



Can a genuinely saved person lose his or her salvation?

The doctrine of eternal security or “perseverance of the saints” or “once saved always saved” has been a core Protestant doctrine since the Reformation (1517). This can be defined as once a person has accepted by faith the saving grace of Christ there is no deed or action that can cause a person to lose his salvation and be lost to eternal damnation, the individual’s salvation is eternally secured by the same unmerited grace.

John 10:28-30 “*and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.*” These words of Jesus make clear that our guardian – the Son of God, is Himself testifying that salvation is in His hands, as Calvin says “This is a remarkable passage, by which we are taught that the salvation of all the elect is not less certain than the power of God is invincible.”¹ Verse 29 reads “*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.*” We can rest assured from this verse that the invincible power of God the Father will always be sufficient to protect believers. Some opposed to this view, conjecturing that we could remove ourselves from the hand of the Lord, but as Grudem comments this “seems to be pedantic quibbling over words—does not “no one” also include the person who is in Christ’s hand?”²

John 6:38–40: “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. “This is the will of Him who sent Me, *that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing* but raise it up on the last day. “For this is the will of My Father, *that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.*”

John 3:36: “He who believes in the Son *has eternal life*” (cf. also John 5:24; 6:47; 10:28; 1 John 5:13). We know that sin brings death in this life, therefore if we have αἰώνιος “*eternal, without end*” life then that eternal life can only be with God.

John 5:24 tells us that the believer who hears the word of God has instantly and permanently passed from judgment and death to life: “*Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment.*”

¹ John Calvin and William Pringle, vol. 1, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 416.

² Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), 789.

Romans 8:38-39 tells us there is nothing in the universe that can keep us from God: *“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Jude 24 assures believers that God will keep His own from falling from salvation: *“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy”*

Ephesians 1:13 assures believers that the truth of the gospel has sealed us in salvation by the third person of the trinity: *“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit”*

Ephesians 1:14 Paul says that “Holy Spirit is the *“guarantee* of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it” – the Holy Spirit who has indwelled the redeemed is Gods’ promise and guarantee of eternal life.

1 Thessalonians 5:23–24 *“now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.”*

Romans 8:30 *“and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.”* The “golden chain of redemption” seems clear enough that as God works in His eternal purposes of predestination, the ultimate end and assurance is glorification of those he has justified, there is no qualification of some potentially falling away. All who are predestined are called, all who are called are justified and all who are justified are glorified.

Hebrews has extensive support:

- Hebrews 6:17-19 says *“So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong ...”* In these verses we are told that God has guaranteed with an oath, and that oath is the assurance of our gift of salvation.
- “One of the new covenant promises that Hebrews emphasizes is cited initially in 8:12b: *“their sins I will remember no longer”* (NET Bible, quoting Jer. 31:34). This is repeated in Hebrews 10:17, where it is cited to give the grounds for the statement of 10:14, *“by one offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.”* This also may be the background for the statement in 9:15 that *“he is the mediator of a new covenant ... so that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”* These are also significant statements about the security that Christ’s high priesthood provides to those who benefit from its

provisions.”³

The Westminster Confession (1648) 17.1 beautifully captures the truth “*They, whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally, nor finally, fall away from the state of grace: but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.*” The basis of this assurance is found in 17.2 “*This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ, the abiding of the Spirit, and of the seed of God within them, and the nature of the covenant of grace: from all which arises also the certainty and infallibility thereof.*”

Opponents of this view may point to the following verses, which have clear exegetical responses:

- Luke 8:13 “*And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away.*”

Here Luke is clearly referring to those who were not true believers, for in the same Scripture the Lord said that they "have no root"--the gospel never pierced their stony heart to create saving faith. They experienced God's truth and Holy Spirit as soil that receives the rain but produces thorns and not good fruit, and so they ultimately fall away.

- Hebrews 6:4-6: “*For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.*”

David Allen comments, "Those who have once been enlightened most likely refers to the initial illumination that results from a response to the preaching of the gospel or early Christian teaching."⁴ In other words a person may be enlighten but may not have come to a saving faith. Some translations read the next set of verbs as “have become partakers,” the NASB translates as “have been made partakers” which is a more passive form that describes the outcome of accepting salvation is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer.

"For it is impossible . . . to restore them again to repentance," new Jewish Christians who turned away from Christ had in fact repudiated the source of

³ Fanning, Buist M. “A Classical Reformed View.” In *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, edited by Herbert W. Bateman IV. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2007.

⁴ David L. Allen, Hebrews, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 348.

repentance. Not unlike the children of Israel who rejected God in favor of safety from Canaanites and were then to wonder for forty years a Christian who rejects Christ cannot find repentance away from the one who pardons sins. By turning away from the source of salvation they are not losing their salvation (this assured through Rom 8:29-30, John 10:30, John 5:24) but rather are turning to a willful state of living where they cannot repent. Fanning, in an article on Hebrews 6 writes “The answer to this problem is, I think, that the writer is portraying the phenomena of their conversion, what their Christian experience looks like outwardly. He portrays them in distinctly Christian terms to emphasize how close they have been to the faith and what they are rejecting if they depart.”⁵

- John 6:66: *“After this many of his disciples quit following him and did not accompany him any longer”*

There is no reason to believe those who left were saved, but rather the opposite, look contextually at 6:64 *“But there are some of you who do not believe.” (For Jesus had already known from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.)*”

- 1 Tim 4:1 *“Now the Spirit explicitly says that in the later times some will desert the faith and occupy themselves with deceiving spirits and demonic teachings, 4:2 influenced by the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared”*

It is not clear those who fell away or departed were actually believers, but rather it’s important to understand that a mere intellectual affirmation of faith does not guarantee the actual possession of eternal life. We see the same language in John 2:19 *“They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us, because if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But they went out from us to demonstrate that all of them do not belong to us.”*

- Mark 14:27-29 *“Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away, for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ 14:28 But after I am raised, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.” 14:29 Peter said to him, “Even if they all fall away, I will not!”*

Here Jesus is clearly referring to believers who are simply running from danger, not from salvation.

- 2 Peter 3:16 *“Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard that you do not get led astray by the error of these unprincipled men and fall from your firm grasp on the truth.”*

There is no indication this is fall from salvation, but rather not to be led astray by the ἀθέσμων (lawless) people teaching a false gospel.

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⁵ Fanning, Buist M. “A Classical Reformed View.” In *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, edited by Herbert W. Bateman IV. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2007.