

Can Christians Be Lost? 2 Peter 2:20-22

Some say that once you become a Christian, that you can never lose your salvation. Is this true? The doctrine of “*once saved, always saved*” suggest that the Christian, once truly saved, can never do anything to lose his salvation and finally be lost in hell. They suggest that any person who appears to be a Christian and falls away, were never truly converted in the first place. They say that Christians do sin; but when they sin, they are punished in this life and forfeit privileges in heaven but not entrance into heaven.

But is heaven conditional? A conditional statement is usually introduced by words such as “*if*” or “*unless*.” When Jesus said in **Lk. 13:3** that *unless* you repent, you will perish, we understand that repentance is a condition to keep from being lost. When the Bible says “*If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin*” (**1 Jn. 1:6-7**). You see, God has given conditions.

The doctrine of once-saved, always saved is built upon the belief that God’s grace is unconditional. Some say once grace is given, a Christian cannot lose it. But the doctrine of unconditional security ignores the conditional, qualifying statements in Scripture about whom the grace saves. There are several passages that show our salvation is conditional. We must remain faithful to God.

For instance, in **Jn. 8:51** Jesus says, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.*” But what happens if a person stops keeping God’s word? The Lord said in **John 15:1-2**, “*I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*” **John 15:6** says, “*If*

anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.” This is the end of a Christian who does not bear fruit.

Moreover, our moral life matters too! A Christian who turns to fleshly passions can lose his soul, but one who puts away sin can live with God. **Romans 8:12-13** says, *“So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”* **Morality is a condition of salvation.**

The Lord expects His people to hold firmly to the faith. Our salvation depends on it. **1 Cor. 15:1-2** says, *“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.”* If they don’t hold firmly to their faith, they will have believed in vain and could lose their salvation.

Remaining active in church attendance and our efforts for the gospel is a condition of our salvation. In **Hebrews 10:25** the inspired Biblical author noted that some Christians had forsaken assembling with the church. In response to this, he wrote in **verses 26-27**: *“For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.”* Yes, a Christian who quits on God can lose the blessing of eternal life. God expects us to stay involved in church as long as we are able.

In **Second Peter** Christians are urged to remain faithful and not to fall away to immorality or false teaching. **2 Peter 2:20-21** says, *“For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to*

have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.” This clear Scripture shows that if a Christian gets overcome by sin, he can find himself worse off than before he became a Christian. It would have been better if he had never known the way of the Lord.

In 1 John 1:6-7 the Bible says, *“If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”* Let us not forget that these words were written to Christians. **Our freedom from sin is conditional on whether we follow the Lord and not the world.**

I have now presented several conditions that God has place on our salvation, and there are many more. But if there were just one Scriptural condition, it would be enough to show that our salvation is conditional.

In addition to the conditions, we have just talked about, *Scriptures often warn Christians to remain faithful and committed to the Lord.* In 1 Cor. 9:24-27 Paul wrote, *“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So, I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.”* Paul knew that he could lose his crown of life if he didn’t discipline himself and stay free from sin.

In Gal. 5:19-21 *Paul warned the Galatian Christians about the deeds of the flesh.* And he said, *“Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom*

of God.” Why would Paul forewarn Christians about these sins keeping them out of heaven, if Christians couldn’t lose their salvation?

Our faith and commitment to Christ is a lifetime effort. The Lord Jesus in **Jn. 5:24** said, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”* One has eternal life as long as he believes and obeys. But if he stops believing or stops obeying, he can lose that life.

Well can a person stop believing? Some think not, but we have an example in Scripture of Israel coming out of Egypt. Study **Psalm 106** closely. **Verse 12** says, *“Then they believed his words; they sang his praise.”* But **verse 13** says, *“But they soon forgot his works; they did not wait for his counsel.”* In **verse 21** we read, *“They forgot God, their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt...”* And here is how it ends, **verses 24-25**, *“Then they despised the pleasant land, having no faith in his promise. They murmured in their tents, and did not obey the voice of the LORD.”* Can people stop believing? The Israelites did!

In the Parable of the Sower, you will remember that Jesus described different kinds of soil: there is the soil by the road, then there is the rocky soil, the thorny soil, and the good soil. These soils we are told are the different types of people’s hearts. Let us see what Jesus said about these in **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.”* You see they stopped believing. I think we all know people like this. Who believed at one point in their life, but because of the circumstances quit believing in another.

In **1 Tim. 4:1**, Paul predicted, *“Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons...”* You see, when you stop

listening to the word of the Lord, you begin to pay attention to others, you can stop believing. To believe in the Lord Jesus means that you believe what He teaches. How can you say you believe the Lord if you will not accept what He teaches?

Now consider **Hebrews 3:12-14**, these words are written to Christians: *“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.”* To fall away is to abandon the Lord willfully. These brothers they had been deceived and hardened by sin and they lost their faith. Again, we are partakers of Christ if we hold firm our faith to the end.

I know that **John 10:27-29** says that *“no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”* And I know that **Romans 8:35-39** teaches that no one and nothing can separate us from God. *These verses however, don’t take into account what happens to a person who decides to separate himself from God.* **Jude 21** advises us to *“keep yourself in the love of God”*; and **John 15:9-10** teaches us that we must abide in God’s love. **You see, no one else can separate us from God, but we can decide ourselves to leave the Lord.** Sadly, Christians can choose to fall away! They can choose to leave God.

And to those who wish to say, that these were never truly converted in the first place. I would like to ask, **Are you sure?** Have you never changed your mind? The Bible in **Hebrews 6:4-6** says, *“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, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, 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.”*

It is beyond doubt that the Hebrew writer was describing people who were once Christians. *They were enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, they were partakers of the Holy Spirit, and they tasted or experienced the good word of God and the powers of the age to come. **You cannot have these spiritual blessings outside of Christ.*** You can't fall away from something unless you had it in the first place. *These Christians fell away by willfully rejecting Jesus Christ.* Others could not get them to repent, *because they did not want to repent.* To fall away is to willfully choose to abandon the faith. And this is what the Hebrew writer described.

In a different situation Galatians speaks of Christians who were following a different gospel than the one Paul preached by binding circumcision and the Law on Gentile Christians. Because of this in **Gal. 5:4** Paul says, ***"You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace."*** Here are people under the grace of God, but they fell away from it, they severed themselves from Christ. To be severed implies that they first belonged to Him.

Know this brethren, a Christian can fall from Grace. I hope that you never do!

Thank God for a second law of pardon for Christians who have sinned. Even when a Christian strays from the truth, *God has a way for him to return to salvation.* Like the prodigal son, he can come home to God.

When Simon the Sorcerer in Acts 8 offered to buy the apostles' gift, Peter rebuked him for his sin. In **Acts 8:21-24** he said, ***"You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."***

And Simon answered, “Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.”

Another dear passage on this subject is **1 John 1:9**, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* God is faithful to His people. *He will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness, “if” we confess our sins, repent of them, and ask for forgiveness.* God offers pardon, but there are conditions to our forgiveness.

The same is true for the person who wants to become a Christian. The Lord Jesus offered the same gift of salvation to those who believe, who will repent of their sins, who will confess His name before others, and who will be baptized. Now baptism is and has always been an immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins (**Acts 2:38**). **Meeting conditions won't earn your salvation; but if you fail to meet them, you cannot enjoy the grace and blessing of God.**