I’m alive. I’m free and I’m me!”

Now of course, in the normal state of affairs, the baby will grow up loved and an integral part of his or her family. But, as far as his/her physical existence is concerned, **once the cord is cut** the baby is no longer dependent on the one who gave it life. In fact, both parents may die, as soon as the baby is born, but the child lives on. Physical birth brings an independent life into the world.

But it is not so where our spiritual new birth is concerned. When you are born again through faith in Christ, you are brought into the life of Another. When we are “born again” we become joined to God in Christ. Through baptism we are united with Christ. Our life is in him. **Christ is our life!**

Jesus says --- to change metaphors! --- **I am the Vine, you are the branches ... whoever does not remain in me is thrown away like a branch and withers ... (John 15: 5-6).** There is never a day when we are not fully dependent upon the resurrection life of Christ to be communicated to us as we walk with him

⁴ Robert Shank’s *Life in the Son: A Study of the Doctrine of Perseverance*, Westcott Publishers, Springfield, Missouri, 1960, pp 90f lists three essential differences.

in faith. Our spiritual life is totally dependent upon our abiding (remaining) in fellowship with our Saviour. Jesus says, **Remain in me, and I in you (Jn 15: 4).**

That's the first difference between our physical birth and our birth into the realm of God. Physical birth brings independent life into existence. On the other hand, our spiritual birth brings us into union with Christ which is a relationship that is never independent of him.

In physical birth the cord is cut, and the baby lives. In spiritual birth, the cord of faith is joined and can never be cut without losing vital connection with the life of Christ.

2. WHEREAS WE HAVE NO SAY IN OUR PHYSICAL BIRTH, IN SPIRITUAL BIRTH WE EXERCISE FULL KNOWLEDGE AND CONSENT.

When we sing **Happy birthday** and blow out the candles, sometimes another song erupts ...

Why was s/he born so beautiful, why was s/he born at all? Because s/he had no say in it, no say in it at all!

All of which is to make the point, that you and I had no say whether we were born into this world or not. But herein lies the second major difference between our physical birth and our spiritual birth.

After hearing the Gospel-word of our Lord, each of us has a decision to make. Will we repent of our sins, and deliberately change our attitude and our direction in life? Will we go God's way trusting our lives to Him, or not? Will we get off the broad way that leads to destruction, and will we enter the narrow way that leads to life everlasting? We must act on the Gospel invitation. We must consent to the claims of our Lord Jesus over our lives.

Whereas we had no say in our physical birth, our spiritual rebirth requires our consent. We must repent and intelligently believe the Gospel of the Kingdom as taught and purchased by Jesus.

The Bible says we are morally responsible and morally accountable beings. The **groom** of his own will takes the bride, but not before the **bride** of her own will consents. Our salvation is all from God's initiative and provision. But God's provision demands a response from men and women. ---

Peter admonished his listeners on the Day of Pentecost, **Save yourselves from this corrupt generation ... (Acts 2: 40).** Paul admonished Timothy, **Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save yourself and your hearers (I Tim. 4:16).** You see there is definitely a sense in which we must save ourselves. We are held morally responsible to believe Christ and to comply with his Gospel-word.

In view of obvious essential differences, it cannot be considered strange that spiritual birth, unlike physical birth, is not irrevocable. It is folly to assume that an equation exists between physical birth and spiritual birth, and that whatever is intrinsic in physical birth is equally so in spiritual birth. Physical birth and spiritual birth are equally real, but essentially different. While an analogy exists between the two, there is no equation whatever. ⁵

Let me make this very clear. Our status as God's children **remains conditional during our entire lifetime.** I repeat, our status as God's children **remains conditional during our entire lifetime.**

⁵ Robert Shank, *Life in the Son: A Study of the Doctrine of Perseverance*, Westcott Publishers, Springfield, Missouri, 1961, p91.

Let's prove this from Scripture --- Those who have been born⁶ of God, do not sin⁷ because God's seed abides in them; they cannot sin⁸, because they have been born⁹ of God (1 John 3: 9 NRSV).¹⁰

Let's unpack this loaded statement. First, how can it be true that one who is born of God **does not sin**? Hasn't John told us at the beginning of his letter, that **If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous?** Which is to say, John has already admitted that Christians do sin. And thankfully we can confess our sins and find forgiveness and cleansing because Jesus is our Mediator.

So, John knows we Christians unfortunately do all sin. Has he forgotten he wrote that when a few lines later he says, **Anyone who is born of God does not sin?** Not at all! The solution comes in the force of the verb tenses in the Greek text. Now, relax. I'm not going to give you a heavy Greek grammar lesson. But I do want to draw your attention to what John actually says.

Observe --- literally --- the Greek reads, **Anyone born of God cannot go on sinning.**¹¹ The idea is that if we are to continue to **stay born of God**¹² then it is a spiritual impossibility to practice willful, deliberate and persistent sinning. **The two conditions cannot indefinitely co-exist!**

Putting it bluntly, if we choose to continually disobey the will of God after becoming a "born again Christian" then our status as having been born of God is put in serious jeopardy ... **OUR STATUS AS GOD'S CHILDREN REMAINS CONDITIONAL ALL DURING OUR PRESENT LIFE!**

It is evident therefore that the circumstance, "cannot practice sinning," is not presented as an inevitable *consequence* of the new birth, but as an essential *condition* governing the continued realization of the new birth in the individual. A major thesis of 1 John is the Apostle's insistence that there are specific conditions under which the new birth *can* exist, and other specific conditions under which it *cannot* exist (cf. 1:5-7; 2: 3-11, 15-17, 24-29; 3: 6-24; 4:7, 8, 20 - 5:1).¹³

In plain English, **to remain born of God we must avoid known, habitual, deliberate sinning.** And the only way to avoid practising sin is to abide in Christ. Which is to say, **Only those who abide in Christ stand begotten of God! Because we are children of God we abide in Christ!**

Let me be practical and give an example or two where Jesus Himself teaches that a true disciple of his may end up forfeiting eternal life, their eternal relationship with God.

THE PARABLE OF THE LAW OF FORGIVENESS (MATTHEW 18).

One day Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, if my brother [if another member of the church ... NRSV] sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as 7 times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy times seven.

For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him;

⁶ *Gegenneemenos* ... perfect passive participle, nominative, singular masculine, literally means "having been born".

⁷ *Ou poiei* ... indicative present active 3rd sing literally means "does not practice".

⁸ *Hamartanein* ... infinitive, present active literally is "go on sinning" or, "habitually practices sinning".

⁹ *Gegenneetai* ... indicative perfect passive, 3rd singular, literally is, "he has been born".

¹⁰ The NRSV footnotes alternately translate the verse: **Those who have been born of God do not sin, because the children of God abide in him; they cannot sin, because they have been born of God.**

¹¹ *Hamartanein* ... is a present active infinitive meaning "he cannot go on sinning" or "he cannot continue practising sin".

¹² See footnote 3 with the further understanding that perfect participle *gegenneemenos* carries the nuance of "stand begotten".

¹³ Op Cit., *Life in the Son*, p 95

and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. ¹⁴

So the servant fell on his knees before him, saying, “have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.” And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt.

But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii ¹⁵; and seizing him by the throat, he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you.”

But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place.

Then his lord summoned him and said to him, “You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?” And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt.

So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart (Matt. 18: 21-35).

So, Jesus teaches that the forgiveness of God is fully and freely granted to each undeserving sinner. There is mercy enough for the vilest offender! Nevertheless, God’s forgiveness **remains conditional** depending on how we subsequently treat our fellows. Forgiveness may be revoked!

Forgiveness and mercy not subsequently passed on can be *forfeited*! Jesus clearly teaches that God’s forgiveness cannot exist in hearts that are themselves uncharitable and unforgiving. **So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.** This is a solemn promise from the lips of none other than Jesus himself!

Those unwilling to pass on God’s mercy to others in the end are incapable of receiving it themselves. Like [electricity](#), God’s life cannot flow into your heart, if it’s not allowed to flow on and be conducted to others.

It is possible warned Jesus, that those who have experienced God’s love and forgiveness may forfeit it if they refuse to show mercy to others. **For the one who has shown no mercy, will be given judgment without mercy; mercy triumphs (rejoices, boasts) over judgment (James 2:13).** God’s grace cannot dwell in bitter hearts. **Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy (Matt. 5: 7).**

SELF-FORGIVENESS. Just by the way, this includes being able to forgive yourself! Sometimes it’s harder to take mercy on ourselves, than it is to extend forgiveness to others who have wronged us.

I know of a woman who had a terrible battle forgiving herself for a big mistake she had made. She had left a pot of boiling water on the stove and her toddler pulled it over onto herself. The child suffered life-long disfigurement.

This poor woman would sit at home continually playing this dreadful mishap over and over again in her mind. This woman had become totally dysfunctional. The tragedy dominated her entire days and the ordeal was robbing her whole family of the wife and mother she was meant to be.

Her inability to apply God’s mercy to herself and to forgive herself meant the Enemy, Satan, was stealing the victorious life she was meant to have in Christ. But she is not alone. Multitudes of

¹⁴ Just one talent was worth 15 years wages of a labourer!

¹⁵ One denarius was worth one day’s wages.

Christians rob God and others of the lives they were meant to have because they do not pass on to themselves the full forgiveness the cross of Christ provides.

Have you passed on God's full forgiveness to *yourself*? If not, you are giving the Devil a powerful tool to steal your life. Christ has once for all offered the perfect atonement for the worst of our sins and mistakes. But we must believe He is righteous to forgive us once we repent and confess them. The Bible says love does not keep a list of wrongs. Don't keep a list on yourself! Those of us who walk in unforgiveness --- whether towards others or towards our own selves --- are rebels in the Kingdom, where love is not optional.

If we want to continue to enjoy the status of being born of God, then we will see to it that we do not live in deliberate willful sin. As we have said already, if Jesus is not your Saviour from your sin, then he cannot save you!

OLIVER CROMWELL

On his death-bed, Oliver Cromwell questioned his chaplain as to the doctrine of the final perseverance, and on being assured that it was a certain truth, said, "Then I am happy, for I am sure that I was once in a state of grace."

Was he told the truth? Or was he given a false hope?

Well, we have seen the truth is that, we **enter** eternal life the moment we trust Christ for salvation, but we will not **inherit** eternal life, until we see the Kingdom arrive at the Second Coming of Christ. Many enter, but fewer will inherit! Many start, but fewer finish! **Many are called, but few are chosen.**

Yes, we have the **promise** of eternal life now, but it does not become our lasting **possession** until the full redemption of our body when we are made immortal at the Second Coming of Christ. We enjoy a foretaste of eternal life in Christ today. But the full banquet awaits. Are you getting dressed for the grand occasion?

The Bible says, **We are being kept by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (I Pet. 1: 5).** Yes, whilst ever you are believing in Christ, you are being held safely in His mighty hands. **The believing one is safe** in Christ, for God is faithful.

In our holding firm to God's promises in Christ, we are held by His mighty Hand! None can snatch the **believer** out of the Almighty Father's Hand. **Our life is hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3: 3).**

CONCLUSION?

So, Can a *Christian* Lose eternal life? Is it possible a *Christian* may forfeit their place in the Coming Kingdom of Christ? Well, to add to the parables and teaching of Jesus we have looked at today, let's let Jesus have the final word, shall we? In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus solemnly warns that, **those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away"** (Luke 8: 13).

According to Jesus himself, it is possible to **believe for a while**, but to finally **fall away**. This is why it's -- **Better to keep the word 'safe' for the end of the journey, when we finally get there, and to use 'being saved' until we do!** ¹⁶

¹⁶ David Pawson, *The Normal Christian Birth: How To Give New Believers a Proper Start in Life*, Hodder & Stroughton, GB, 1997, p301

