

Can We Lose Our Salvation?

By Dr. David A. DeWitt

- *How eternal is salvation?*
- *What if I stop believing?*
- *What about those warning passages in the Bible?*

How eternal is our salvation?

The most obvious fact about our salvation as dealt with in the Bible is that it is not usually referred to as “salvation” or being “born again.” It is most frequently referred to as “eternal life.” The Greek word for “eternal” (*aiōnios*) means forever—something without beginning, something without end, or something everlasting. This word is used to define salvation at least 52 times in the New Testament; 37 of those times it is translated “eternal” and 15 times it is translated “everlasting” (KJV). Here are some examples:

Jesus said, *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life* (John 3:16).

Jesus also said, *And I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. 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* (John 10:28-29).

Peter said that we are born again *to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you* (1 Peter 1:4).

Paul reminds us, *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus* (Romans 8:1). He then goes on to say, *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, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord* (8:38-39).

Here are some more verses for further study: Matthew 19:16, 29; 25:46; Mark 3:29; 10:17, 30; Luke 10:25; 18:18, 30; John 3:15-16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 39; 6:27, 40, 47, 54, 68; 12:25, 50; 17:2-3; Acts 13:46, 48; Romans 2:7; 5:21; 6:22-23; Galatians 6:8; 1 Timothy 1:16; 6:12, 19; Titus 1:2; 3:7; 1 Peter 5:10; 1 John 1:2; 2:25; 3:15; 5:11, 13, 20; and Jude 21.

What if I stop believing?

Some gifts can be given back, and some cannot. If I gave my daughter a new bicycle, she could give it back. But suppose I gave her a polio vaccination. That is a gift she cannot give back. If after I gave her the medication she refused to believe in polio vaccinations, and even denied that she ever got one, is she still vaccinated against polio? Of course she is! Why? Because the nature of the gift will not allow it to be given back or destroyed, even if she stops believing in it. The Bible describes salvation as just such a gift. It depends not on us but on God. It is a gift that God calls “eternal.” The Bible nowhere tells us that we are to keep ourselves saved.

Of all the major world religions, biblical Christianity is the only one that teaches that we cannot lose our salvation. It seems natural for man to feel that he needs to maintain his position before God, because all other religions see salvation as a work of man. Obviously, if man must be or do something to get right with God, then he would stop being right with God when he stopped being or doing those things.

Some Christians believe that we would not lose our salvation for doing something “a little sinful” (like lusting, gossiping, or coveting), but we would lose our salvation if we do a “big sin” like rejecting our faith or joining a satanic cult. But that is saying that we stay saved and get into heaven if our sin levels do not rise above a certain point. That means that some sins are ultimately acceptable to God. But the Bible teaches that no sin is acceptable to God. All sin must be paid for. Either we accept the payment Jesus made on the cross or we will have to make the payment ourselves (Matthew 8:12; Revelation 20:11-15). If God just forgave sin by overlooking it, then Christ would not have had to die. But He did. And when He did, He paid for all the sins of all time.

Salvation is not an effort on the part of the believer to not sin. Salvation is a cleansing of all sins of all time totally accomplished by Christ on the cross (2 Corinthians 5:19-21) and applied to the believer at the time he or she receives Christ (John 1:12; 3:16).

Can a Christian stop believing? Of course he can! But he cannot stop being saved. Why? Because that sin, like all sin, is already paid for and removed from him. Of course, it is likely that if a person has stopped “believing,” it is because that person never trusted Christ in the first place. We should never assume a person is saved because of some previous religious or emotional experience.

What about those warning passages in the Bible?

It’s true. There are many warning passages in the Bible. For example:

(1) Moses and the Old Testament prophets warned the Jews that if they didn’t keep God’s law they would not be blessed in the land of Israel (Deuteronomy 30:15-30).

(2) Jesus warned people not to think they are saved because they are religiously active. He said, *Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness’* (Matthew 7:21-23, see also vv. 13-14).

(3) We are warned that if we are not living like a believer, it could be we aren’t one (Colossians 1:21-23).

(4) Jesus warned the Pharisees that rejecting Him as the Messiah was blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and that such rejection shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come (Matthew 12:31-32). Rejecting Christ is also unpardonable for us. If we go through life and die rejecting Christ, we will not be forgiven of our sins.

It’s true there are many warning passages in the Bible. But no passage warns us about losing our salvation. There are many people who think they are believers, but they are just religious. For these people it will seem like they lose their salvation. But we must also understand that the salvation promise is simple. *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God ...* (John 1:12, see also John 3:16 and 5:24).

Paul says, ... *He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we might be holy and blameless before Him* (Ephesians 1:4, *emphasis mine*). In Romans he wrote, *He also predestined us to become conformed to the image of His Son* (Romans 8:29, *emphasis mine*).

So saved people are saved because they chose to receive Christ alone by faith alone as a substitute for their sin. They are also saved because those same people were chosen. But they were not just chosen to be saved, they were chosen to be “holy,” “blameless,” and to be “conformed to the image of His Son.”

The problem with the lack of security doctrine is one of misunderstanding God’s purpose for writing the Bible. God did not write the Bible just to get people saved. Our salvation is only a necessary means to an end. The real end, or purpose, for which God wrote the Bible was to reveal Himself to us so that we might be conformed to the image of His Son. His desire is for man to stop sinning and practice holiness (Matthew 5:48; Ephesians 2:10; and 1 Peter 1:16).

God talks about more in the Bible than salvation. He also tells us why He saved us. So if we bring a mental context of salvation to every passage we read, we are going to misunderstand many of those passages.

Questions and Answers

Q: *How eternal is salvation?*

A: Salvation is eternal life, and eternal life is just that--eternal (1 John 5:13).

Q: *What if I stop believing?*

A: Unbelief is a sin, and like all sins, it's paid for on the cross by Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21). Therefore, if I stop believing, I cannot lose my salvation.

Q: *What about those warning passages in the Bible?*

A: Warning passages in the Bible warn against depending on religion or good works for salvation. They warn people that they might think they are believers when they are not, but they do not warn real believers that they can lose eternal life.