

IS IT POSSIBLE FOR A CHILD OF GOD TO BE LOST?

Jesus said, “*For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost*” (Luke 19:10). From what Jesus said, we know that it is possible for a person to be *lost*. The Bible’s better news, though, is that it is also possible for a lost person to be *saved*. In fact, God wants every person to be saved from sin (1 Timothy 2:4).

Once a person has become a child of God, is it possible for him to remain saved? The Bible’s message to Christians is, “*If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin*” (1 John 1:7). So, it is possible for a child of God to continue to have his sins washed away.

In this brief study, however, we are seeking the answer to a different question. We want to know: According to the Bible, is it possible for a child of God to be lost? That is, is it possible for a person to receive the remission of sins, but later become unfaithful to the Lord, die in that condition and be lost eternally in hell? It is a most sobering question, would you not agree?

MAN’S DENIALS

A number of religious groups have traditionally taught that it is impossible for a saved person to do anything that would cause him/her to be lost eternally. Some call it “the impossibility of apostasy,” while others refer to it as “the perseverance of the saints.” Another expression used is “eternal security” (of believers). Perhaps the most common way that we hear it expressed is the basic “once saved, always saved.” Regardless of how they say it, such religious groups or individuals do not deny that a person can be lost. What they deny is that it is possible for a child of God, one that was really saved, to act in such a way that he/she will fall from God’s grace and be eternally lost.

I want you to hear in their own words what different denominational groups and their preachers actually believe and teach on this question. One of the more well-known creeds of the past, The Westminster Confession of Faith (1648), under the

heading “Of the Perseverance of the Saints,” states: “They, whom God has 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.”¹

One advocate of the impossibility of apostasy expressed the doctrine this way: “Once saved, always saved. It is one of the grandest thoughts in the Bible: Once you believe, you can never be lost, you can never go to hell. Christ will always be your Savior. It is possible to get your eternal destiny settled once for all so that you never have to worry about it.”²

The same author wrote: “The term *perseverance of the saints* emphasizes that Christians . . . will persevere in trusting in Christ as their Savior. They will not turn on and then turn off, but they will continue believing forever. Thus, they will always be saved”³

In a public debate that took place in Mississippi in the late 1970’s, one denominational preacher affirmed that even if a child of God died while in the act of committing fornication, such a child of God would still go to heaven.⁴ Whether you agree with him or not, his statement makes his position on our question quite clear, does it not?

THE BIBLE’S WARNINGS

While the Old Testament does not speak about Christians, in it there are instructions and principles that show how God dealt with His children under the old covenant. In 1 Chronicles 28:9 it is written that David said, “*And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father . . . but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.*” 2 Chronicles 15:2 states, “*The LORD is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.*”

The apostle Paul wrote of himself, “*But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified*” (1 Corinthians 9:27, NKJV). Christians are told, “*Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness . . . murders, drunkenness, revellings . . . they which do such*

things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21). What if children of God go back to their old ways of adultery and immorality, and die in that condition? Again, the Bible says, “. . . *they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*”

Consider the words that Jesus spoke to two different congregations in the first century: “. . . *I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember, therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent*” (Revelation 2:4,5). “*I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth*” (Revelation 3:15,16). Do not such “or else” warnings from the Master send a clear message to all Christian that would fail to repent of their sins?

Please hear one final warning: “*Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall*” (1 Corinthians 10:12). We wonder: if it is not possible for a child of God to fall away and be lost, then why would the Lord bother telling us to be careful/take heed in order to avoid falling?!

THE BIBLE’S EXHORTATIONS

Over and over we read exhortations for Christians in the Bible – exhortations to keep on being faithful to the Lord. Again, what would be the point of the Lord imploring us to “keep on” and telling us “if” we are faithful then we will be blessed, if, in fact, there is no way for us to slip, fall, and lose what He has promised? For example, in Galatians 6:9 we read that Christians are told, “*And let us not grow weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.*” What does “if” mean, and what if we *do* faint and quit?

Hebrews 3:12 states, “*Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.*” This verse would have no “punch” if it were impossible for a child of God to leave Him, would it? God’s children are told, “*Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own*

steadfastness” (2 Peter 3:17). Read those words again: “. . . beware lest ye . . . fall from your own steadfastness.”

Can disciples of Jesus avoid becoming unfaithful to Him? They can IF . . . : “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (2 Peter 1:10). There it is! This is God’s formula for not falling: “do these things.” Do what things? Grow in those character traits that have just been noted in verses five through seven (faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, love). If a Christian must do these things to avoid falling, then is it not obvious that *he will fall if he does not do them?!*

The Lord has promised that certain ones will receive a crown of life. Who are they? “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (James 1:12). God’s crown is for the one that loves him. Question: What if a child of God stops loving Him? If he stops loving Him (which he shows by no longer obeying Him, John 14:15), would he not forfeit his right to the crown of life?

Jesus said it another way: “. . . be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). My friend, do you not see a condition in this marvelous promise of Jesus? Indeed: to get the crown, one must be faithful. A believer can stop believing, a faithful man can become unfaithful, and a man that loves the Lord can stop loving Him. Anyone that does so fails to meet the Lord’s conditions of salvation, and in the process falls from the Lord’s favor.

THE BIBLE’S CLEAR DECLARATIONS

We have looked at some Bible warnings and Bible exhortations. Now, let us close by listing a few statements that plainly show the possibility of believers falling. They are right out of the Bible.

“They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away” (Luke 8:13).

“I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that

abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned” (John 15:5,6).

“And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died?” (1 Corinthians 8:11). [Is a brother not lost if he becomes spiritually dead (and does not repent)?]

“Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace” (Galatians 5:4).

“Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (James 5:19,20). In this verse, “the sinner” that is spiritually dead is a brother, a child of God.

“For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world . . . they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire” (2 Peter 2:20-22).

So, is it? Is it possible for a child of God to fall from His grace and be lost? The Bible’s warnings, exhortations, and declarations make it clear that, yes, it is possible for a child of God to be lost.

¹ Edwin Palmer, *Five Points of Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 107.

² Palmer, p. 68.

³ Palmer, p. 68.

⁴ Highers-Chastain Debate, 1978, audio tape.

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