**ONCE SAVED, ALWAYS SAVED?** (w/Addendum)

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Most Christians have heard this phrase many times. And most of us probably believe it’s true. What brings me to this subject is when our Sunday study of Romans 11 came to verse 22, we had to wrestle with this issue. As teacher, I needed to do some additional research of *scripture* to help us all understand what God wants us to understand about this phrase and this idea. This essay contains the results of that research. I have used God’s Word, Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries, and The Complete Biblical Library. Scripture must illuminate scripture, not opinions.

Basically, I found that the title phrase isn’t true unless the phrase “as long as we continue to believe in *and follow* Jesus” is added. Following Him means doing what He tells us He wants of us as detailed in His scripture and through prayer insights – being neither lukewarm nor cold.

So, let’s capture here several of the scriptures that inform our knowledge of this truth. Is it possible that those who have at one time “believed in” (Pisteuon = believe on, commit to, entrust to; as in John 3:16) Jesus as Savior can turn away, can deny Christ, by not following Him? Of course, that’s possible. NLT quotes from 1 Tim 4:1, 2 Tim 2:12 and then Matthew 10:33.
(Words of Jesus will be in red boldface)

 “Now the Holy Spirit tells us clearly that in the last times some will turn away from

 the true Faith; they will follow deceptive spirits and teachings that come from demons.”

 “If we endure hardship, we will reign with Him. If we deny Him, He will deny us.”

 **“But everyone who denies Me here on earth,**

 **I will also deny before my Father in Heaven.”**

Obviously, God sees unproductive Faith as “dead and useless” (see James 2:17). As James in 2:18 says, “I’ll show you my faith by my works.” Now if that is so, does that mean God will not bring someone who once was “saved” (but has now walked away from Christ) into Heaven when they die? Let’s look at that…

In the letter Paul wrote to the Gentile believers in Rome, he said these startling words in Chapter 11, verses 21 and 22.

 “For if God did not spare the original branches (the Jews, whom He cut off the

 Vine because of unbelief), He won’t spare you either. Notice how God is both

 kind and severe. He is severe toward those who disobeyed, but kind to you

 if you continue to trust in His kindness. But if you stop trusting, you also will be

 cut off.” (NLT)

One of the great “assurance” verses is from Jesus’ words in John 10:27-29:

 **“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow Me. I give them**

 **eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from Me,**

 **for my Father has given them to Me, and He is more powerful than anyone else.**

 **No one can snatch them from the Father’s hand.”** See also Isaiah 43:13 (NLT)

Sounds like a rock-solid assurance for followers. And it is – for followers. As long as a believer remains a follower, a sheep in the Father’s flock, no one – not even the devil, his demons, or the world’s corrupt system – can snatch us away from God’s loving hold on us. But when we, on our own, walk away from Christ either deliberately or carelessly and begin to walk with the world and its ways, we will have removed *ourselves* from His hand. No one will have “*snatched*” us away; we will have *taken ourselves away* from Him. We will then have *denied* Christ by not believing, trusting and following Him. We are then wholly vulnerable to the wiles and lies of the devil, the world, and our own flesh.

Jesus is trying to tell us in many places that there is an “IF” to salvation. It is serious business to forfeit our salvation by walking away from our Faith, either carelessly or deliberately. Knowing our righteous God is a demanding God, why would anyone not believe Him when He says follow Me to your end of days IF you want to join Me in My Heaven?

There are some who cite four scriptures (all by Paul who also wrote Romans 11:22,23 which prompted our study) that speak of God *sealing* us who have received His Son as Lord and Savior. Those four are 2 Corinthians 1:22, Ephesians 1:13 & 4:30, and 2 Timothy 2:19. These, all written by Paul, are translated as “sealed” only in the NASB and earlier translations. No other writers of Scripture use this term for these verses. The NLT, for example, in 2 Corinthians 1:22 says “and he has *identified us as his own* by placing the Holy Spirit in our hearts as the first installment that *guarantees* everything he has promised us.” But that same Paul also wrote in 2 Timothy 2:12b, “If we deny Him, He will deny us.” So, again, the “sealed” that some cite as proof that once saved is always saved is false, even in Paul’s own understanding.

Remember, Jesus says in Matthew 10:33 **“Deny Me on earth, I will deny you before my Father.**” In Revelation 2:10 Jesus says, **“But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life.”** Again in John 15:6 Jesus says, **“Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers.”** In John 15:10 Jesus defines what He means by “remain” – **“When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love...”** It cannot be made more clear – those who are once saved must, MUST, remain obedient *followers of Jesus* to insure joining Him after our mortal death here on earth. Don’t let Paul’s use of “sealed” mislead you teachers and preachers, because even he refutes that meaning in his other writings.

Let’s look at some powerful words from Paul’s magnificent letter in Romans 8:12-14 NLT.
 “Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your
 sinful nature urges you to do. For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if
 through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature,
 you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.”

Then Romans 8:35a,38a,39 NLT.
 “Can anything ever separate us from Christ’s love? And I am convinced that
 nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or
 in the earth below – indeed nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate
 us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

These words from the verse-by-verse commentary on Romans 8:13,35,36,38,39 in my 40-volume “The Complete Biblical Library” should prove helpful. 8:13. “To allow the things of the world to completely dominate one’s spiritual life is spiritual suicide. *This verse is perhaps the clearest, most concise statement of the way a person once in grace can lose his salvation*.” 8:35,36. “The perils mentioned by Paul may not be common to us where we live, but we are faced with numberless spiritual perils which threaten our relationship. The one thing that can separate us is spiritual death, described in verse 13. *The believer can choose to leave Christ out of his life; then he is separated from salvation by his own will.*” 8:38,39. “The secret is to remain “in Christ.” Eternal Security is provided, but it is only available as long as we remain “in Christ.” By the decision of our will, we came into the relationship of being “in Christ.” By a decision of our will, we can choose to terminate that relationship. If we do that, we have lost our security. *In summary, there is nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of Christ outside of ourselves. The only thing that can effect that separation is human will.”*

 Are there other scriptural proofs of this notion that we can lose our salvation? There are others, many others. *God would not let us miss something as important as this by not giving us plenty of warning with corroboration*.

The Greek phrase “work out” means “to continually work to bring something to fulfillment or completion.” In other words, our salvation requires attention, just like a garden needs attention to grow and mature. We must work at it by staying close to Jesus, by doing those things He calls us to do, and to always have a healthy fear of offending God and to have an awestruck reverence and respect for Him (Pr 1:7, 9:10; Is 66:1-3a). Each of us is responsible for keeping and maturing our salvation. An excellent statement is verse 13 in Philippians, chapter 2: “For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases Him.” (NLT)

Some say Hebrews supports an unqualified “Once Saved, Always Saved.” But does it? Let’s look at Hebrews 6:4-6.

 “For it is impossible to *bring back* to repentance those who were once enlightened –

 those who have experienced the good things of heaven and shared in the Holy

 Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the power of the

 age to come – and who then turn away from God. It is impossible *to bring* such

 people *back* to repentance; by rejecting the Son of God, they themselves are

 nailing him to the cross once again and holding him up to public shame.” (NLT).

Though others cannot *bring back* such a one, the *person himself* can come back to repentance.

Let’s look at Hebrews 10:26,29,31,38,39 (parallels the thoughts of Habakkuk 2:4b).

 “Dear friends, if we deliberately continue sinning after we have received knowledge

 of the truth, there is no longer any sacrifice that will cover these sins. Just think

 how much worse the punishment will be for those who have trampled on the Son

 of God, and have treated the blood of the covenant, which made us holy, as if it

 were common and unholy, and have insulted and disdained the Holy Spirit who

 brings God’s mercy to us. It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living

 God. …my righteous ones will live by faith. *But I will take no pleasure in anyone*

 *who turns away. But we are not like those who turn away from God to their own*

 *destruction. We are the faithful ones, whose souls will be saved.”* (NLT)

One more scripture to show that we must stay a firm believer and follower of Jesus if our salvation is to be viable and active for bringing us home to be with Him upon our mortal death. This one is from Colossians 1:22b,23: (Keep in mind that Paul wrote this, too.)

 “As a result, He has brought you into His own presence, and you are holy and

 blameless as you stand before Him without a single fault. But you must continue

 to believe this truth and stand firmly in it. *Don’t drift away from the assurance*

 *you received when you heard the Good News*.” (NLT)

Paul goes on to say in Colossians (1:27; 2:6-8; 3:1-4; 4:2) that because Christ lives in you, you have the assurance of sharing His glory, but that is only so, if you stay in Christ. Verse 6 of Colossians 2 says plainly: “And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus, as your Lord, *you must continue to follow Him.*” (NLT)

*Basically, what all of these verses are saying is that we can lose our salvation assurance of going to Heaven if we drift away from following Jesus Christ as our Lord. We must follow Him to the end of our lives. As Paul says so well, we must run the race all the way to the finish line.*

***Would God spend so much time and ink with so many different writers***

***warning us about something that some today think can’t happen?***

Paul and other New Testament writers strongly encourage believers to root themselves in the faith and hope of the gospel in order to persevere to the end. “Today in the Word” commentator Doug Moo puts it this way: “God does, indeed, by His grace and through His Spirit, work to preserve His people so that they will be vindicated in the judgment; but, at the same time,

*God’s people are responsible to persevere in their faith if they expect to see that vindication*.”

The danger of believing this Once Saved, Always Saved pretense is that it can mislead some to think they can go on about their business and think that no matter how they live, they are saved.  As you see from the scriptures, that is a fraudulent view.  In addition, that statement leads some of us to think that when someone who has been saved starts sinning, we say, “Oh, well, he must not have been saved after all.”  That is a statement intended to “protect” the lie of “Once Saved, Always Saved”…. And that is simply not so, and is, therefore, dangerously misleading. Someone who is saved can walk away from Christ, as these scriptures have told us.

And there are many others; here’re some, all Jesus words:
 **Matthew 10:22,33,38; 13:20,21; 24:10-13.**

If one of us walks away from our Faith in Christ, can we repent and return – and will He forgive us and take us back? If we repent, He promises to always forgive us, cleanse us and bring us back into His family. The Heart of Jesus is that He wants none of us to perish (2 Pet 3:9). As long as we don’t commit the unforgiveable sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit, then Christ will always take us back. One of the purposes of the powerful Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) is to clearly show us that our Father will always take back His *repentant* son, even after the son has turned away in complete denial of his father and his father’s ways, and was considered “dead and lost” (vs 24). To God alone be the Glory! See also Colossians 2:6-10.

*The church must teach the truth of God’s Word and not man’s words on any topic*. Otherwise,

some having come to faith might believe the lie of Once Saved, Always Saved, and decide that they can return to their former life of sin and its supposed pleasures (2 Pet 2:21) falsely believing they can do that because they will always be saved no matter how they live.  That is a lie from the pit of hell. A backslidden “Christian” is a terrible witness to the world. Psalm 73:27 says:

 “Those who desert Him will perish, for You destroy those who abandon You.” (NLT)

I hope you now see this critical issue in the light of God’s Word. Once we are saved, we will be forever saved – *as long as we continue to follow Jesus* – **As long as we entrust Him with our lives by living for Him. *Our very life eternal with God depends on our living our Faith in Him alone*.** The fact that we may sin occasionally, does not deny our Faith in Him. It upsets our relationship with Him, but by repenting and asking His forgiveness we re-establish that close relationship with Him in salvation. “But if we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.” (1 John 1:9, NLT) But, as **Revelation 2:10,11 and 21:8** make clear, those who deny their Faith in Christ will not go to a heavenly home to be with Him for eternity, but such deniers will be thrown into the Lake of Fire. God’s Grace is Priceless!

So, walk with The King today *and every day* so as to be a blessing for the rest of your life!

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Note: If you believe this view is incorrect, I welcome a scripture-based correction. Thank you….

*Now see the Addendum attached to this Essay*  Soli Deo Gloria...

**Addendum** –Detail for the “Once Saved, Always Saved?”Essay

What follows is an addition for emphasis to my essay on this topic. The purpose here is to highlight the words of Jesus as He speaks to being faithful to Him all the way to the rapture, or our mortal death, whichever comes first.

The obvious point is: The words of Jesus are ultimately authoritative and take precedence over any human’s interpretation of other words, such as the Apostle Paul’s. Paul is the only one who used the word “seal”, only to have it mis-interpreted to mean “locked-in” rather than the intended “identified”. The bottom line is, again, that anyone who comes to Christ and then falls away or denies or fails to follow Him, will not be claimed by Jesus and will not enter His rest in Heaven (or the New Earth). The only people who should be concerned about this are those who are not, will not, and have not followed Christ after their genuine conversion experience.

These are Scriptures that speak of Believers needing to stay Followers of Christ, once saved – to be qualified to come home to Him after our mortal death. Words of Jesus are in red and *italicized*.

Psalm 73:25-27

“Those who desert Him will perish, for You destroy those who abandon You.”

2 Peter 1:10,11

“So, dear brothers and sisters, work hard to prove that you really are among those God has called and chosen. Do these things, and you will never fall away. Then God will give you a grand entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

Matthew 10:22,33,38

*22.* *“And all the nations will hate you because you are my followers. But everyone who endures to the end will be saved.”*

*33. “But everyone who denies me here on earth, I will also deny before my Father in heaven.”*

*38. “If you refuse to take up your cross and follow me, you are not worthy of being mine”*

John 10:27-29

*“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father’s hand.”*

Also, Isaiah 43:13

“From eternity to eternity I am God. No one can snatch anyone out of my hand. No one can undo what I have done.” True, but one who, once saved, stops obeying Christ is cast aside and will not enter Heaven – see John 15:6 & 10 below:

But then John 15:6 & 10

*6. “Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned.”*

*10. “When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father’s commandments and remain in his love.”*

Revelation 2:10,11

*“Don’t be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you. You will suffer for ten days. But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life. Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. Whoever is victorious will not be harmed by the second death.”*

Matthew 24:10

*“And many will turn away from me and betray and hate each other.”*

2 Timothy 2:12,19 (Paul’s last letter makes clear he knows denying Christ is possible)

12. “If we endure hardship, we will reign with him. If we deny him, he will deny us.”

19. “But God’s truth stands firm like a foundation stone with this inscription: ‘The Lord knows those who are his.’ And ‘All who belong to the Lord must turn away from evil.’”

Now let’s look at the several verses that Paul uses in his writings that use the word, “sealed” or “seal”. In the NASB they are:

 “also sealed us” 2 Corinthians 1:22

 “sealed in Him” Ephesians 1:13

 “you were sealed” Ephesians 4:30

 “having this seal” 2 Timothy 2:19

The word “sealed” as used in the NASB and earlier versions of the Bible, is from the Greek word *esphragisthete*. It is defined by several words: *seal, seal up, set a seal upon, affirm, authenticate, certify, acknowledge*. Another is *identify* as used in the NLT Bible. Another is *secured* as used in the Amplified Bible. The principal purpose of the use of this word was to show that once a person is saved, he is “identified” or “affirmed” or “acknowledged” as belonging to the family of God. It does not convey a meaning of “locked up” or “sealed up”, even to Paul. Even the word “secured” used in the Amplified Bible does not mean “locked up” or “Christ’s forever” considering the other scriptures that do not subscribe to the once saved, always saved pretense, as provided earlier in the main essay. If more is needed, I have covered this point thoroughly in paragraph three on page two of the main essay, “Once Saved, Always Saved?”.

In my continued reading of the Bible, I have come across other scriptures that speak to this very important issue; I present their addresses here: 1 John 1:5-7; 2:24,25; 3:6-10. John 3:36; 8:31; 11:26; 12:26,48. Galatians 5:4; Hebrews 3:6, 14. 2 John 1:8,9. Jude 1:24.

Hoping this provides some additional light on the topic.

Tom McDonald, April 19, 2023 & June 4, 2024.