

God's Faithfulness

The "Once Saved, Always Saved" doctrine is alive and kicking. It is a false teaching about perseverance. Those who hold it say that a person who has faith in Christ cannot lose faith. Using "saved" to mean "converted," they teach that a converted person can never fall away.

It is no use confronting these teachers with people who have stopped going to church or stopped confessing faith in Christ. Since we cannot look into another person's heart, they will insist that such people either never believed or still believe.

But "Once Saved, Always Saved" is against the Bible. The Bible says that people can fall away and have fallen away. David fell away and did not repent until Nathan preached to him (2 Samuel 11:1-12:13). In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul lists other Old Testament examples and makes this application: "*Therefore, the one who thinks that he is standing firm should beware that he does not fall*" (v. 12). Jesus talks about those who "*believe for a while and in time of temptation they fall away*" (Luke 8:13). (See Isaiah 1:2; Matthew 10:22; 24:13; Romans 11:20-21; Galatians 5:4; 1 Timothy 1:19-20).

The Bible clearly says that a believer can fall from faith in Christ. So what do we tell a troubled Christian who asks: "How can I be sure that I will not fall away?" We tell him the Gospel, the message of God's grace in Christ, the forgiveness of sins because God the Son has died in His place.

The passages about falling away are not meant for troubled Christians. They are for people who are proud and secure in a fleshly way, trusting themselves not to fall away. They are for people like Peter, who bragged and boasted that he would not deny the Lord (Mark 14:29-30).

The Bible has unlimited assurance for those who trust Christ, not themselves. We go on from 1 Corinthians 10:12 to verse 13: "*God is faithful.*" The point is to trust God's faithfulness, not our faith. Christian faith is faith in Christ, not faith in faith. If we trusted our faith, we would be trusting ourselves. That would be idolatry. It would also be foolishness, for we are terribly, fatally weak. On our own we can fall but we cannot fly. To rise, we must be raised. We must be held and lifted by God. He does that through His Word.

We are weak, but Christ is almighty. No one can take His sheep away from Him (John 10:27-30). The passages about falling away teach us not to trust ourselves. The passages about being held by God move us to trust Him more and more. See Romans 8:28-39; 1 Corinthians 1:8; Philippians 1:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:24; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; 2 Timothy 1:9-14; 1 Peter 1:5; 5:10.

By our own power, we cannot begin to believe nor continue to believe. We cannot come to Christ or stay with Christ by our own thought or effort. Through the Gospel, God has brought us to Christ and keeps us with Christ. Jesus accepts us for His own sake because our sins have been forgiven by His sacrifice for our sins in our place. Jesus will not reject us or let go of us (John 6:37, 44; 10:27-30; Matthew 11:28).

Then why do some fall away? We do not know. We do not know why some are saved and others are lost. The Bible does not explain. We must be content to do without an answer to that question in this world.

If a person is converted, preserved, and saved, God has done it. God alone gets the credit. If a person never believes or falls away, it is his own fault. Man alone gets the blame. But God wants everyone to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). We do not understand. We do not have to understand. God understands.

But how about you and me? Is our salvation certain? The only answer is the Gospel, the good news of salvation for Jesus' sake. By the Gospel, God assures us of salvation. Salvation is certain because it is all God's doing.

The Biblical teaching assures and reassures us. The teaching that we can fall is a needed warning not to trust ourselves. The teaching that God holds us is the needed comfort that leads, moves, and draws us to trust Him more and more. God's faithfulness is our security. He will not change His Word. He will not forget His promises. He will not reject nor abandon His children. He will deliver us from this present evil world full of tears and take us to be with Him in heaven because of Jesus.