

Assurance of Salvation

It is – unfortunately – not uncommon for us to have friends or family members who seemingly cease to be a Christian. We tend to say that they have lost their faith and fallen back into a lifestyle of sin. If this is indeed what has happened – that an individual was saved and is no longer saved – Christians have a reason to be concerned. In describing the situation as such, we have taken the ability to save out of the hands of our loving Creator and Redeemer and placed it in the hands of fallen, sinful human beings. For it is now we humans who decide whether we are saved or not, whether we are in God's covenant or not, whether we belong to the people God has chosen for himself. And it is clear from Scripture that this ought to concern us, not only because it attempts to usurp God's power to save, but also because we are fickle, faithless creatures.

Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command (Gen. 3); Moses did not heed God's instruction (Numbers 20:2-13) and was not allowed to enter the promise land; David committed adultery and tried to hide it by murdering (2 Samuel 11); and Israel was constantly being rebuked for her idol worship (see all the prophetic books from Isaiah to Malachi).

However, one of the most comforting promises comes to us in 2 Timothy 2:13: "if we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself." Paul provides us with a similar message in Romans 3:3-4a: "What if some were unfaithful? Does their unfaithfulness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar." When God chooses to save, it is so.

Scripture speaks of the followers of Christ as being born again by the Spirit (John 3; 1 Peter 1:3, 23). They are new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15) who walk in a newness of life (Romans 6:4). They still battle the effects of the sinful flesh, but they reside in the Spirit (Romans 8:1-11). Nowhere in Scripture do we see hints of the new creation becoming the old creation again. Believers are not born again and again and again, with multiple spiritual deaths along the way. And although we still find ourselves battling the sin that dwells in our bodily members (Romans 7:23), we have been placed in Christ by the Spirit for good.

Scripture states this explicitly in the Gospel of John. Jesus says,

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me *I will never cast out*. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, *that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me*, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day (John 6:37-40).

And again in John 10:28-29,

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.

Although these words are meant to be words of comfort – our salvation is secure in Christ – we are still left wondering what happened to our friend or family member who seemingly lost their faith. Biblically, perhaps against what our experience and intuition tells us, we must say that either that person has not in fact lost their faith, in which case they are like a tree with some dead and rotting branches that will make a recovery, or they were never truly born again in the first place. Like the parable of the sower (Mark 4:1-20), the seed was planted and perhaps began to grow, but the actual moment of regeneration, the coming into bloom (to continue the floral metaphor), had not occurred. This judgment, of course, is not ours to make but God's alone (Matthew 7:1-2; Romans 2:3).

It is easy to proclaim that one cannot lose salvation, that God's faithfulness triumphs our unfaithfulness, and proceed to live in a lifestyle of sin. This is a common objection to this doctrine, that it encourages sinful behavior. But we uphold the words of Paul: "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (Romans 6:1-2). And with John we profess, "Whoever makes a practice of sin is of the devil... No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God" (1 John 3:9-8). A life that is characterized by living against the expressed will of God, in which there is not battle against sin because sin still holds it completely captive, has not experienced the redeeming grace of God.

A tree is known by its fruit (Luke 6:43-45). As we securely rest in the salvation won for us on the cross, taking comfort in the fact that Jesus does not lose one of his own, let us make our lives living sacrifices in response to his goodness and grace.

Practical Ways