

BIG QUESTIONS

Part 1: Can Christians Lose Their Salvation?

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Can Christians lose their salvation if they live a sinful, unrepentant lifestyle, commit suicide, or openly reject the faith and deny Christ? Can Christians lose their salvation by committing the unpardonable sin?

I. WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

A Christian is a person who has fully trusted in Jesus Christ as their Savior (John 3:16; Acts 16:31; Ephesians 2:8–9).

This question relates only to the genuine salvation of true believers. We all know of people who claimed to be Christians, and then later indicated by their words or actions, that they were not truly saved. Perhaps they were caught up with Christian friends in Christian activities but were never regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This study relates only to true believers. Can a true believer become lost? Are believers in Christ eternally secure? A true believer, a “Christian” is not a person who has simply said a prayer or walked down an aisle or been raised in a Christian family. While each of these things can be a part of the Christian experience, they are not what makes a Christian.

II. FALSE CLAIMS FOR LOSING ONE’S SALVATION

False Claim: Based on 2 Peter 2:21, and Hebrews 6:4-6, backslidden Christians can lose salvation.

“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.” 2 Peter 2:21

“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.” Hebrews 6:4-6

Response: These verses are not about believing Christians who “backslide.” These verses are describing Jewish unbelievers who were intellectually persuaded of the gospel and Jesus Christ (“once enlightened”) but were spiritually uncommitted. They had “fallen away” by initially knowing the truth but then rejecting it.

False Claim: Christians can commit the unpardonable sin (Matthew 12:32) and lose their salvation.

“Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come” Matthew 12:32

Response: Christians today cannot commit the unpardonable sin! Matthew 12 appears to refer to a sin that could take place only in the time of Jesus. It is knowingly attributing Jesus’ miracles, done by the power of the Holy Spirit, to Satan. To commit this particular sin required the personal and visible presence of Christ on earth; to commit it today, therefore, would be impossible. Any sin for which you sincerely seek Jesus’ forgiveness, is not the unpardonable sin. See 1 John 5:1; John 1:12; 3:15-16; 3:36; 5:24; 6:40; 1 John 1:9; Romans 10:9, 11.

“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God...” 1 John 5:1

“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” John 1:12

“...that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:15-16

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.” John 3:36

“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.” John 5:24

“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 6:40

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9

“That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Romans 10:9

“As the Scripture says, ‘Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’” Romans 10:11

False Claim: The “burned branches” in John 15:1-6, indicate that Christians can lose their salvation. This passage states that anyone who does not abide in Christ will be thrown into the fire and burned. It suggests that true believers will spend eternity in Hell if they don’t abide in Christ.

"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." John 15:1-6

Response: The person in John 15:1-6, who does not “abide in me” is an unbeliever who does not have a personal faith in Christ. It does not refer to Christian believers. To “abide” in Christ (Grk: *meno, μείνω*) is to live in Him. When a person is saved, he or she is described as being “in Christ” (Romans 8:1; 2 Corinthians 5:17), held secure in a permanent relationship (John 10:28–29). Therefore, abiding in Christ is not a special level of Christian experience, rather, it is the position of all true believers.

The difference between those abiding in Christ and those not abiding in Christ is the difference between the saved and the unsaved.

False Claim: Christians who commit suicide can lose their salvation. A Christian who commits suicide will lose their salvation and will be eternally lost in Hell.

Response: It is a sad fact that some Christians have committed suicide. Adding to the tragedy is the false teaching that committing suicide automatically consigns one to hell. Many believe that a Christian who commits suicide will not be saved. This teaching is not supported in the Bible. Scripture teaches that, from the moment we truly believe in Christ, we are guaranteed eternal life (John 3:16).

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (Jn. 3:16 NIV)

III. 12 REASONS WHY CHRISTIANS CANNOT LOSE THEIR SALVATION¹

Reason No. 1: Salvation is a gift from God and is irrevocable (Romans 11:29).

“...for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. (Rom. 11:29 NIV)

Most, if not all, of what the Bible says happens to us when we receive Christ would be invalidated if salvation could be lost. A Christian cannot be un-newly created. The redeemed cannot be unpurchased. Eternal life cannot be temporary. God cannot renege on His Word; scripture says that God cannot lie (Titus 1:2).

Reason No. 2: A Christian is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17, NKJV).

A Christian is not simply an “improved” version of a person; a Christian is an entirely new creature. He is “in Christ.” For a Christian to lose salvation, the new creation would have to be destroyed.

Reason No. 3: A Christian is marked by God and sealed by the Spirit (Ephesians 1:13; 4:30).

“You also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory” (Eph. 1:13).

“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” (Eph. 4:30 NIV).

At the moment of faith, the new Christian is marked and sealed with the Spirit, who was promised to act as a deposit to guarantee the heavenly inheritance. The result is that God's glory is praised. For a Christian to lose salvation, God would have to erase the mark, withdraw the Spirit, cancel the deposit, break His promise, revoke the guarantee, keep the inheritance, forego the praise, and lessen His glory.

Reason No. 4: The Holy Spirit places believers into the body of Christ.

For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body-- whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free-- and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. (1

¹ This author is indebted to S. Michael Houdman, <www.GotQuestions.Org>, for much of this content.

Cor. 12:13 NIV)

There is no evidence in Scripture that believers are ever removed from the universal body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Reason No. 5: A Christian is redeemed (1 Peter 1:18-19).

“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:18–19).

The word redeemed refers to a purchase being made; a price being paid. We were purchased at the cost of Christ’s death. For a Christian to lose salvation, God Himself would have to revoke His purchase of the individual for whom He paid with the precious blood of Christ.

Reason No. 6: A Christian is justified (Romans 5:1).

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

To justify is to declare righteous. All those who receive Jesus as Savior are “declared righteous” by God. For a Christian to lose salvation, God would have to go back on His Word and “un-declare” what He had previously declared. Those absolved of guilt would have to be tried again and found guilty. God would have to reverse the sentence handed down from the divine bench.

Reason No. 7: A Christian is promised eternal life (John 3:16).

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Eternal life is the promise of spending forever in heaven with God. God promises that if you believe, you will have eternal life. For a Christian to lose salvation, eternal life would have to be redefined. The Christian is promised to live forever. Does eternal not mean “eternal”? In OT God demonstrated over and over again that he is a promise keeper!

Reason No. 8: No one can charge God's elect with anything that could cause them to lose their salvation (Rom. 8:33).

“Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.” (Rom. 8:33 NIV)

Reason No. 9: God has begun a process that leads from predestination to glorification without any possibility for loss (Rom. 8:28-30).

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love

him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.” (Rom. 8:28-30 NIV)

Reason No. 10: A Christian is guaranteed glorification (Romans 5:1; 8:30; Philipians 3:20-21).

“Those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified” (Romans 8:30).

According to Romans 5:1, justification is ours at the moment of faith. All those whom God justifies are promised to be glorified. This promise will be fulfilled when Christians receive their perfect resurrection bodies in heaven (Phil. 3:20-21). If a Christian can lose salvation, then Romans 8:30 is in error, because God could then not guarantee glorification for all those whom He predestines, calls, and justifies.

Reason No. 11: The Lord Jesus continually intercedes for believers (Heb. 7:25, 1 John. 2:1), and that is sufficient to keep us saved.

“Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.” (Heb. 7:25 NIV)

“My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father-- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.” (1 John. 2:1 NIV)

Reason No. 12: Believers are secure in the hand of Jesus and the hand of the Father (John 10:27-29). Jesus teaches that "they shall never perish" and no one is able "to snatch them out" of His or the Father's hand (John. 10:27-29).

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.” (Jn. 10:27-29 NIV)

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