

Is it possible to lose my salvation?

By Dr. Jim Denison

On Sunday morning, September 9, 1973, I asked Jesus Christ to forgive my sins and become my Savior and Lord. But when I finished praying, nothing happened. I saw no lights, I felt no weight lift from my shoulders. My first thought was, "Is that all there is to it?" And my intellectual questions about God didn't evaporate. I still wondered about creation and science, world religions, why God allows evil and suffering. And so I doubted for many months whether my salvation and faith were real.

Was I alone? The renowned historian Will Durant mailed questionnaires about the meaning of life to a number of famous people. After reading their answers, he published them in a chapter he titled, "An Anthology of Doubt." Who hasn't contributed to that topic?

What do we do when we doubt our salvation or our faith or our God? How can we help someone else deal with their doubts?

Know what you can know

Start with his promise: "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). A literal translation would be, "We can actually and with full assurance know intellectually and personally that we have eternal life." This phrase does not mean that we gradually grow into assurance, but that we can possess here and now a present certainty of the life we have already received in Jesus.

But here's the catch: first we must "believe in the name of the Son of God." "Believe" means more than intellectual assent—it is the biblical word for personal trust and commitment. I can assent to the fact that an airplane will fly me from Dallas to Atlanta, but I must get on board before it can. No surgeon can operate on the basis of intellectual assent—we must submit to the procedure.

If you have, you can claim the biblical fact that you "have eternal life," present tense, right now. You are already immortal. Jesus promised, "whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:26). We simply step from time into eternity, from this life to the next.

Nowhere does the Bible say how it feels to become the child of God, because our feelings can depend on the pizza we had for supper or the weather outside the window. No circumstances or events can guarantee our salvation. It takes as much faith to believe I am a Christian today as it did to become one more than thirty years ago. I still haven't seen God, or proven my salvation in a test tube. If I had, I could question the reality and veracity of what I saw or thought. So could you.

Either the Bible is true or it is false. Either God keeps his word or he does not. He promises that if you "believe in the name of the Son of God," you "have eternal life." This moment. You cannot lose your salvation, for you are already the immortal child of God. This is the fact of God's word.

What about "falling from grace"?

Those who believe that it is possible to trust in Christ and then choose to lose our salvation are quick to quote Hebrews 6:4-6. These interpreters assume that the text speaks of people who have experienced a genuine conversion, then "fall away" (v. 6). They typically believe that such a person needs another salvation experience. But others disagree.

Some believe that the writer is stating a hypothetical case: if genuine Christians "fall away," then "it is impossible" for them "to be brought back to repentance" (vs. 4, 6). Not that they can in fact fall from salvation, but if they could, they could not be saved again. Note that if the text deals with a Christian who actually falls from faith, it teaches that the person has no chance to be saved again (Arminian beliefs to the contrary).

Others (myself among them) believe that the writer is speaking not of a Christian but of someone who considers the faith, perhaps even joining a church, but then rejects Christ. If such a person persists in unbelief, he cannot then be saved. If a person claims that he once trusted Christ but does so no more, I would believe that he was never a genuine Christian.

The biblical teaching that a genuine Christian is forever the child of God (cf. John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 5:17) seems too clear for me to allow this difficult text to convince me otherwise. But the practical consequence is the same: my Arminian friend believes the person has fallen from the faith; I think he was never a believer; we both want him to come to Christ.

Conclusion

Expect to face doubts about your salvation. The stronger your faith, the more likely you will be subjected to such attacks, intended by the enemy to paralyze and cripple your faith and prevent your service to God. The stronger your faith, the greater a threat you are to the enemy. Doubts sometimes come not because our faith is weak, but because it is strong.

If you know you have made Christ your Lord but still face doubts about your salvation, try my favorite prayer in the Bible. After a father pleads with Jesus to heal his demon-possessed boy, Jesus says, "Everything is possible for him who believes" (Mark 9:23). And the father exclaims, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (v. 24). You can pray that prayer today, and Jesus will hear you and help you.

Remember that you are God's child. My sons will always be my sons, no matter how they feel or what they do, because they were born that way. Have you been born again?