

**What Every Christian Should Know**  
**Lesson 12**  
**Salvation: Eternal Security/Assurance**

**Introduction:**

*[Teachers, I always like to start a lesson off with a personal story that sets up the lesson. I have included a personal story in the introduction that you are welcome to use, but it would be more powerful if you could add an example that you have experienced into the introduction.]*

Growing up I attended a small Christian school in North Carolina. While I was a student I developed an incredible friendship with a classmate named Mary. Mary was encouraging, she was nice, and overall she was just a fun person to have as a friend. But beyond all of these characteristics, Mary seemed to have a dynamic relationship with Jesus. Mary would pray for me, give wise counsel, and even challenge me to grow deeper in my personal walk with God.

Mary was enrolled to go to seminary but she decided to postpone her seminary studies for a year, so that she could spend nine months living in Prague. I dropped Mary off at the airport as my closest friend, but nine months later I picked up a total stranger. Mary had many new experiences while she was in Prague leading her to be transformed into a completely different person. I tried to keep our friendship together for several years, but finally it became clear that she wanted me out of her life completely.

**What is Eternal Security?**

I consistently wrestle with the question, “What happened to Mary?” Mary seemed to be so close to the Lord, but after nine months in another country she decided that Christianity was rubbish. Mary’s story begs the question of eternal security (also known as the perseverance of the saints, or as once saved always saved). **The question of Eternal security is: If someone truly surrenders his/her life to Jesus is it possible for the person to lose, or choose to walk away from his/her salvation** (Erickson, 997)?

**How do we answer this question?**

The first way to answer this question is to say that it is not possible for a genuine believer to lose his/her salvation. In other words it is impossible for the true believer to completely fall away from grace; rather the true believer will persevere to eternal salvation (Leith, 191, Westminster Confession of Faith 17.1).

Jesus teaches in John 10:27-30:

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will 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. I and the Father are one (ESV).

Jesus is clearly teaching that a true follower of Christ will never lose his/her salvation. Jesus says that the true believer will never perish and that it will be impossible for anyone to take the believer from him. Jesus then reinforces his original statement by saying that the Father is greater than all and no one will be able to take a true believer from the Father's hand. The genuine believer can be comforted by the teaching of Jesus that his/her eternal salvation is securely held in God's omnipotent hand.

### **The Doctrine of Salvation supports Eternal Security**

The view of eternal security is also reinforced by a healthy understanding of the work of salvation. The scripture teaches that a man would not surrender his life to Christ if it were not for the Sovereign plan of God (John 6:44, Ephesians 2:8-10); and yet scripture also teaches that whosoever chooses to surrender his/her life to God will be saved (John 3:16, 2 Peter 3:9). The doctrine of God's Sovereignty and the doctrine of Man's Free Will are both taught in the scripture. The Christian needs to hold to both of these doctrines in order to have a Biblical view of the work of salvation.

**ILLUSTRATION:** This great paradox of the work of salvation functions in a similar way as train tracks to a train. A train can only function if it is riding on two parallel tracks. If one of the rails were removed the train would crash. In a similar way it is essential for the believer to hold to both the Sovereignty of God and to the Freedom of Man. Removing one of these doctrines will lead to a crash of misinterpreting the Biblical teaching of salvation (J.I.Packer).

A man surrenders his life to God when God moves in his life, and the man follows this leading by choosing to surrender his life to Christ. When this salvation process occurs the man becomes a new creation. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17, ESV)." The genuinely saved believer is a new creation and it is impossible for him to lose his salvation and return to his old self. One who would assert that it is possible for a genuinely saved man to then fall away from the faith, would have to say that the man decided to no longer follow God and that God Himself changed the man from the new creation back to the old sinful self. This assertion completely contradicts the teaching we find in John 10:27-30.

The doctrine of eternal security does not disallow a time of backsliding in the believer's life. The true believer may go through a time of backsliding, but the genuine believer will always come back to repentance through the eternal security of salvation (Boettner, 187).

## The Second way to answer the question

The second view of eternal security is to say that it is possible for a genuine believer to lose his/her salvation (Erickson, 1000). This view is based upon scriptures that warn against apostasy “See that no one leads you astray (Matt. 24:4, ESV);” scriptures that exhort Christians to continue on in their faith 1 Cor. 9:27 ESV “But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified;” and upon scripture that at first glance appears to be an example of true apostasy (Erickson, 1001):

“For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.” (Hebrews 6:4-6, ESV).

Regarding the warning and exhortation scriptures one could reason that the Bible would not contain these passages if it were not possible for the believer to fall away. However, the teachings of Jesus and the letters of Paul were taught and written to large groups of people (Grudem, 799). In those groups there would have been people who may have thought they were saved, but upon receiving these warnings they may realize that they have never genuinely surrendered their lives to Jesus. Secondly, we must remember that the Christian life is a difficult life to live. An eternally secure Christian is not a person who simply prayed a prayer when they were young, but the genuine Christian is the person who has asked Jesus to be both the Savior and the Lord over his/her entire life. The encouraging words of the scripture for believers to “keep pressing on to win the prize” serve as an essential motivator for the believer.

Hebrews 6:4-6 is the strongest passage for believing that a genuinely saved person can indeed lose his/her salvation. However, the people described in this passage can be interpreted in three ways: (1) The first interpretation sees the people of Hebrews 6 as genuinely saved people who lost their salvation (2). The second interpretation holds that the people of Hebrews 6 were not genuinely saved; rather they were associated with the church and they gained some benefits of being around believers, but they themselves have never been regenerated. (3) The third interpretation teaches that the scenario of Hebrews 6 is rhetorical. ***If*** the genuine believer fell away he/she would lose his/her faith, but he/she will not fall away since no one can tear a believer out of God’s hand (Erickson, 1004).

The second interpretation is the best way to understand the people of Hebrews 6 (Grudem, 801). Using scripture to interpret scripture, one can conclude from John 10 that no one (and that would include yourself) and that nothing can take the truly redeemed from God’s hand (Romans 8:39). Therefore interpreting Hebrews 6 as true apostasy is not a solid Biblical option. Erickson would argue that Hebrews 6 describes too close of a connection with God for the people not to be genuine believers; therefore concluding that the passage is rhetorical (Erickson,

1004). However, the people of Hebrews 6 are an example of the people that Jesus describes in Matthew 7:21-23. This group of people did amazing miracles in God's name, but at the final judgment Jesus will say, "I never knew you; depart from me..."

### **Assurance: How can I know that I know that I am saved?**

The scriptures teach us that the genuine believer will be eternally secured by God. This assertion leads us to the next question of "How do I know that I am a genuine believer?" We will look at several scriptures that teach us about the genuine believer.

"..because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:9-13 (ESV)

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." Ephesians 2:8-10 (ESV)

"And this is the testimony that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life." 1 John 5:11-12 (ESV)

These scriptures clearly teach that you become a genuine believer through faith in Jesus the Christ. We were created by God to be in a relationship with him where we love God and we love other people. The Bible teaches us that God is holy and that he cannot be around sin. The scriptures then teach us that we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory. So we were created by God to live for him, but because of our sin we are separated from God and we are unable to fulfill our purpose of life of loving God and loving other people. But because of God's great love for us, he sent his one and only Son, Jesus, who lived a perfect life, was crucified, and three days later rose again. Through the perfect life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we have the only way for our sins to be forgiven, so that we can enter into a relationship with God and fulfill our purpose of life of loving God and loving other people. When we pass away from this world, or when Jesus returns, whichever happens first, we will continue for all eternity to be in a relationship with God in a literal place called heaven. We can rest assured that if we have surrendered our life to God by asking him to be two things in our life 1. Our Savior: to save us from our sins 2. Our Lord or Boss: to be in charge of every part of our life; we are a genuine believer.

## **What if I keep on sinning?**

When you surrender your life to God you have become a new creation, but we are still living in a fallen world. While we are on earth we should be continuing to grow deeper in our walk with God, but as Christians we will still sin. The teaching of Christian Perfectionism, the idea that we will stop sinning on the earth, contradicts the Bible. We will continue to struggle with sin, but God is faithful to forgive us of our sins. We will not reach a sinless state until we are in heaven.

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:8-9 (ESV)

Knowing that we will still sin and God will forgive us, does not provide us with a license to do whatever we want and then apologize to God. Rather the genuine Christian loves God so much that he is appalled at his/her own sin and is so grateful that God is willing to grow us and forgive us when we sin against him.

## **Conclusion**

The Bible affirms that a person who has truly surrendered his/her life to Jesus will not “lose” his/her salvation. We can also firmly be assured that if we have surrendered our life to God we are a genuine believer.

So what about my friend Mary? If Mary genuinely surrendered her life to Christ, I would say that she is in a backsliding state of her life, but like the prodigal son will soon come back to her senses. However, if she has never genuinely accepted Christ, she is lost, and it is my desperate prayer that she will truly surrender her life to the Lord.

## Works Cited

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