

## What is Eternal Security? Faith or Works?

There are two positions we will be looking at during this study. In both cases we will assume for simplicity that the person under consideration is “truly” saved. The “nominal” Christian that was never truly saved is not under consideration in the context of this study. The issue we are dealing with is can a born again believer do or not do something that would result in forfeiting his salvation? The two positions:

1. **Eternally Saved** — (Cannot lose your salvation.) Once a person comes to Christ and believes the Gospel, the Holy Spirit acting in place of the missing human spirit of the spiritually dead “in Adam” person, makes that person’s positive volition toward the Gospel efficacious (effective) faith, and such a believer is then saved with all that is associated with that title. That person is said to be “saved by faith through grace and not of works” (Eph 2:8-9). This is saved in the past tense.
2. **NOT eternally saved** — That is the born again believer, through some act of volition, or some failure, stopped believing, or rejection of God, can lose or forfeit his previously granted salvation and go to hell instead of heaven. There is no guarantee he is saved unless he “perseveres” in the faith until the end of his life.

### Let’s begin by recognizing one simple unavoidable fact.

This study assumes the status of the person in question is that he is saved based on the criteria expressed in Ephesians 2:8-9 and other passages.

**Eph 2:8** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

This passage clearly spells out the conditions necessary to be saved, and they are:

1. The Gospel is presented to our subject

2. He demonstrates **faith** in that presented Gospel
3. God reciprocates with the **gift** of **saving** that person from eternal condemnation
4. And that is an act of **grace**, meaning the saved person did nothing to deserve or earn such benefits from God beyond the non-meritorious act of faith
5. As an act of **grace** because of **faith** and a **gift** from God, there is no opportunity or reason for the saved subject to claim any credit for his changed status — “that no one may **boast**”.

Based on this passage (and others), we say that salvation is a product of grace apart from any human works. We do not earn or deserve what God gives us. Our only contribution to the process is faith in the Gospel.

### **What is the Gospel?**

**1 Cor 15:3** ... that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,

Those are the key points of the Gospel. Believing that is sufficient for salvation. The Gospel of John speaks of “faith” or “believe” some 99 times and never mentions any other criteria.

Some will argue, however, that repentance is necessary for salvation. It is, but not the way many think. Repentance simply means to have a change of mind—but about what? Some argue it is a change of mind about our sins, in other words, going from “liking” your sins to “disliking” your sins. I disagree. If “repenting of your sins” were a requirement then that would be human works. It is entirely likely you did hate your sinfulness, but that is not a criteria for being saved.

What actually does constitute the change of mind is far more important and profound in its effect on your salvation than simply going from “liking” your sins to “disliking” your sins. This profound repentance is changing your mind about Christ, who He is and what He did that makes our salvation possible and real. Repenting of your sins has zero effect on your salvation, but changing your mind about the means of salvation does.

Before salvation we likely believed all manner of things about how one is saved. We might have tried some other spiritual experience in search of heaven. Usually, we simply believe that we must “try harder” to be a good person, that is by some system of behavior modification—human works. But the Ephesians 2 passage specifically says that works are excluded. And so does this...

**Titus 3:5** he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup> so that being justified by his grace ...

Note it says “he saved us”. “He,” of course, is God. And it wasn’t because of “works done by us in righteousness”. And it wasn’t because we repented of our sins—works. It was “according to his mercy and the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit”. All this was “through” the agency of Jesus Christ our Savior, and it was “grace” (a free gift underserved and unearned).

Salvation (being delivered from the fires of hell) is not a product of human works but a free gift from God accomplished by Him and given as grace to those who believe “that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3-4). “He saved us, not because of works” (Titus 3:5).

Putting all that together, the Scriptures tell us that we are saved by faith through grace totally apart from any form of human works, which would have otherwise given us grounds for boasting, of which there are none (Eph 2:9). Salvation is all God’s doing and **only** man’s faith in that.

Then if a believer can later fall from grace, stray, commit some unpardonable sin, reject Christ, stop believing, enter into apostasy, and in that process forfeit his salvation ... how is that not human works? Let that sink in for a moment.

**For a believer to lose his salvation because of anything he does is adding man's works as a condition of that salvation.**

I don't care how you spin it or slice it and dice it, that is the way it is. Thus grace is no longer grace; it has become works. Salvation that cannot be earned by what one does cannot be lost by what one does.

**The elephant in the room...**

One cannot claim to be saved by faith through grace and then turn around and claim there is something he must do or must not do to maintain his salvation without destroying the concept of salvation by faith through grace.

**One simple unavoidable fact is this:** If you believe this "other gospel" that a believer can lose his salvation through any human act, then **you believe in a salvation by works.**

I could stop right there, because that reasoning just destroyed the argument that a believer can lose his salvation, that is unless you believe in an unbiblical works-based system. However, let's continue so I can drive a stake into the heart of this doctrine of demons.

**License to Sin?**

It is argued that to subscribe to eternal security is nothing more than a license to sin. It says if we cannot lose our salvation, then we are free to tell God to "kiss off, see you in heaven" and proceed to live a completely carnal life. Such an argument assumes incorrectly that the only means God has of disciplining His children is to reject them and take away their salvation.

You might then hear those taking this position really mean "habitual sinning". Define habitual sinning. Yearly? Monthly? Weekly? Daily? I have news for you, folks. Every single one of you sins daily and probably habitually. You have a weakness for some sin; we all do. And you do it over and over, and you confess it over and over. If you fail to use the power of the Holy Spirit to manage that sin, does that mean you are condemned to hell?

“Willful sinning, then! Yeah, that’s the ticket!” And what sin is not willful? Name a sin you committed that you did not make a free will decision to commit.

“All right! Really bad sins then?”

How bad? Murder? Adultery? Those two usually get everyone more than a little excited. If you believe that, then you will have to explain King David and his adultery with Bathsheba followed by his murdering her husband, Uriah, (double whammy there). And all the while he was “a man after God’s own heart”.

“Okay! Okay! Someone who sins and stays in sin for an extended period of time?”

How long? Day? Week? Month? Year? Forever? David remained in sin after he committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband for maybe as much as a year after. What is the cut off? How much disobedience is too much?

How about someone who goes into rebellion and states there until he dies? David’s son Solomon walked away from his faith at the end of his life.

**1 Kings 11:5** For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. <sup>6</sup> So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord

**1 Kings 11:9** And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice <sup>10</sup> and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods. But he did not keep what the Lord commanded. <sup>11</sup> Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, “Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant.

He basically stopped believing all he understood about God and sought other gods. There is no record in Scripture that Solomon ever repented. If he had, don't you think that would have been mentioned? Did Solomon lose his salvation? Doesn't say that. He did lose his kingdom, and it was divided by two sons.

As you can see, those who take the position you can lose your salvation because of sin don't have very clear answers as to just what it takes to lose it. It is easy to speak in generalities, but somewhat harder to get specific and make application.

**“Free Grace” isn't a license to sin; it is a license to serve.**

Believers normally respond to grace by obeying and serving God, not sinning against Him. When a believer appreciates what God's love and grace have done for him, the natural response is gratitude reflected in Godly behavior. While examples of believers who see grace as an excuse to live licentiously are rare, examples of those who see grace as a reason to obey and serve God are overwhelmingly abundant. Romans chapters 6-8 explain that God's grace gives believers a new life, a new position, and a new power to live righteously.

**Titus 2:11** For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, <sup>12</sup> training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, <sup>13</sup> waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, <sup>14</sup> who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Training to live a Godly life is a lifetime process for every believer.

Believers are held accountable for how they live. At the Judgement Seat of Christ (Bema evaluation), believers will have to give an account of how they lived their spiritual lives. They will be rewarded in eternity or suffer loss of reward. (Rom 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10).

Furthermore, the Lord disciplines believers who do “fall from grace” in this life.

**Heb 12:5** ... My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. <sup>6</sup> For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

Any believer in some state of rebellion or apostasy can expect increasing levels of “chastisement” (here translated “discipline”). The purpose is not necessarily punitive as much as it is for encouraging the wayward believer back into right relationship (fellowship) with God. It will probably involve pain, especially if the urging is resisted.

Continued rebellion by the believer can even result in the person being removed by physical death. Let’s examine a few in Scripture.

**1 John 5:16** If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. **There is sin that leads to death;** I do not say that one should pray for that. <sup>17</sup> All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death. (ESV)

“There is a sin that leads to death.” That is from the ESV. The NKJV and the NIV say, “There is sin *leading* to death.” Every sin, even the “least” sin, is in its own nature mortal or deserving of death; the proper wages of sin is death.

Let’s pick apart that phrase “sin that leads to death”. “Sin” is the Greek hamartia *ham·ar·tee·ah* and means an offense, a violation of the divine law in thought or in act. It is usually and correctly translated here as “sin”. “Death” is the Greek thanatos *than·at·os* refers to physical death of the body but can carry the idea of future misery in hell. “That leads to” is *pros* and usually means to the advantage of, at, near, to, or towards. “That” in the English is implied by the Greek *pros*. “Sin leading to death” is probably a more accurate translation.

The translation “sin that leads to death” should be taken literally. It says there is “sin that leads to death,” but notice there is no definite article before “sin”. It isn’t “a sin” or “the sin”. It is just “sin,” though some translations do add the “a” (but it is a more accurate translation without it).

Some examples of this sin leading to death in Scripture...

### Those abusing the Lord's Table in Corinth

**1 Cor 11:27** Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup> Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>29</sup> For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. <sup>30</sup> **That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.** <sup>31</sup> But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. <sup>32</sup> But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

There were some in the church in Corinth who were partaking of the Lord's Table in an "unworthy manner". The two words come from the Greek *anaxios* /an-ax-ee-ocē/ and simply means unworthy or not deserving. Those **guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord** were those who disrespected poorer members by utter disregard for their needs (11:21–22). Furthermore, the meal, which was like a pot-luck without the sharing had degenerated into a celebration resembling gluttony and even drunkenness for some of the members, while the poorer members went with very little or nothing to eat. Paul is saying those doing wrong need to **examine** (*dokimazetō*, "test to approve," (1 Cor. 11:28) themselves and they would see that they lacked God's approval (*dokimoi*, v. 19) in this behavior. Simply put it was sin! Coming to the Lord's Supper with unconfessed sin on the soul brought **judgment** on the guilty participants. What that **judgment** entailed was it had brought sickness and even death on some

### Ananias and Sapphira

**Acts 5:1** But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, <sup>2</sup> and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. <sup>3</sup> But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the



proceeds of the land? <sup>4</sup> While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.” <sup>5</sup> When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. <sup>6</sup> The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. <sup>7</sup> After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. <sup>8</sup> And Peter said to her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.” And she said, “Yes, for so much.” <sup>9</sup> But Peter said to her, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.” <sup>10</sup> Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. <sup>11</sup> And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

These two are probably the most famous and the most obvious example of sin leading to death. What was so terrible about what they did that it deserved immediate death? This was probably not the first rodeo for these two. There was likely a history here, and this was the final act. But even if it wasn't, we should understand the church was very young at this point and, for sin to be condoned within the church body, especially one that is seen as lying to the Holy Spirit, could not be tolerated.

## King David

**PS 118:17** I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord. <sup>18</sup> The Lord has disciplined me severely, but he has not given me over to death...

This is a Psalm of David, and he is praising the Lord for His goodness in his life. At verse 17 he suddenly says he will not die but will live. In verse 18, he says he has been disciplined very severely, but not given over to death. David is recounting the period in his life when he took Bathsheba, impregnated her, tried to deceive her husband Uriah into thinking the child was his and, when that didn't work, he arranged to have Uriah murdered.

In this prayer he is recognizing the fact that he was close to experiencing “sin leading to death”.

Believers are called to service for God, and the natural tendency is for them to render service, but clearly not all do this. The price they pay for their rebellion will be rendered both here through painful chastisement even to the possibility of the death penalty on earth and in the form of lost rewards at the Bema judgment in eternity.

## **Some Basics Facts of Salvation**

We do need to develop some basic doctrines associated with salvation. What we will be looking at are things that God does for a believer at the moment of salvation. Some say that list is forty items long, but we will not cover all of them in this study. In order to lose your salvation for any reason, all of these would have to be reversed. And guess what? There is no mention in Scripture of them being reversed. If it could happen, don't you think the Bible would mention it?

## **Reconciliation**

Reconciliation is defined as someone or something that is thoroughly changed and adjusted to a standard. A wristwatch, for example, can be reconciled (adjusted or changed) to agree with the national atomic clock in Colorado. In the context of our study, it is man who must adjust to the perfect standard of God. Romans 5 tells us of this.

**Ro 5:6** For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— <sup>8</sup> but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. <sup>10</sup> For if while we were enemies we were **reconciled to God** by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are **reconciled**, shall we be saved by his life.

<sup>11</sup> More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received **reconciliation**.

Christ died for the ungodly, which would be all of us. Justified by his blood we are saved from the wrath of God. By faith, man is reconciled to meet God's standard. We were enemies, but we have been reconciled by the death of his son. Note it says "by the death of his Son" and implied is not by our works. This is needed because by one man sin entered the world, and that would be Adam.

**1Co 15:22** For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

This problem dates all the way back to Adam and the fall of man. Since then mankind has been on the outs with God and our sins in conflict with His perfect righteousness. Since the fall man has been born spiritually dead with a sin nature and alienated from God. That must be fixed if we are to have any relationship whatsoever with God.

Well, how is man reconciled to that standard?

**Eph 2:11** Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— <sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup> For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility <sup>15</sup> by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, <sup>16</sup> and might **reconcile** us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. <sup>17</sup> And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. <sup>18</sup> For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. <sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

Verses 11-13 reminds the Ephesian believer that once he was separated from the family of God, without hope and without God. Verse 13 tells us it was those who are “in Christ Jesus” who were before separated are “brought near”. The vehicle that brings us “near” is the blood of Christ, not His literal blood, but the fact that through the spilling of His blood He died for our sins in our place. That produced “peace” between God and the person who is “in Christ,” and that abolished the enmity between them. Now those believers in Christ have access to the Spirit and the Father (verse 18) and are “no longer strangers and foreigners but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” “Household of God?” The Greek implies that is a blood relationship! The reference to two being made into one is describing born again Israel and Gentile believers as two being made into one, the Church.

**2 Cor 5:17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. <sup>18</sup> All this is from **God, who through Christ reconciled** us to himself and gave us the ministry of **reconciliation**; <sup>19</sup> that is, in Christ God was **reconciling** the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of **reconciliation**. <sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God

Verse 17 speaks of our identification with Christ. The soul is seen to be “in Christ”. The person must be identified with Christ. If a person has this identification with Christ (through faith) then he is reconciled. The basis of the reconciliation is what Christ did on the Cross. The someone “thoroughly changed” is the believer who has put his faith in Christ and the Cross. Through his faith he has been adjusted to the righteousness of God. And he is a new creature (2 Cor 5:17).

So, the unsaved and fallen man (or woman) is separated from God because there is enmity between them—sin, initially Adam’s sin and later personal sin added to that. That enmity must be removed before fallen man can be reconciled to God. Once the person puts his faith in Christ, that enmity is removed because of the work of Christ on the Cross satisfied the perfect righteousness of God. It is the fallen man who has adjusted through faith and is thus reconciled to God. God never reconciles Himself to man.

Man must reconcile to God. This is the manward side of the process. There is a Godward side called "propitiation," which is our next subject.