

Security of the Believer

We are to love one another deeply, from the heart (I Peter 1:22). This includes loving believers even when they share different Scriptural beliefs. One area of Scripture on which true believers disagree is the security of the believer. Some believe “once saved, always saved,” while others believe that salvation may be lost through a grievous sin, or pattern of sinning, or through a decision to no longer believe in Christ. Although true believers may differ on this subject, we at Mountain View Community Church believe that the Bible teaches that true believers are eternally secure in Christ. This position paper seeks to explain the basis for that belief.

1. We believe that Christians cannot lose their salvation because of the character of God the Father who disciplines, but would never disown, His children.
 - a. According to Romans 5:8, God loved sinners so much that He gave His son to die for them. If God loved us while we were yet sinners, there is nothing we could possibly do once we are Christians that would cause Him, who would graciously give us all things, to stop loving us (Romans 8:32). Romans 8:38-39 makes it clear that there is “nothing” that can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
 - b. According to John 1:12-13, all who believe in Jesus Christ have become children of God (Romans 8:15-16; Gal. 4:4-7). Once adopted, God will not disown His own children (John 6:37-39). The inheritance of God’s children “can never perish, spoil or fade” (I Peter 1:3-4).
 - c. God the Father is almighty and will not allow His children to be taken from Him by anyone (John 17:9-12; John 10:27-30).
 - d. If believers sin and rebel against God, God will discipline them as a loving father in order to bring them back to Himself (Hebrews 12:5-11). He will not, however, remove them from His family. If He did that, He would no longer be showing unconditional love and His offer of salvation would cease to be a free gift.

2. We believe that Christians cannot lose their salvation because Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross was a perfect sacrifice and paid the full penalty for our sins. Nothing can be added to what He has done in order to purchase redemption.
 - a. One of Jesus’ final statements while hanging on the cross was “it is finished” (John 19:30). This meant that He paid the full penalty for our sins. His words were not a whimper of defeat, but a shout of victory.
 - b. The book of Hebrews presents Jesus as our High Priest who is the mediator between ourselves and God the Father. In Hebrews 7:23-27 God’s Word clearly states that Christ’s sacrifice was offered “once for all” and He is therefore able to save completely and forever those who come to Him in faith. Hebrews 10:14 says, “by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.” Hebrews 10:10 tell us who it is that is being made holy: “And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” Those who are being made holy (NAS “are sanctified”) are all who have accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior.
 - c. As Colossians 2:13b-14 says, "He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; He took it away, nailing it to the cross." Clearly Jesus' sacrifice paid for all our sins: past, present, and future. To assert that a sinner can have a saving faith in Christ and thereby be forgiven, but later lose that salvation would be to say that Jesus' death on the cross was insufficient.

3. We believe that Christians cannot lose their salvation because the Holy Spirit indwells every believer at the moment of salvation, thus sealing the believer until the day of redemption.
 - a. Ephesians 1:13-14 says, "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of salvation. Having believed, you were marked in Him to those who are God's possessions—to the praise of His glory." The word "seal" indicates security (Matthew 27:66), ownership (I Corinthians 6:19-20), and genuineness (John 3:33). It indicates that God has truly purchased us and that this is a finished transaction. This sealing of the Holy Spirit is bestowed upon every believer at the moment of faith in Christ.
 - b. Ephesians 1:14 declares that God has sealed us to the "praise of His glory." If we could do anything to keep ourselves saved through our own acts of righteousness, then God would not receive the glory that is due to Him.

4. We believe that those who "leave the faith" and apostatize never truly had the faith. They were professors of faith and salvation, but not possessors of it.
 - a. I John 2:18-23 refers to the act of apostasy. Many in that day who were fellowshiping with the Christian church were not holding to the orthodox faith. Because of the influence of Gnostic¹ teaching some asserted they believed in Jesus, but this Jesus they believed in was not the Jesus of Scripture. In time these "professors of faith" became apostates and left the Christian church because as 1 John 2:22 says, they did not acknowledge that Jesus was the Christ, and as 1 John 4:2 says, they did not acknowledge that Jesus had come in the flesh.
 - b. Apostasy refers to those who profess to believe, but in time deny that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah and Savior of the world. Those who apparently stop believing in Christ never truly exercised saving faith in Christ. If they had, they would continue believing, since this is God's work (John 10:29; Romans 8:29-30).
 - c. Apostasy does not refer to believers who fall back into sin and become "carnal" or "worldly" in their lifestyle (1 Cor. 3:1-3). These people may disobey the Lord and grieve and quench the Spirit of God in their lives, but they do not stop believing that Jesus is the Christ. They will be disciplined by God (Heb. 12:5-11). True believers who do not live for Christ in the way God desires for them will not lose their salvation, but will lose some rewards in heaven (1 Cor. 3:11-15).
 - d. An example of apostasy is Judas Iscariot. Judas walked among Jesus and the other 11 disciples for 3 years, but then betrayed him. He appeared on the surface to be a true follower of Christ, but he was not (John 17:12).

5. We believe that some passages in the New Testament are difficult to interpret and on the surface appear to teach that believers may be able to lose their salvation. A closer look, however, reveals that these passages teach that believers can lose rewards in heaven or that those who "fall away" were only professing to believe and did not genuinely possess salvation.
 - a. Hebrews 6:1-8 is one of the "five warning passages" in the book of Hebrews (the other four are Hebrews 2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 10:26-39; and 12:25-29). In order to interpret these passages accurately, it is important to understand the argument of the book of Hebrews. The book of Hebrews was written to show the superiority of Christ over Judaism (specifically the angels, Moses, and Aaron) in order to (1) encourage the believers to press on to maturity and (2) warn professing believers not to lapse back into Judaism but cling to Christ as their priest/king. With this understanding, we realize that in Hebrews 6 the

author is warning professing Jewish Christians who are wavering in their faith not to abandon the foundational truths of Christianity.

Most likely, if these individuals did reject the Christian faith that they had seemingly embraced, and returned to Judaism, it would prove that they never really possessed the faith in the first place. Thus, this passage is speaking about the issue of apostasy, as 1 John 2 does. The other interpretive options would be to say that those who many “fall away” in Hebrews 6 are genuine believers who lose their salvation. The major problem with this view is that verses 4-6 would then indicate that these believers who fall away and lose their salvation could never be saved again. It would seem unthinkable to postulate that an unbeliever who repents can be saved, but a truly born-again believer who “falls away” could not ever be saved again.

Another interpretive option is to say that these believers who “fall away” do not lose their salvation but only lose their reward in heaven. It is true that genuine born-again believers can sin and backslide and such will lose their reward in heaven (1 Cor. 3:1-16), but true believers will not ever stop believing completely. The sin of apostasy can only be committed by an unbeliever.² Since Hebrews 6 clearly seems to refer to the possibility of individuals rejecting “the faith,” then loss of reward for sinning believers is not in view.

- b. Other New Testament passages that command readers to “remain in him” or “continue in the faith” (e.g. John 15:4-7; 1 Cor. 15:2; Col. 1:23; 1 John 2:24,28) do so to (1) exhort professing believers not to abandon “the faith” and (2) challenge believers to live pure lives which are pleasing to God so they might not lose rewards in heaven.

We believe that true Christians sin, but do not lose their salvation. God does not stop loving us, un-adopt us, allow us to perish, disinherit us, make Christ’s sacrifice insufficient, remove his forgiveness, or remove the seal of the Holy Spirit. By His grace, God continues to love us.

The Elders of Mountain View Community Church
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Notes:

¹ In 1 John two distinct forms of Gnosticism seem to be in view. One is docetic Gnosticism which taught that Christ was only an appearance (1:1 and 4:2-2; i.e. Jesus walked on shore but did not leave footprints). The other is a form of Gnosticism propounded by Cerinthus, a contemporary of John. According to Cerinthus, Jesus was a naturally begotten human upon whom the “Christ” spirit descended at the baptism of Jesus and left before the crucifixion. This is refuted in 1 John 5:6.

² In Matthew 24:24, Jesus says false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive the elect – if that were possible. The implication is that no, it is not possible to deceive the elect. Unbelievers can be deceived (2 Corinthians 4:4) regarding the identity of the Christ, but true believers cannot be deceived and will not apostatize.