

"Can Christians Be Lost?"

Some say that once you become a Christian, that you can never lose your salvation. Is this true? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders. And this is a Bible study, "In Search of the Lord's Way." And today we're asking if a Christian can lose his salvation, so stay tuned.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way, we're here to search God's Word for the Lord's will. God is the author of Scripture, and we can believe the Bible because God was behind the writing of every verse, every chapter, and every book. We can trust it to give us the truth that God wanted us to know, truth that is sufficient to lead us to eternal life. We need that truth, so we go to the Bible. And we're always delighted when you spend this time with us. Let us know that you're watching and tell a friend about this program. We want to be a part of your life each week.

The doctrine of "once saved, always saved" suggests that the Christian, once truly saved, can never do anything to lose his salvation and finally be lost in hell. This belief says Christians have an unconditional security in Christ. They suggest that any person who appears to be a Christian and falls away, that they were never truly converted in the first place. They say that Christians do sin; but when they sin, they are punished in this life and forfeit privileges in heaven but not entrance into heaven.

But is heaven conditional? What is a condition? A conditional statement is usually introduced by words such as "if" or "unless." When Jesus said in Luke 13:3 that unless you repent, you will perish, we understand that repentance is a condition to keep from being lost. When the Bible says "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:6 to 7). My friend, you see, there are conditions.

Now if you want more information about whether Christians can be lost, we offer printed copies or CDs of our study free. Just mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also stream this program on our website at www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from 2 Peter chapter 2, verses 20 to 22, and then we'll answer the question, "Can a Christian lose his salvation?"

Our reading today from God's inspired and all-sufficient word comes from 2 Peter, chapter 2, verses 20 to 22. "For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, 'A dog returns to its own vomit,' and, 'A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire.'" That's a big, big, big warning coming from the word of God. Let's pray together. Father, help us never to get entangled in the defilements of the world, but to stay true to You, and to love You, and to serve You. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

The doctrine of once-saved, always saved is built upon the belief that God's grace is unconditional. Some say once grace is given, a Christian cannot lose it. But the doctrine of unconditional security ignores the conditional, qualifying statements in Scripture about whom the grace of God saves. Now several passages show our salvation is conditional. We must remain faithful to God.

For instance, the Lord Jesus said in John 8 and verse 51, "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death." But what will happen if a person stops keeping God's word? The

Lord said in John 15 verses 1 and 2, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me (now notice that the branch is already in them) that doesn't bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit." Now when a branch in Christ no longer bears fruit, it's taken away. John 15 verse 6 says, "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned." Well this is the end of a Christian who will not bear fruit.

Moreover, how your moral life matters. A Christian who turns to fleshly passions can lose his soul, but one who puts away sin can live with God. Romans 8 verse 12 to 13 says, "So then, brethren (he's talking to Christians), we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— for if you (that is you Christians) are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live." Morality is a condition of salvation.

The Lord expects His people to hold firmly to their faith. Our salvation depends on it. 1 Corinthians 15 verses 1 and 2 says, "Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word that I preached to you—unless you believed in vain." Now if they don't hold firmly to their faith, they will have believed in vain and could lose their salvation.

Colossians 1:21 to 23 says, "And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach— if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister." You see, holding firmly to the gospel is a condition of our salvation.

Remaining active in church attendance and our efforts for the gospel is a condition of our salvation. Hebrews 10 verse 25, there the inspired writer noted that some Christians had forsaken assembling with the church. And in response to this, he said in verses 26 and 27: "For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries." Yes, a Christian who quits on God can lose the blessing of eternal life. God expects us to stay involved in church as long as we are able.

The second epistle of Peter was written to Christians urging them to remain faithful and not to fall away to immorality or false teaching. 2 Peter 2:20 to 21 says, "For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, (my friend, these people are Christians) they are again entangled (that is back into those sinful things) in them and overcome, (he says) the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, (that is to become a Christian), than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them" Now this clear Scripture shows that if a Christian gets overcome by sin, he can find himself worse off than before he became a Christian. It would have been better if he had never known the way of the Lord.

In 1 John 1 verses 6 to 7 the Bible says, "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet we walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, then we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." Now this was written to Christians. Our freedom from sin is conditional on whether we follow the Lord or follow the world. Now, I've presented several conditions that God has placed on our

salvation, and there are many more. But if there were just one, just one Scriptural condition on this list, my friend that would be enough to show that our salvation is conditional.

Now in addition, the Scriptures often warn Christians to remain faithful and committed to the Lord. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:24 to 27, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? (He says) Run in such a way that you may win (that is give it all you got). Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath (but we do something more than that), but we an imperishable. Therefore (he says) I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and I make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified." Paul knew that he could lose his crown of life if he didn't discipline himself and stay free from sin.

In Galatians 5:19 to 21 Paul warned the Galatian Christians about the deeds of the flesh. And he said, "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you (that is you brethren in Galatia), just as I've forewarned you, that those who practice such things (and that includes them) will not inherit the kingdom of God." Why would Paul forewarn Christians about these sins keeping them out of heaven, if Christians couldn't lose their salvation?

Our faith and commitment to Christ is a lifetime effort. The Lord Jesus said in John 5:24, "whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." Well this passage says the believer possesses eternal life but doesn't say anything about the person who stops believing or stops hearing the word. John 8:51 says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, that if anyone keeps my word, he shall never see death." But what about the person who quits keeping the Word? John 3:36 says, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." One has eternal life as long as he believes and obeys. But if he stops believing or he stops obeying, he can lose that life.

Well can a person stop believing? Some think not, but we have an example in Scripture of Israel coming out of Egypt. Study Psalm 106, and study it closely. Psalm 106 and verse 12 says, "Then they believed His words; They sang His praise." But verse 13 says, "they quickly forgot His works." In verse 21 the Bible says, "they forgot God their Savior." And then Psalm 106:24 to 25 says, "Then they despised the pleasant land; They did not believe in His word, but grumbled in their tents; They did not listen to the voice of the LORD." If we ask can people stop believing and hearing God? Well the Israelites did. And my friend, you can too, beware.

Now in the parable of the sower that's very familiar to us in scripture, you remember that Jesus described different kinds of soil: there's the soil that's beside the road, then there is the rocky soil, the thorny soil, and the good soil. Now these types of soil actually describe people's hearts. Jesus tells how the Word of God or the seed is planted in the thorny soil and what happened. You remember the Lord said in Luke 8:13, "Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, they receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away." You see, they stopped believing. Sadly, we've all known people like this. Who believed at one point in their life and quit believing in another.

Paul predicted in 1 Timothy 4 and verse 1, "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons." You see, when you stop listening to the Lord and His word, and you begin to pay attention to others, you can stop

believing. To believe in the Lord Jesus means that you believe what He teaches. How can you say you believe the Lord if you will not accept the things that He teaches.

Now consider Hebrews 3:12 to 14, that are written to brothers in Christ. "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end." Now to fall away is to abandon the Lord willfully. These brothers they had been deceived and hardened by sin and they lost their faith. Again, we are partakers of Christ only if we hold firm our faith to the end.

Now at this point someone says, "Well Phil, don't you know no one can snatch us out of the Lord's hand? Don't you know that we can never be separated from God's love?" Yes, I well know the two precious promises first found in John 10:27 to 29 and the second in Romans verses 35- to 9, I know them quite well. And they say that no one and nothing can separate us from God. These verses, however, don't take into account what happens to a person who decides to separate himself from God. Jude 21 advises us to "keep yourselves in the love of God"; and John 15:9 to 10 teaches us that we must abide in God's love. Oh no one else can separate us from God, but we can decide to leave the Lord. Christians can choose to fall away! They can choose to leave God; and, sadly, sadly, many have.

Another person objects, "Well if a Christian falls away, he was never truly converted in the first place." Are you sure? Have you've never changed your mind? The Bible says in Hebrews 6:4 to 6, "For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away (that is by their choice), it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to an open shame."

Now it's clear that these people were once Christians. They were enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, partakers of the Holy Spirit, and they've tasted or experienced the good word of God and the powers of the age to come. Oh I tell you, you couldn't have these spiritual blessings outside of Christ. You can't fall away from something unless you were first part of it. These Christians fell away by willfully rejecting Jesus Christ. Others could not get them to repent, because they didn't want to repent. To fall away is a willful choice to abandon the faith.

In a different situation Galatians speaks of Christians who followed a different gospel than Paul preached by binding circumcision and the Law on Gentile Christians. And Paul said in Galatians 5 and verse 4 "You've been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace." Here are people under the grace of God, but they fell away from it, they severed themselves from Christ. Oh to be severed implies that they first belonged to Him. My friend, a Christian can fall from grace. And I pray that you never do. Let's pray together. Oh Father, help us to hold firm to our Faith. And never leave You, and never desert you, but to stay close in our relationship to You. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We pray this in the name of Jesus our Lord, Amen!

Thank God for a second law of pardon for Christians who have sinned. Even when a Christian strays from the truth, God has a way for him to return to salvation. Like the prodigal son, he can come home to God.

When Simon the Sorcerer in Acts 8 offered money to buy the apostles' gift, Peter rebuked him for his sin. In Acts 8:21 to 24 Peter said, "You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible,

the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." God expects Christians to repent of their sins and ask for forgiveness, if they wish to be pardoned.

The Bible says in 1 John 1 verse 9, that "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." God is faithful to His people. And He will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness, if...if...we confess our sins, repent of them, and ask for his forgiveness. God offers pardon, but there are conditions to our forgiveness.

The same thing is true for the person who wants to become a Christian. The Lord Jesus offers salvation as a gift to those who will believe, who will repent of their sins, who will confess His name before others, and who will be baptized. Baptism is an immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2 and verse 38). Now meeting conditions won't earn you salvation; but if you fail to meet them, you cannot enjoy the grace and blessing of God.

We hope that our study of God's Word has challenged you to think about your soul. If you want a free printed copy or a CD of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org.

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Do worship with a church of Christ in your area. If you're looking for a church home that loves and follows the Bible, we'll be happy to help you find one. Well we'll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program. God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.