

## **The Security of the Believer** **Can a Believer lose his “Grace Salvation?”**

Every Christian has doubted his or her salvation in Christ. Mr. Doubt comes visiting the new, immature believer, like a thief in the night, to steal his assurance of salvation. All it takes is a whisper in the ear from the enemy telling us we are lost. He says, “How can you call yourself a Christian and do what you just did?” Also, there are many voices coming from pulpits telling folks that disobedience can separate you from Christ and his love.

Can a Christian lose his salvation through doubt, sin, or willful disobedience? Can we “fall from Grace?” Is it possible to be saved eternally and then forfeit that precious gift by actions, or deeds that we have done or not done?

### **The Real Issue**

First, when we ask the question, “*can a Christian lose his salvation?*” we must ask a prior question that is even more important, that is, “*how did I secure my salvation in the first place?*” “Does forgiveness come to me because of something I did, or was forgiveness the result of what Christ did for me? Is being saved a result of my efforts or His? I must determine if being saved is by Grace or by works or even a combination of both. How I answer those questions will settle the issue of whether or not I believe I can lose my salvation.

### **I had it, but lost it**

Many major denominations teach that a believer can lose salvation because of some unconfessed or unrepentant sin. The debate is as old as the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. John Calvin and James Arminius held differing views. Calvin taught “the eternal security of the believer,” while Arminius said “no.” to eternal security. Denominations have divided along lines with these great men.

Calvin says, “I HAVE IT AND CANNOT LOSE IT!

Arminius says, I HAVE IT, BUT I CAN LOSE IT!

So, wherein lies the truth?

### **A Paradox**

Language can be confusing, for example the idea of “saved.” This word implies rescue, deliverance, and redemption. How can you or I be “partially” saved, or “sorta” saved? It is like saying you were almost saved from being shot, or you were almost saved from being run over by a truck. If you were shot you were not saved from being shot. If a truck ran over you, or even a part of you, you weren’t saved from being squished by the truck. Sorta saved or temporarily saved is not really “saved.” In fact, saved from what? In the bible we are saved from “wrath” through Christ. Either we are or we are not saved from God’s wrath.

### **Eternal or Temporary**

Think about the word *eternal* in scripture. It literally means the “life of the ages, or from age to age.” The forgiveness Jesus offers us is repeatedly called “eternal life.” See **John 3:16; John 3:36; Romans 6:23; Hebrews 7:25; 1<sup>st</sup> John 5:11-12**

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How then can salvation be both eternal and temporary? The salvation Jesus promised us is expressed as, “*and I give life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.*” **John 10:28**

Notice, if you can never perish, how can you ever perish? And if forgiveness is eternal (forever) how can it not be forever or just temporary?

### **Gifts and Wages**

Scripture often speaks of salvation being a “gift.” The very word for God’s “grace” has the root word for gift in it. Grace is always a gift, never a wage. In fact, wages and gifts are opposites. Wages you earn thru work or labor; a gift you cannot earn, it must be freely given, that’s why it is a gift.

Salvation is a gift to be received, it is never an attainment to be achieved. It is received not earned. It is not a merit we earn but a mercy God gives. Salvation does not begin in the life of man but in the love of God.

The idea of losing salvation has behind it the thought that it was earned by good behavior and can be lost by bad behavior. This is not what scripture teaches us.

### **Grace Salvation**

Let’s take a moment to examine the meaning of grace salvation and all that it implies.

First, all mankind faces a two-fold liability in the presence of Holy God:

- We are sinners by birth- sons of Adam, born in sin (**Romans 5:12, 19**). Our very nature is sinful, self-centered, and cannot please God. See Romans 8:8.
- We are sinners by choice (**Romans 3:10-23**). Therefore, we are guilty of transgressing against God’s law and his love.

### **Walls and Barriers**

Because of these barriers between us and Holy God, we need two things:

- *Deliverance* from what we are- Self-centered, not God centered
- *Forgiveness* for what we’ve done- Sin

God’s offer of Grace Salvation is that he has torn down the barriers that separate us from himself. Man erected the walls and is helpless to remove them. God must take the initiative, which he has done in sending his Son Jesus to die for us. We cannot change what we are on the inside, nor can we go back in time and undo the wrongs we have done. Mankind deserves justice, but he needs mercy! God’s grace in Christ is that mercy. Someone defined God’s grace as:

G-God’s

R-riches

A-at

C-Christ’s

E-Expense

God’s riches given freely to us is the cross of his beloved Son Jesus. Scripture says it this way, “*while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*” That is God’s gift of grace salvation.

### **Four Word Pictures**

The NT gives us four beautiful “word pictures” that illustrate God’s gift of

Grace to sinners. *These* word pictures show us the love of God in forgiving us eternally and putting us in right standing with Him forever.

**Justified**= **Romans 3:24** says, “*Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.*” The word *justified* means to declare “innocent”, “not guilty” or “righteous”. Paul says that is what God, the righteous Judge of the universe, has done for us. He has declared us not guilty. How did He accomplish such a feat? It wasn’t easy. God was faced with a delicate dilemma. As a Holy God, He must punish sin. As a God of love, He desires to forgive the sinners. He hates sin and loves the sinner. How can He vindicate His holiness and still love the sinner? *Justification* was God’s answer.

*An act of grace.* Perhaps an illustration of how God justified us would help demonstrate what the cross of Jesus did for us. Suppose I am your father. I am also a district Judge. You are my rebellious teenage daughter or son. You steal an automobile, and, while driving under the influence of alcohol, you run over and kill an innocent child. By chance you are brought into my court for sentencing. All the evidence is in, and you are found guilty on several counts of lawlessness. It is my task, as judge, to pass sentence upon you—my own child. For the sake of the illustration, let’s say the sentence is capital punishment – a life for a life. What a dilemma! As your loving father I desire to forgive and extend mercy, but as a judge I must honor the law and punish the lawbreaker. What is the solution? Suppose, as the judge, I came down off the judge’s seat, stood beside you, and passed sentence upon myself as your substitute my life for yours. The law would be satisfied, and you would be justified. You would be declared righteous, innocent. I would have taken your place and punishment—the innocent for the guilty. Someone said justified means, “Just as if I had never sinned”. What a wonderful act of love that would be. Amazingly, that is what God, the righteous Judge, did for us. Jesus (God in the flesh, **John 1:14, 18; Hebrews 1:3**) died in our place. **Romans 5:8** declares, “...*Christ died for us.*” God now sees the sinner just as if he had never sinned – or *justified*. We are pardoned by the Judge of the universe. Forever!

Notice that God has declared us righteous. It is an act of His love. He sees us as innocent when He knows we are not! Jesus’ righteousness has been deposited to our bankrupt account, and God sees us in Christ. We are pardoned without any merit in us. We had nothing to do with it. It is pure grace. We are acquitted, pronounced innocent, and all because of the death of Jesus, our Savior. That is one look at how God removed the barriers. He *justified* us in Christ. We have been eternally pardoned, not just paroled.

**Redeemed**=A second word picture often used in the NT is this word “*redeemed.*” Jesus has also redeemed us, as well as pardoned us. **Romans 3:24** also says, “*Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.*” Even as justification pictures the courtroom, redemption pictures the slave market. It portrays the sinner as a slave to sin and the devil. Christ came to pay the ransom for our freedom. Jesus Himself used this word picture when he said, “*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*” (**Mark 10:45**).

This Greek word for ransom means the price paid to a slave owner to purchase a slave. The price that purchased us out of slavery was the precious blood of Jesus. This is Simon Peter’s thought when he writes, “*knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ*” (**1 Peter 1:18, 19**). Redemption has been purchased for us. Our freedom from sin’s bondage has been paid for by the blood of Christ. We

have been declared not guilty before the Law of God and also set free from slavery. We are never to be put on sale again, because we are no longer slaves, but sons, adopted into the family of God (**Romans 8:15**). We have been forever acquitted and emancipated! The Bible tells us at least five things about our redemption:

- It cost God the life of His only Son (**1 Peter 1:18, 19**)
- It has taken place, historically, on the cross (**Ephesians 1:7**)
- It is eternal, not temporary (**Hebrews 9:12**)
- It is offered to the whole world (**1 Timothy 2:3-6**)
- It must be appropriated by faith in the work of Jesus on the cross (**Romans 3:26, 28**)
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**Propitiation**= Third, God's saving grace is pictured as a *propitiation* for sins. **Romans 3:25** contains Paul's third graphic illustration of what happened on the cross. "*Whom God displayed publically as a propitiation in his blood through faith...*"

This idea of making propitiation is a high priestly word illustrating what happens when a priest offers up an animal sacrifice to God to remove the guilt of sin. It pictures Yom Kippur-the Day of Atonement, when the high priest of the Jews would one day a year offer up an unblemished lamb as a sacrifice for the sins of the people. This word propitiation also pictures the Passover in Egypt when the blood was put on the doorposts of Israel's houses and the Angel of Death "passed over" them. The Passover is a shadow fulfilled in the Cross of Christ where the messiah's blood was posted on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins.

The main idea in propitiation is that the sacrifice of the innocent blood of Jesus both removes our guilt and expiates God's wrath against us. To propitiate is to "cover over" and to expiate is to remove or blot out. Both of these Jesus did for us. **1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 5:7** says, "*For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.*" John the Baptist said it, "*Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*"(**John 1:29**)

### **Benefits of Christ's "propitiation"**

First of all- God has forever cleansed us of all unrighteousness. Our sins are gone, blotted out forever. See **Col. 2:14** where this one sacrifice for sins removes all guilt for all time.

Second, this means God is not mad at us anymore! His wrath toward us who are saved is GONE! Jesus took God's wrath upon himself on the cross. Therefore when a Christian sins (and we all do) he need never fear the wrath of God. God's love for us in Christ is unconditional. Even God's discipline to sinning believers is not punishment to get even for offended justice, but is the work of love teaching us to walk by faith.

Propitiation says, "God has cleansed me and loves me eternally."

**Reconciliation**= In **Romans 5:10, 11**, Paul uses another picture word several times. It is the family word *reconciliation*. This term was illustrated for us by our Lord Jesus, in the parable of the prodigal son (**Luke 15:11-32**). When the wayward son came home to this father, and the two embraced after the son's confession; that was a picture of reconciliation. To be reconciled to God basically means to be restored to fellowship with our heavenly Father, because all the barriers are down. Because the sin, guilt, and wrath are gone, we now have eternal peace with God. God is our Father; we are His children, and fellowship is secured.

### **Putting the Puzzle Together**

Paul has been painting a picture for us. It is entitled *Saved by Grace*. This picture is like a giant puzzle. As we put the pieces together, we gain a perspective of the whole. Notice this progression:

*Propitiation*: God has cleansed us and removed all guilt.

*Justification*: God has pronounced us innocent; we are pardoned.

*Redemption*: God has freed us from bondage and death.

*Reconciliation*: As a result, we are reconciled to God and restored to fellowship.

Paul says in **Colossians 1:22**, “yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach.” These are the results of grace salvation. We have forgiveness, freedom, and cleansing, so He can present us before Him “. . . holy and . . . beyond reproach.” All of this simply means that God has accepted us in Christ. Sins are no longer the issue. All the barriers are gone, removed forever. No matter how many sins you have committed, nothing can keep you from God. His grace is greater than all our sin.

### **Eight troublesome scriptures:**

There are only 8 Passages in the New Testament that seem to indicate “*falling from Grace*.” is possible. We will examine them one at a time to see what is taught here.

**John 15: 5,6** “ *if anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned*”

1. The verses are allegorical & symbolic, we should not base any critical doctrine on allegory.
2. The issue Jesus is addressing is bearing fruit (righteousness), not salvation, or disobedience. The issue is our “abiding” in Christ which is about our fellowship with Christ not our relationship to Christ (salvation).
3. He who abides bears fruit as the life of Jesus’ Spirit flows thru him. We are worthless to any spiritual production apart from abiding in Christ. This allegory of roots, fruits, vines and branches is about our being in close fellowship with Christ which will make our lives fruitful and worthwhile, not “worthless.”

**Galatians 5:4** “*you have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from Grace.*”

1. This sentence must read this in the “context” of the whole book & theme of Galatians, in which the Apostle Paul is defending “grace salvation” against those Jewish believers from Jerusalem who came to Galatia teaching a “different gospel.” See **Galatians 1:6**.
2. These false teachers (Judaizers) were mixing law & grace; telling the church that the men must be circumcised, they must observe Jewish Mishnah rules and holidays. They were adding these “laws” to the cross of Christ as saving works.
3. Paul taught Grace-plus-nothing salvation. He calls their teaching a “different” gospel. It is different because it adds works to the completed work of Christ. See **Galatians 2:20, 21**.

4. Paul affirms to the Galatians that our sins and religious performance are no longer the issues, but that God's grace given to us in the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ is all sufficient for salvation-plus nothing. To add any human work is to "fall away from the principle of salvation by grace."

### **Hebrews 6: 4-6**

"...if they should fall away..." This phrase raises the question of can a Christian lose his Salvation thru disobedience.

1. If it teaches losing salvation, it also teaches that a believer who can lose it, cannot get it back. He has committed the "sin unto death" of *1<sup>st</sup> John 5* If it is teaching that you can be saved, then sin away God's grace, then it is also teaching total apostasy-that you cannot ever be resaved. I do not think that is the teaching here.
2. The writer of Hebrews describes those in **Heb. 5:12-14** as those who "*ought to be teachers*" thus they are saved but immature. They need to grow up in the faith. Then in the following passage in **6:1-6** he tells the same saved people to go on to maturity. He further describes them as:

"Those who have been enlightened...

Having tasted of the heavenly gift,

Made partakers of the Holy Spirit,

Tasted the good word of God,

And the powers of the age to come"

All these are descriptions of a born again believer in Christ. The writer then declares that "if" it were possible for these true believers to fall away from the faith (renounce faith in Christ) then it is impossible to renew them to salvation ever again. Why? Because there is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved (**Acts 4:12**) Christ would have to come back and do it all again! Thus if it were possible to be saved, then lost, you can never be resaved!

3. Probably, this section (verses 4-6) is a "hypothetical" straw man statement showing that Christ is the only way of Salvation, and to turn away from him is to be forever lost. See *1<sup>st</sup> John 2:19* I believe it is a hypothetical not actual statement. It is a "what if" situation. This passage is in reality teaching the impossibility of a truly saved person ever being lost.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 2:20-22** "...a dog returns to its own vomit."

1. To whom were these words spoken? See 2:1= false teachers, who denied the Master who bought them with his precious blood (see **1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:18,19**)
2. Peter is speaking to those who came right up to the door of salvation in Christ, perverted the truth, and then turned back to their sensual ways.
3. This is not unlike many thousands of Church members who "prayed the sinner's prayer" but there was no true repentance & re-birth. Then they "fall away" without having ever truly been saved.

### **James 5:19, 20** "...will save his soul from death..."

There are several possible ways to understand this verse:

1. If a Christian strays from the truth, turn him back and save his soul from the death of hell. If this is the meaning, the verse is teaching apostasy.
2. If a Christian sins, turn him back and save his soul from the “death” of lost fellowship here on earth. This idea minimizes the word “death” making it equal to darkness or deprivation.
3. “*save his soul*” could have the idea of “delivering his personality” from death. It would thus translate, “deliver his life from the deadly results of sin.” This is the most probable meaning in the light of other scriptures like **James 4:8** and **Galatians 6:1,2**

**Revelation 3:5** *...and I will not erase his name from the book of life”*

1. The context is the Seven Churches of Revelation
2. The Sardis church has two kinds of people in its membership, saved and lost. He is telling the saved that their salvation is secure, and because they are worthy, their name is forever in the book of Life. This phrase does not imply that God has an eraser he uses on folks that commit some unforgiveable sin.

### **Final thoughts**

Those who are saved forever from God’s wrath are described by Jesus, Paul and Peter as “born again.” When you are born from above (spiritual birth) you cannot be unborn. When you are adopted into God’s forever family, you cannot be unadopted. What grace gives, it does not retract. God’s only requirement of us is to trust his love for us. He asks us to live by faith. He even offers to give us faith as a gift of his grace. Whether your faith is weak or strong, it cannot affect your acceptance with God. Faith is the empty hand, the instrument by which we accept God’s free gift.