

Eternal Security

Introduction

A number of events have moved me to spend some time on the subject of eternal security. Is the believer forever secure in Christ once he is born again? Are there any circumstances whatsoever by which a saved child of God can ever lose his salvation and return to an unsaved status and the condemnation to hell associated with that?

Short answer, “No!”

Not everyone agrees with my short answer. Obviously, there are some who take a doctrinal position that says it is possible to be saved by faith and then, through some act or series of acts, forfeit your salvation thus the need for this study.

I am going to be working under the premise that the person under consideration is indeed a born again believer on the basis that salvation is appropriated by faith through grace (Eph 2:8-9) and is a gift to those who trust the work of Christ on the Cross has dealt with his sins. The Scriptures clearly teach there is no other process by which one may find reconciliation with God other than by placing one’s trust *completely* in the hands of Christ and what He did on the Cross. That means not Allah, Buddha, Confucius, or anyone else can save you, including you yourself. Only Christ can save you by grace through you placing faith in what He did on the Cross.

This study will focus on the possibility (or not) of reversing that.

The doctrine we will deal with is sometimes called “Once Saved, Always Saved” or as some say, “OSAS”. I prefer a more positive and doctrinal “eternal security”. Many arguments are presented to dispute this position. During the course of this series, I will attempt to deal with those passages that are most commonly cited as “proof text evidence” that you can lose your salvation.

How to study the Bible

Studying the Bible is easy—and then, at the same time, it isn't. We can get a lot out of just reading the Bible and meditating on what we read. But like reading any book, if we read just a random sentence in the middle somewhere, or a paragraph, or even a chapter, we are reading it out of the context of the whole story. No matter how well we think we understand what that sentence said, it never tells us enough to understand the story, and if we don't understand the rest of the story, how can we understand the sentence? The Bible is the same way.

It is very easy to pick a passage out of the Bible and arrive at a determination about what it is saying, which may be right—or it may be totally wrong. It is often very easy to take a passage out of context and make it say whatever you want it to say. As the saying goes, "A passage taken out of context is a pretext."

You did not pop out of your mother's womb with even basic language and reading skills much less understanding more complicated subjects like mathematics and history. The same is true with your new birth and the Bible. We are not born again with a broad and deep understanding of the many doctrines in the Bible for living the life we are called to live as Christians. New believers are babes in Christ and are capable of taking in only "milk"—that means the simplest of the those many doctrines. Like a child we must go through an education process to advance to spiritual maturity where we can have a fully and properly functioning spiritual life.

Rom 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

This passage is an appeal for Christians to live a life glorifying to God (present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God). It is an "appeal," (Greek means beseech of exhort) implying it is entirely possible

that such a life that is a “living sacrifice” is a potential and not a guaranteed reality.

As this passage states, we are called to a complete “renewing” of our thinking. The word in the original language is one from which we get the English “metamorphosis,” much like the transformation the caterpillar goes through to emerge as a beautiful butterfly. While the new birth is a one time event, the growth to spiritual maturity that follows takes place over time, and it is not guaranteed that a believer will pursue that goal diligently. Just like as a child you needed to learn, grow, and mature into a functioning adult so does the “babe in Christ”.

First we take in “milk” doctrines, but as we grow spiritually, eventually we can take in the “meat,” which are the more complicated doctrines found in the Bible. That growth process does not happen overnight. It can take years of study, and even then, there will always be more to learn. Unfortunately, far too many churches today teach only milk and their members never really mature spiritually.

Heb 5:12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, ¹³ for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

This passage in Hebrews speaks of that. The writer of the epistle is charging the recipients with the fact that they have not advanced spiritually. By this time in their spiritual development, they ought to be teachers but they are in need of teaching (v12). They need “milk” because they are “unskilled” (v13). “Solid food is for the mature” (v14) which gives the mature believer the ability to “distinguish good from evil”. Obviously, not all believers are capable of distinguishing good from evil, and they may not exhibit the fact they are born again.

These Hebrew believers have not advanced to spiritual maturity, and the fact that the author is charging them with that failure is proof they have

been believers for some considerable length of time that should have been more than sufficient for them to become spiritually mature.

It is absolutely critical for the new believer to get off on the right foot and learn sound doctrine—and to continue that growth process. And no doctrine could be more basic and more important than the doctrine of soteriology—the doctrine of salvation. Get it wrong here and that will lead to much error later. All through that learning process there are many opportunities for Satan to mislead the believer. Many of the epistles in the NT deal with this very problem of false doctrines creeping into the church, especially false doctrines relating to salvation and the spiritual life. Nothing has changed in 2,000 years. Satan is still trying to distract believers from the truth. There is a big red target on every believer's back.

The Bible is a complicated book, but if you approach it right, it is actually very easy to grasp the many nuanced details found in its passages. To accomplish this there are certain rules of hermeneutics the student should follow.

Context, context, context!

Like they say about buying and selling property, the three most important things are location, location, location. With studying Scripture, the three most important things are context, context, context. Failing to consider the context is probably the biggest reason we get bad interpretations of Scripture. In preparing this study, I found that just about every “proof text” that supposedly says you could lose your salvation was interpreted wrong because of an easily avoided context issue.

What do I mean by “context”?

Context is the “background” that surrounds a study passage. It is the forest in which we see the bird on the branch of one tree. A given passage may actually have several contexts that are important to its interpretation. Some to consider:

- **Who is speaking, to whom is he speaking, and when is he speaking?** For example look at Matthew 12:31-32.
 - **Matt 12:31** Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. ³² And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man

will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

- Jesus is speaking to Israel through the Pharisees who have accused Him of performing miracles in the name of Beelzebul and rejecting Jesus as Messiah. Jesus is warning Israel that they face severe discipline for that sin, and they were disciplined. They were removed as a nation forty years later. The application is to the nation Israel in the context of the Mosaic Covenant and not the individual Israelite.
- **What is the immediate subject context** of a passage? What caused the speaker to say whatever he said? What is the broader subject? If the broad subject is about the spiritual life, then the subject passage probably needs to be understood in that context. You may have to go back to the beginning of the chapter or even the beginning of the book —and/or go forward to passages after the subject passage that may be relevant to its understanding. The classic example of this issue is the Epistle to the Hebrews. It is absolutely essential to understand the whole context of the epistle to correctly interpret any passage in it. Because of failure to do this Hebrews is one of the most misunderstood books in the Bible.
- **What is the historical context?** The serious expositor needs to understand the historical events going on at the time of the passage under study. They can often impact the interpretation.
- **What is the cultural context?** The Bible spans thousands of years and culture changed many times during that period. Some cultural mores were driven by the culture itself and some were God-given, either by direct communications or through the Mosaic Covenant during the Age of Israel.
 - **Example:** Throughout the Age of Israel and even beyond in the middle-east, there was a set process for arranged marriages. Jesus alludes to this practice in several places in the Gospels. Understanding that cultural marriage process helps to correctly interpret certain passages relating to the end times.
- **Categorize into the correct doctrinal context.** Categorize the passage as to its doctrinal subject and interpret it in the context of that doctrine. Always—ALWAYS—reason from what is known and established as true to the unknown. Never turn this around. What I mean is to identify the subject of the study passage and compare it to

already established-as-true interpretations of passages on the same subject. If the study passage seems in conflict with already established-as-true doctrine in other passages, the student is compelled to consider that his subject categorization (and thus interpretation) of the study passage is wrong. NEVER automatically assume that just because the study passage seems to conflict with already established doctrine in other passages that the other passages must be wrong. It is possible that they are, but you should never jump to that conclusion on the basis of one passage.

- **Positional sanctification, experiential sanctification, or ultimate sanctification? (“Saved” in three tenses.)** This is really a subset of the doctrinal context failure. Most errors of interpretation regarding our subject of eternal security are directly a result of looking at a passage that is about experiential sanctification and making a positional sanctification application.
 - **Positional Sanctification** — This is your identification with Christ as a born again believer and is most often seen in Scripture in the term “in Christ” or some variation of that. It refers to the believer’s salvation. This is also called “saved in the past tense,” meaning the believer *has been delivered* (saved) from the fires of hell (the penalty of sin). This is a one time event and does NOT depend on experiential sanctification as any assurance or proof of its existence.
 - **Experiential Sanctification** — This is the believer’s spiritual life, or discipleship, or Christian walk, or spiritual growth to maturity. Like salvation, it is supernatural in that it is a life of grace lived by faith and produced by the indwelling Holy Spirit in those who “walk by means of the Spirit” (Gal 5:16). Another term for it is “eternal life” in the sense that it is lived in the here and now not just in eternity. Well and properly lived, eternal life looks like Galatians 5:22-23 because it is the very life that Christ lived here on earth. This is what will be evaluated at the Bema judgment, nothing else. This is what can be “lost” through sin, the grace that you can “fall” from, the life that you can stray from, the faith you can abandon, and what a believer can reject to his utter destruction, meaning physical temporal destruction. This is also called “saved in the present tense,” meaning to be *delivered* (saved) through life’s trials and tribulations and from the power of sin by the grace of God.

- **Ultimate Sanctification (Glorification)** — This is the believer being delivered into glory at death or the rapture, whichever comes first. It is being *delivered* (saved) from this body of corruption into one that is incorruptible and ushered into the presence of God forever. This is sometimes called “saved in the future tense” in the sense that it is yet future and a certainty as a result of our positional sanctification. Experiential sanctification has nothing to do with ultimate sanctification with one exception. That exception is the glorified believer will face the Bema judgment to have his spiritual life (experiential sanctification) evaluated for the purpose of receiving rewards in heaven or not. Sin is NOT an issue at the Bema judgment, only the believer’s spiritual walk and “fruit” production are evaluated for potential rewards/crowns (or not) in heaven.

1 Cor 3:10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. ¹¹ For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— ¹³ each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

This is the Bema judgment. Only Church Age believers will be present. Sin will not be judged here because that was judged at the Cross. What is evaluated (judged) is our spiritual production. What did we do with the spiritual gift(s) and assets we were given by God to accomplish whatever we were called to accomplish for the glory of God? “Works” built upon a solid foundation, the leading and empowerment of the Spirit, are gold, silver, and precious stones that survive the fire test. “Works” produced in the power of the flesh for personal glorification are wood, hay, and straw, which will burn as useless when tested by fire. What is at stake is NOT our salvation (v15) but the receiving or loss of rewards in heaven (v14).

Saved in Three Tenses

Phase	Positional Sanctification	Experiential Sanctification	Ultimate Sanctification (Glorification)
Tense	Past	Present	Future
Saved from sin's ...	Penalty	Power	Presence
Scripture	Eph 2:8-9 Titus 3:5	Philip 2:12	Rom 5:10, 8:30

Remember these three tenses of “saved”. We will see more examples of this later in our study.

- Lastly, one is forced to consider the original language**, be it Hebrew or Greek. Some words just don't make the jump from one language to another well. Also, the translation is dependent on the skill of the translator and his objective for the translation. Today, we have multitudes of translations ranging from those called “formal” translations to those called “dynamic or functional” translations. The formal translations attempt a more strict word-for-word movement from the Hebrew or Greek into English; while the functional translations work more from thought-for-thought. A word-for-word translation would be seen in the New King James Version or the New American Standard Bible, while the Contemporary English Version and Peterson's “The Message” is a functional translation (also referred to as paraphrase). The formal translations attempt to remain as true to the syntax of the original as possible. The sentence structure might have made perfect sense to the first century Hebrew or Greek, but it can create some really strange sounding sentences in the English. Furthermore, words can be translated correctly but lose some of their meaning during translation. A good example is the English word “if”. In Greek there are four words with four different meanings that are all translated “if” in the English. Unless the immediate passage context gives you a hint, and it often does not, you don't get that difference by reading the English “if” in the Bible, and it could be significant to understanding the passage. The differences are called “conditions” and given a “class” to differentiate them.

- “If” in the first class condition in the Greek means “if and it is true”. Sometimes can be translated “since”.
- In the second class condition it will mean “if and it is not true”.
- Third class is “if and maybe it is true and maybe it isn’t”.
- The fourth class is really strange. It says “if and I wish it were true but it isn’t.” All four translate simply as “if”.

Col 1:23 if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard

That “if” is in the first class condition and considered to be true. It is not maybe they will or won’t continue in the faith. There is no doubt they will “continue in the faith ...”

The easiest and most common mistake in interpreting Scripture is to fail to consider the context. Do that and you get bad doctrine.

Let’s Define Some Terms

Grace

We have already defined grace as something received unearned and underserved. The recipient of grace does not pay for it in any way. There is no quid quo pro in the usual sense of such.

The Kingdom

The Kingdom comes with several names and two forms. The names include: Kingdom of Heaven, Kingdom of God, Messianic Kingdom, and just The Kingdom.

The kingdom comes in two forms. One is as a physical and literal kingdom, and the other is as a spiritual form of the kingdom. The two are related and in some cases coterminous, but sometimes only the spiritual aspects of the kingdom are in view in a passage.

MATT 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand...”

Which kingdom is in view here. If you say the eternal physical kingdom you would be half right. Jesus is speaking to Israel (context) about things relating to Israel. He is speaking of the literal physical kingdom.

But Israel rejected the King and thus the literal physical kingdom was not really “at hand” (near), so was Jesus wrong? No, because Jesus was also speaking of the spiritual kingdom, and that was indeed near and given to the Church at Pentecost.

Rom 14:7 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit

Which kingdom is this? This was spoken during the Church Age by Paul (context), and it describes the spiritual kingdom that was (and still is) in effect. “Peace and joy” sound like maybe the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23)? It should because that is exactly what it is referring to. The spiritual kingdom is seen during the Church Age in the form of the believer’s spiritual walk with God in the power and leading of the Holy Spirit. The nine attributes seen in Galatians 5:22-23 are not only a picture of the very life that Christ lived while here on earth but also a picture of the spiritual characteristics of the kingdom that believers can experience now and will experience fully in glorification.

The physical/literal kingdom can be seen as the Millennium and eternity that follows. It is both literal and physical with a literal King reigning in Jerusalem and includes all the spiritual aspects associated with the kingdom.

We would say the kingdom refers to any type of rulership God may assert on earth at any given time in human history. Prophetically it is the Millennium and eternity. However, the parables in Matthew 13 represent the kingdom of heaven in its “mystery” form. During the Church Age, it is the dynamic power of God's rule on earth and is the impact of the believers who execute the plan of God for their lives.

Apostasy

A public denial of a previously held religious belief and a distancing from the community that holds to it. The term is almost always applied pejoratively, carrying connotations of rebellion, betrayal, treachery, or faithlessness. It is seen in Scripture using several different terms such as: falling from grace, falling away, led away, hardened, entangled again, and straying, to list a few of the many such terms used to describe a believer in a state of apostasy. The word “apostasy” means to deviate from the truth and does not imply the losing of one’s salvation. We will see more on this in our study.

Law vs Grace

One of the biggest issues we have in properly interpreting the Word is failure to separate Israel and the Church. God has a plan for each, and they only rarely intersect. This failure is the chief reason for the false doctrine called “replacement theology,” which teaches that the Church has replaced Israel in God’s plan, but that is a study for another time. This chart is an attempt to show the differences between Israel and the Law verses The Church and Grace. Understanding the differences will help in interpreting some “confusing” passages we will look at later.

The Difference Between The Law and Grace

	Israel/Law	Church/Grace
Salvation	<p>By Faith apart from works</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looking forward to what would happen at the Cross (to the extent its details were revealed). • Salvation is neither earned nor deserved • Faith is man's ONLY contribution to the process. 	<p>By Faith apart from works</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looking back at what was accomplished at the Cross. • Salvation is neither earned nor deserved • Faith is man's ONLY contribution to the process.
The Temple (Where God "Resides")	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temple was in Jerusalem • Believing Jew met God at the Temple • Formal relationship with God was conducted at the Temple • Through priest intermediary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believer is the Temple • Believer has potential for a personal relationship (fellowship) with God through human spirit and indwelling HS. • Believer IS a priest
Relationship with God (Spiritual Life)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No universal indwelling of the HS by believing Jew. Some were temporarily endowed with power of HS for specific tasks • Thus believer met the terms of the Law Covenant by human effort alone • Thus Law was entirely a works covenant system. Blessings earned, discipline deserved provided motivation • Law regulated all behavior — moral, social, worship • Sins were confessed over a sin offering (representing Christ). Offering died for sins of the Jew • Having met the terms of the Law, the confessing Jew was then declared judicially blameless (Righteous under the Law) • Compliance with the terms of the Law Covenant was, in effect, the believer's functional spiritual life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believer is under grace and not the Law • Grace = from God undeserved and unearned (very unlike the Law) • Believer is indwelt by the HS at the moment of salvation for life • The spiritual life of the believer is led, enabled, and produced by the indwelling HS through faith in that leading and enablement. • Thus the spiritual life is supernatural (not humanly enabled or produced) • Personal sin can damage the fellowship between the believer and God, resulting in chastisement and a paused spiritual life • Restoration to fellowship is through private confession of sins directly to God