

# The Eternal Security of the Believer

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The question sometimes arises as to whether someone who has come to faith in Christ can lose their salvation. As with any question we may have regarding our faith and the Christian life, we always go to the word of God to find our answers. There are several passages in the Bible that speak to the degree of certainty we have regarding our salvation, and to what extent our perseverance or continuance in this state of grace depends upon our own actions after we are saved.

We may have some questions for which there are no direct answers in the Scriptures; there are some things that we will not understand until we are finally together with the Lord in Heaven. However, the issue of our eternal security and perseverance in the faith is not one of those things that we will have to wait to understand, because the Bible speaks to this issue extensively in several passages. Let us now look at what God reveals through His word about the eternal certainty of the salvation that He has provided for us as His people through the atoning death of His Son, Jesus Christ.

## *The Teaching of Jesus*

There can be no better place to begin than to look first at the words of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Recorded in John 6, Jesus said:

“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will ***certainly not cast out***. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ***This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.*** For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.” (John 6:37-40, emphasis added).

This passage speaks very clearly to the issue of the eternal security of the believer. Jesus said that ***all*** of those who have been given to Him by the Father, or God’s elect, ***will*** in fact come to Him. And then in this same verse Jesus said regarding those who do come to Him, that He will ***certainly not cast them out***. And He said this with no mention of any added conditions whatsoever, or any mention of their performance after they are saved.

Jesus emphasized the same point again in the following two verses when He said that He had come down from Heaven not to do His own will, but the will of His Father who had sent Him. Jesus then revealed that it is the will of His Father that He would lose ***none*** of those who had been given to Him, but He would raise them up at the last day. So here is the same teaching of the eternal security of the believer given again in this same passage, in clear language, in order to make sure that His message was fully understood.

In the final verse of this passage Jesus reiterates this same message of the eternal security of the believer yet a third time, when He said that ***everyone*** who looks to Him and believes in Him ***will*** have eternal life together with Him in Heaven. Let us notice in this verse that Jesus did not say that some of those who to look to Him and believe in Him will have eternal life, depending on what they may do after they are saved. However He did say clearly, and with no added conditions or any mention of a believer’s performance after they are saved, that ***everyone*** who looks to Him and believes in Him ***will*** have eternal life; He ***will*** raise them up at the last day. And so we see that ***three times*** in this passage of John 6:37-40, Jesus emphasized that our salvation in Him is an eternal certainty.

Going just a few verses further in John 6, we will consider once again a teaching that we studied previously when discussing predestination and the effectual calling of God. Here Jesus said: “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:44).

In the first part of this verse, Jesus taught that no one is able to come to Him unless the Father draws them, or calls them. And then in the second part of the verse, Jesus taught that those individuals whom God does call *will* be raised up at the last day. There is no condition at all attached to His statement. Jesus stated clearly that those whom God draws, or calls, will be raised up at the last day, meaning that all who receive God’s calling to faith in His Son will be saved, and none will be lost. Jesus also communicated this same truth in clear, unambiguous language in John 6:39.

In John 10, Jesus again spoke of the eternal certainty and security of our salvation when He said: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.” (John 10:27-30).

Those whom Jesus referred to as His sheep are those whom the Father has given to Him. These are the elect, whom God foreknew from before the creation of the world. God’s elect have already, or will at some point in time, be called by Him to faith in Christ, and they manifest in their lives the calling of God by their belief in Christ and their love for other believers. Speaking of these, Jesus said that they will *never* perish. Jesus did not say that they will never perish unless they disobey to some degree after they are saved. But He did say succinctly, and without any added conditions at all, that they will *never* perish.

Jesus then continued in this passage to teach that *no one* is able to snatch one of His sheep out of His hand, or His Father’s hand. *Neither we ourselves, by our own actions or failings, nor any other created being, is able to snatch any believer out of God’s hand.*

## *The Teaching of the Apostles Paul and Peter*

In Romans 8:29-30, we see the same teaching of the eternal certainty and security of God's salvation. In these verses Paul described a definite sequence, or order of salvation, beginning with those whom God foreknew (See also Ephesians 1:4-5). Paul taught that those whom God foreknew have all been predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. Then in His time, God calls those whom He foreknew to faith in His Son. Paul then said further that those who are called are also justified. And finally in this sequence or order of salvation, Paul said clearly, succinctly, and with no added conditions whatsoever, that *those who are justified are also glorified* (verse 30).

In this passage Paul taught that all of those who are called by God to faith in His Son Jesus Christ are justified, and all of those who are justified are ultimately glorified. The certainty of the sequence of events is clear in Paul's language. None fall away, and again, Paul makes no mention of man's performance or actions as having any effect in this process whatsoever.

The entirety of the actions in effecting the salvation of God's elect described in this passage are God's actions, and only His actions. Nowhere is any condition regarding man's performance made mention of at all, either before or after he has been saved.

A believer's performance or obedience to God's word definitely has an effect on his eternal reward, as Paul taught in his letter to the Corinthians: "Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." (1 Corinthians 3:12-15).

The "foundation" that Paul mentioned in this passage is Jesus Christ Himself, and the salvation that God has provided for His people through the blood of Jesus shed on Calvary's cross. Paul then taught that the quality of each believer's work will be tested by fire. If his work withstands this test, he will receive a reward from God.

Now let us notice what Paul taught in verse 15. He said that if the believer's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, but "he himself will be saved", only as one

escaping through the fire. Here Paul again emphasized that disobedience and failure to obey God will not affect the salvation of the believer, that salvation being eternally secure. However, disobedience will result in a loss of rewards that one may have received if he had been obedient, and his work had withstood the test of fire. Regardless of a believer's failings in life, even after he is saved, his salvation itself is eternally secure.

Paul also taught in Romans: "for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." (Romans 11:29). God does not change His mind concerning those whom He calls to faith in His Son.

Though a believer's salvation itself is eternally secure, there is yet another very sobering teaching in the Bible that we must consider. There is reference made in John's first letter to sin that results in the physical death of a believer. John wrote: "If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this." (1 John 5:16).

Hebrews 12:1-13 also speaks of God's discipline of His sons, saying that God disciplines every son whom He receives. We as believers must all take this matter of obedience very seriously. God will separate us from our sins. Even though our salvation itself is eternally secure, our future reward in Heaven, and according to 1 John 5:16, maybe even our physical lives here on earth, are at stake.

Paul taught again in his letter to the Romans of the eternal certainty and security of our salvation when he said there is no power in all of creation that is able to separate us as believers from the love of God:

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, "For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35-39)

*No power in all of creation*, including demonic power, is able to separate us from the love of God that has been given to us in Christ Jesus our Lord. And this includes our own miniscule power to disobey, or to rail angrily against God for the troubles that come upon us during the course of our lives. Though we may fail miserably, God's word does not fail.

Once again, we consider the words of Jesus Himself when He said: "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." (John 6:37). *No one* who has come to Christ will *ever* be driven away from Him. None of God's elect will ever be cast out from His presence; our salvation is eternally secure. The One whose name is "Faithful and True" (Revelation 19:11) has Himself said it.

We are not saved by grace, and then kept in this state of grace by our own good works; rather we are kept by the power God. Peter wrote in his first letter: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (1 Peter 1:3-5).

In this passage, Peter taught us that we as believers have "an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away", and he taught that we are protected or kept safe by the power of God until the time when we are finally together with the Lord in Heaven. Though our future reward in Heaven depends upon our obedience to God's word, our salvation itself is eternally secure, and entirely God's own doing from beginning to end.

If our salvation in any way depended on our own works, then we would be able to boast that our works were good enough to keep us saved. If our salvation depended upon us making the "right decision" to accept Christ, then we would be able to boast that we made that "right decision" when others did not. However, the Scriptures teach that no man can boast that he had anything to do with his salvation. Paul wrote: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; *and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*" (Ephesians 2:8-9, emphasis added).

Our faith in Christ is a gift that was given to us by God; it did not come about through any work of our own whatsoever. And through this gift of faith, we

are protected not by our own power, but we are “protected by the power of God” until our salvation is revealed (1 Peter 1:5).

Paul also emphasized that we are kept by God’s power and not our own, when he wrote to the Corinthians teaching that it is God Himself who “will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:8-9).

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians with this same message regarding the eternal certainty and security of our salvation when he said: “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and *He also will bring it to pass.*” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, emphasis added). So Paul emphasized yet again that God has called us into fellowship with His Son, and God is faithful; He will preserve us and keep us blameless all the way through to the coming of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul also wrote to the Philippians with the same message when he said: “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 1:6). The Scriptures teach us that God Himself began the work of salvation in us, and He is the One who will carry our salvation through to completion.

## **The Eternal Security of the Believer – Part 2**

In Part 1 of our study, we examined several Scripture references regarding the eternal security of the believer. Despite these teachings, which clearly reveal that our salvation in Christ is eternally secure and certain, there are some who say there is evidence from the Scriptures that a believer can lose their salvation. Those who hold this view will often refer to Hebrews 6:4-9, Hebrews 10:26-29, and 2 Peter 2:20-22 to support their doctrine. We will now look carefully at each of these

Scripture passages to see if there is any validity to the assertion that these Scriptures teach that a believer can lose their salvation.

In order to accurately interpret Scripture, we must consider the context of the passage from which the Scripture is taken. We must also consider whom the author is addressing in the passage. And we must interpret the passage under consideration in the light of all the rest of the Scriptures as a whole, which is to say that we must let Scripture interpret Scripture. If we derive an interpretation of a Scripture passage that is contradicted by other passages in the Scriptures, then we can be sure that we have derived an erroneous interpretation.

We have already examined several passages containing very clear and unambiguous language, which state that a believer cannot lose their salvation. These passages reveal that every believer is kept safe by the power of God, who Himself carries our salvation through to completion, from beginning to end.

Now, in the interest of a complete consideration of what the Bible teaches about the eternal certainty and security of our salvation in Christ, let us consider several of the passages which are most often cited by some as evidence that a believer can lose their salvation. And let us carefully examine these Scriptures in order to arrive at a correct and biblically sound interpretation, so that any confusion we may have on this issue may be resolved.

### ***The Meaning of Hebrews 6:4-8***

We should begin our study of this passage by understanding that the letter to the Hebrews is addressed to Jews who had become professing Christians. As we will see when we consider Hebrews 10:26-29, some of these professing Hebrew believers were not continuing in the faith, but they were leaving the congregations of believers to return to the way of Judaism.

The main purpose of the letter to the Hebrews was to emphasize to everyone in these congregations the preeminence of Christ, and to admonish them that there is no other way to God the Father than through Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews warned that for those who ultimately reject Christ, there is nothing left for them “but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.” (Hebrews 10:27). They would not be saved simply because they were descended from Jacob.

Also as we begin our study of Hebrews 6:4-8, let us consider as well that this passage is prefaced by Hebrews 5:11- 6:3. In these verses, the writer of Hebrews comments on the fact that though the congregation had heard the fundamental truths of the word of God preached, some did not seem to be growing in the faith. And in fact, these needed someone to teach them the elementary truths of God's word all over again (Hebrews 5:12).

This failure to grow in the faith and bear fruit could indicate that some in the congregation had never come to faith in Christ, though they had heard the words of the Gospel message. With this preface in mind, we will now consider Hebrews 6:4-8.

Looking at the first part of the passage, we read:

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, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. (Hebrews 6:4-6)

And then immediately following in verses 7-8, we see reference to "ground" receiving "rain" that often comes upon it. If the ground "brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled" then it receives blessing from God. But if it bears "thorns and thistles" it is worthless, and in the end it will be burned. In these verses, the author employed a method of communicating his message that was similar to a method that Jesus often used in His teaching, which was to teach a spiritual principle by means of an analogy or comparison to something in the natural world.

In Hebrews 6:7-8, the "ground" is symbolic of people. The "rain", which often falls upon the ground, is symbolic of the word of God, the Gospel message which is preached in the hearing of men. The "vegetation" or harvest that is useful to those for whom the ground is farmed is symbolic of the good fruit born by those who hear the word of God and do indeed come to faith in Christ. As a result of their genuine faith, they will indeed bear fruit in their lives, showing that they are in truth Jesus' disciples (John 15:8).

In contrast to the ground that bears a useful harvest of good fruit, other ground receives the same "rain" of the word of God, but it bears only thorns and thistles. This ground is symbolic of those people who hear the same Gospel

message, but they do not come to faith in Christ. And therefore they cannot produce a useful harvest of good fruit.

There are three teachings of Jesus that are in complete agreement with the analogy and teaching of Hebrews 6:4-8. The first is the Parable of the Sower given in Matthew 13:1-23. The second is Jesus' teaching on false prophets given in Matthew 7:15-23. And the third is Jesus' Parable of the Wheat and the Tares recorded in Matthew 13:24-30 and 13:36-43. By considering Hebrews 6:4-8 in the light of all three of these passages, we will let "Scripture interpret Scripture", and in doing so we will gain an understanding of this teaching given to us by the author of Hebrews.

First, let us begin by comparing the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13 to Hebrews 6:4-8. In this parable, the "seed" sown by the farmer is symbolic of the word of God. The seed falls upon different types of "ground" or "soil", and again, just as in Hebrews 6:7-8, the soil symbolizes men, who receive the word of God in their hearing. Jesus taught that the only place where the seed of the word of God will bear a useful harvest is where it falls upon "good soil". The good soil symbolizes God's elect, who hear the word of God, and who do indeed come to faith in Christ. Only those who come to faith will be able to bear a useful harvest of good fruit.

Second, let us compare Jesus' teaching about false prophets in Matthew 7 to Hebrews 6:4-8. In His teaching here, Jesus warned us to watch out for false prophets who come to us "in sheep's clothing", or claiming to be Christians, but in reality they are not. He symbolized these individuals as bad trees, which cannot produce good fruit (Matthew 7:18b). And He said that these "bad trees" will be cut down and thrown onto the fire (Matthew 7:19. Compare with Hebrews 6:8.). By contrast, Jesus symbolized those whose faith is genuine as "good trees", which produce good fruit and cannot produce bad fruit (Matthew 7:18a. Compare with Hebrews 6:7).

And third, let us compare Jesus' teaching in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares in Matthew 13 to Hebrews 6:4-8. In this parable Jesus spoke of tares or weeds, which bear no good fruit, being mixed in among the wheat, which does indeed bear a useful harvest of good fruit. The tares, which are often hard to distinguish from the wheat, symbolize the unregenerate among true believers, and they bear no good fruit. In contrast to the tares, the wheat symbolizes genuine believers, and these do indeed bear good fruit, bearing a harvest "useful to those for whom it is tilled", as the writer of Hebrews said (Hebrews 6:7).

***The one consistent theme in each of these three teachings of Jesus, and also in Hebrews 6:4-8, is that professing believers will demonstrate or give evidence that their faith is genuine by the fact they do indeed bear good fruit. Only genuine believers are able to bear good fruit; the unregenerate are not able to do so.***

The individuals in Hebrews 6:4-8 who receive the “rain” of the word of God, but they bear no useful harvest of good fruit, are the same individuals that we see in the Parable of the Sower who receive the “seed” of the word of God, but they never come to faith in Christ. And therefore, they can bear no good fruit.

Again, the individuals in Hebrews 6:4-8 who receive the “rain” of the word of God, but they bear no useful harvest of good fruit, are the false prophets about whom Jesus spoke in Matthew 7. Their profession of faith is false. Though they may claim to be Christians, and they may claim to have repented, they are not true believers, and Jesus characterized them as bad trees which can produce only bad fruit.

And again, these individuals in Hebrews 6:4-8 who receive the “rain” of the word of God, but they bear no useful harvest of good fruit, are the tares in Jesus’ Parable of the Wheat and the Tares. The tares symbolize the unregenerate, who are mixed in among genuine believers. Unlike genuine believers who are symbolized as wheat, which does produce a useful harvest of good fruit, the tares cannot bear good fruit.

To summarize, when we compare the teaching in Hebrews 6:4-8 with Jesus’ teaching in the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13, His teaching about false prophets in Matthew 7, and His teaching in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares in Matthew 13, we find that ***in all four of these passages the individuals who bear no good fruit are those who receive the word of God in their hearing, but they never come to faith in Christ as God’s elect do. As a result, they can bear no good fruit.***

The individuals referred to in Hebrews 6:4-8 who receive the “rain” of the word of God, but they bear no useful harvest of good fruit, are individuals who will be present in most every congregation of professing Christians, who are in fact unregenerate. ***They will claim to have repented, and they will claim to be believers,*** when in fact they have never come to faith in Christ.

When the writer of Hebrews said that they “have once been enlightened”, “have tasted the heavenly gift”, “have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit”, and “have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come”, he was saying that these unregenerate individuals, who claimed to be believers but were not, were present in the congregation and *shared in the hearing of the preaching and teaching of the word of God* with others who were in fact true believers. These unregenerate individuals are symbolized as ground that “drinks the rain which often falls on it” (Hebrews 6:7), and again this rain is symbolic of the word of God, but they produce only “thorns and thistles” (Hebrews 6:8), or bad fruit as Jesus taught in Matthew 7:15-23.

In John 6 we see that Jesus spoke to a crowd saying: “...*the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life*. But there are some of you who do not believe.” ... “For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.” (John 6:63-65, emphasis added). *For any man to read or to hear the word of God is for him to partake in spirit and life, but not all of those who partake in God’s word believe*. Many hear the word of God, but it has not been granted to them by the Father to believe in Christ, or to come to Him, even though they hear the spoken Gospel message.

*To hear the word of God preached* is to be “enlightened” (Hebrews 6:4) as to God’s only plan of salvation for man. It is also to “have tasted the heavenly gift” (Hebrews 6:4), and to “have been made partakers in the Holy Spirit” (Hebrews 6:4), because once again, Jesus said that *His words* “are spirit and are life” (John 6:63). It is also to “have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come” (Hebrews 6:5).

These unregenerate individuals were present in the congregations of professing Jewish believers, and they heard the word of God preached. But as the writer of Hebrews also said, “the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.” (Hebrews 4:2).

The word they heard did not profit them because, unlike the true believers in the congregation who heard the word of God and came to faith in Christ, these professing but unregenerate individuals heard the same Gospel message but did not come to faith. And as we have seen from the Scriptures before, a genuine faith in Christ is itself the gift of God, and a gift that He does not give to everyone, but only to those whom He has chosen to show mercy in calling them to faith in His Son (Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 9:15-18, 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5).

The individuals to whom the writer of Hebrews referred in this passage of Hebrews 6:4-8 are *not* believers who have lost their salvation, or who are in danger of losing their salvation. Rather, *they are those individuals among professing Christians who have never in fact come to faith in Christ in the first place.*

The individuals spoken of in Hebrews 6:4-8 are not those whom Jesus once knew; rather they are those whom Jesus *never knew* (Matthew 7:23). They are those who heard the word of God, but they never came to faith in Christ because it had not been granted to them by the Father (John 6:65, 8:43, 8:47). *As a result, they did not continue in the faith that they claimed to have but were ultimately numbered among those “who have fallen away”* (Hebrews 6:6. Consider also Matthew 13:20-21 and 1 John 2:19).

These individuals are not trees that were once “good trees”, but because they produced bad fruit they lost their salvation and became “bad trees”, because Jesus taught that “A good tree *cannot* produce bad fruit...” (Matthew 7:18, emphasis added). Rather, they were “bad trees” all along, and because of this they produced no good fruit (Compare Matthew 7:16-19 and Hebrews 6:7-8).

When we interpret Hebrews 6:4-8 in the light of other similar teachings in the Bible, we gain an understanding of what the author intended to communicate. However, if we were to isolate this passage from the rest of the Scriptures, we might arrive at an altogether different and erroneous understanding.

To interpret this passage as saying that a believer can lose their salvation would be in stark contradiction to numerous passages we have already studied, which state clearly that a believer cannot lose their salvation. According to the word of God, our salvation does not depend upon our own power and ability to obey God, but we are kept safe by His power (1 Peter 1:4-5). Our salvation is both initiated and carried through to completion by God Himself (Philippians 1:6).

### ***The Meaning of Hebrews 10:26-29***

Another Scripture passage that some will say teaches that a believer can lose their salvation is found in Hebrews 10. This passage reads:

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. Anyone who has set aside

the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? (Hebrews 10:26-29)

Some would say this passage teaches that if a believer were to deliberately continue to engage in sinful practices after “receiving the knowledge of the truth” and having been saved, then they would lose their salvation. First, we need to look no further than the context of this passage to know that such an interpretation is invalid. In verses 28 and 29, we see that the writer of Hebrews was referring to the sin of apostasy, or the sin of ultimately rejecting Christ and the sacrifice He made of Himself for the sins of mankind, which is the *only* provision that God has made for the sins of mankind (John 14:6, Acts 4:12).

The “we” in verse 26 refers to professing Hebrew or Jewish believers, who are the individuals to whom the letter to the Hebrews is addressed. As with most any group or congregation of professing believers, some are genuine believers, and some are not.

The writer of Hebrews was communicating that if professing Jewish believers received “the knowledge of the truth”, which is to say that they received the proclamation of the Gospel message in their hearing, and they “go on sinning willfully” in that they ultimately rejected the message, then there remained for them no sacrifice for their sins, but only a fearful expectation of the judgment of God which will come upon all unbelievers. They would not be saved simply because they were descended from the twelve tribes of Israel, as Paul also taught in Romans 9:1-8 and 11:1-8.

The entire passage from which Hebrews 10:26-29 is taken is Hebrews 10:19-39, which is a call for professing Jewish believers to persevere in their faith, and not to return to the way of Judaism. It is apparent from this passage that there were some who were not continuing in the faith but had apparently parted company with true believers (verse 25). In verse 39 of this passage, we see that the writer of Hebrews is contrasting those who “shrink back to destruction”, or those who do not continue in the faith, with those who “have faith to the preserving of the soul.”

Those who did ultimately depart from the faith showed themselves to be those who had never been saved in the first place. The Apostle John described

these same individuals when he wrote: “They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.” (1 John 2:19).

Though they had professed a faith in Christ, and they were associated for a time with others who were genuine believers, they had never been saved. As a result, they did not continue in the faith with those who were true believers.

By their departing they showed themselves to be the false prophets that Jesus warned us about in Matthew 7:15-23, who claimed to be Christians, but were not. They were “bad trees” that could not produce good fruit.

They are also the same individuals whom Jesus characterized as “rocky places” without much soil that had received the seed of the word of God, as we read in the Parable of the Sower. These rocky places received the seed of the Gospel message, and the seeds immediately sprang up, symbolizing an apparent conversion. But ultimately the heat of the sun withered the plants because they had “no firm root” in themselves, as Jesus described them, and therefore they bore no fruit (Matthew 13:5-6, 20-21).

The sin referred to in this passage of Hebrews 10:26-29 is the sin of unbelief, or ultimately rejecting Christ after having heard the Gospel message, after “receiving the knowledge of the truth”. This sin of unbelief or apostasy will be committed by all of those who are not called to faith as Jesus taught in John 6:44 and 6:65.

The individuals in Hebrews 10:26-29 are *not* true believers who “go on sinning willfully” in that they continued to participate in sinful behavior after they were saved and therefore lost their salvation. Rather, these individuals were in fact unregenerate. Though they had heard the outward proclamation of the Gospel message, they had never been inwardly called by God to faith in Christ. Therefore, they were still dead in their sins.

These individuals, if they are never called to faith in Christ, will persist in their unbelief and rejection of Him. They will ultimately be shown to be among those who do not receive God’s mercy (Romans 9:18), but who are “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction” (Romans 9:22).

The writer of Hebrews himself attested to the fact that salvation through Jesus Christ is only for those who are called by God when he wrote: “For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place

for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, ***those who have been called*** may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.” (Hebrews 9:15, emphasis added).

Peter also taught that salvation is only for those who are called by God to faith in Christ. Peter spoke to a crowd in Jerusalem, saying: “For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, ***as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.***” (Acts 2:39, emphasis added).

We know from Romans 8:30 that all of those whom God calls, He also justifies and ultimately glorifies. ***None*** of those who are called to faith in Christ are lost (John 6:37-40). To interpret Hebrews 10:26-29 or any other passage of Scripture as saying that a believer could lose their salvation would be clearly contradicted by several passages of Scripture that we have already studied.

***Hebrews 10:26-29 and Hebrews 6:4-8 both speak of the same group of people.*** These passages speak of those individuals among professing Christians who, though they have heard the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and they claim to be believers, and they claim to have repented, they have never in fact come to faith in Him. Though they appeared for a time to be genuine believers because of their association with others who were, they were in fact not. As a result, the time came when they no longer continued in the faith but fell away (See Hebrews 6:6).

Those who have heard the word of God and claim to be believers, but ultimately they fall away and do not continue in the faith, are those who have “trampled under foot the Son of God”, and “regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant” by which they at one time claimed to have been sanctified. And in doing so they have “insulted the Spirit of grace.” (See Hebrews 10:29). They are not among “those who have faith to the preserving of the soul”, rather they are among “those who shrink back to destruction” (See Hebrews 10:39).

They heard the word of God, words that “are spirit and are life” as Jesus said, but they did not believe ***because it had not been granted to them by the Father to come to faith in Christ*** (John 6:63-65). They did not in reality ever come to faith in Christ, though they will claim to be Christians (Matthew 7:22-23).

Jesus again spoke of these unregenerate individuals and their inability to come to Him when He told His disciples the reason that He spoke to the crowds in

parables. Jesus said: “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.” (Matthew 13:11).

Even though many “receive the knowledge of the truth” in that they hear the spoken proclamation of the Gospel message, which is the outward call to men to put their faith in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, only God’s elect will be called to faith through the word of God with the inward, effectual calling of God that Jesus taught about in John 6:44. The rest are unable to come to Christ. Unless and until God intervenes in an individual’s life and effectually calls them to faith in His Son as we have discussed previously, they will “go on sinning willfully” (Hebrews 10:26) by persisting in their unbelief, because they can do nothing else. (Consider also 1 Peter 2:7-8).

### ***The Meaning of 2 Peter 2:20-22***

Another passage that some refer to as teaching that a genuine believer can lose their salvation is found in 2 Peter. This passage reads:

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.” (2 Peter 2:20-22)

To begin with, this passage is taken from a larger passage which consists of 2 Peter 2 in its entirety. The subject of the passage is false teachers and their impending doom and judgment by God (2 Peter 2:17). So immediately we see that those under consideration in the context of this passage are not true believers, but false teachers.

In verse 20, Peter said that these individuals “have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”. These again are those individuals who heard the proclamation of the Gospel message. They had received “knowledge” of Jesus Christ and had “escaped the defilements of the world”, in that they were present in the congregations of the early churches and partakers with genuine believers in hearing the preaching and teaching of the word of God (Compare Hebrews 6:4-8). But they were not changed by the Gospel

message; they never came to faith in Christ. They were in fact unregenerate and bore only bad fruit, as is abundantly clear from the context of 2 Peter 2.

When Peter spoke of these individuals as being “again entangled” and “overcome” by the defilements of the world, we know that he is not speaking of believers, because as John taught: “for *whatever is born of God overcomes the world...*” (1 John 5:4, emphasis added). No genuine believer is overcome by the pollutions of the world. Rather, everyone who has been born of God will overcome the world and all of the defilements in the world by the power of the One living within them, Jesus Christ Himself.

The unregenerate condition of the individuals to whom Peter referred in 2 Peter 2:20-22 becomes even clearer when we look at verse 22, where he wrote: “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.’” A dog and a pig were both considered unclean animals, according to the Old Testament dietary laws.

The point to be made when looking at verse 22 is that though these individuals may have professed a faith in Christ, they were in fact unregenerate, or unclean. They did not persevere in the faith, but *they went back to the unclean ways they had known before because there had never been any change in their lives; they had never come to faith in Christ.* Just as the unclean dog and pig both go back to the uncleanness to which they have always been accustomed, so also these professing but unregenerate individuals went back to the defilements of the world.

### ***In Conclusion***

Hebrews 6:4-9, Hebrews 10:26-29 and 2 Peter 2:20-22 have been used by some to say the Scriptures teach that one can lose their salvation after they have been saved as result of returning to a life of sinful practices. Though a believer will sin at times after he is saved (Romans 7:7-25), no genuine believer will ever return to a life that is characterized by sin, as is clearly taught in 1 John where we read: “No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” (1 John 3:9).

The only way that any of these three passages could be made to say that a believer can lose their salvation would be to ignore the context of the broader

passages from which they are taken, and to isolate them from the rest of the Scriptures a whole. In each of these three passages, the individuals under consideration are *not* those who are genuine believers and are in danger of losing their salvation. Rather, they are in fact the unregenerate who, though they had heard the Gospel message, and had shared with true believers in the preaching and teaching of the word of God, *they had never been saved*. Consequently, they could bear no good fruit.

These unregenerate individuals are the false prophets about whom Jesus warned us in Matthew 7:15-23, who come to us “in sheep’s clothing”, claiming to be Christians. They will acknowledge Jesus as Lord, and even claim to have prophesied, worked miracles and cast out demons in His name, but they will one day hear from Him the words: “...*I never knew you*; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.” (Matthew 7:23, emphasis added).

## **The Eternal Security of the Believer – Part 3**

Previously, we considered passages from Hebrews 6, Hebrews 10, and 2 Peter 2 which some have used to say that the Bible teaches that a believer can lose their salvation. However, when we examined each of these Scriptures in the light of the context in which they appear in the Bible, and in the light of the rest of the Scriptures as a whole, we saw that these passages refer to those individuals among professing Christians who will claim to be believers, but who in fact have never been saved.

In Matthew 7 Jesus described these individuals as false prophets. They are those whose profession or claim that they are believers is false. In this same passage Jesus also described them as ravenous wolves among His sheep, and as bad trees that cannot bear good fruit. In Matthew 13 He described them again as tares among the wheat, which can bear no good fruit.

There is another passage of Scripture that some have used to say that a believer could lose their salvation for failing to diligently maintain good works

after they are saved. This passage is found in 2 Peter 1:10-11. Let us now look carefully at this passage, and let us consider it in the context of both 2 Peter and 1 Peter, and let us also consider it in the light of the rest of the Scripture as a whole, so that we can understand what Peter intended to communicate to God's people.

### ***The Meaning of 2 Peter 1:10-11***

Peter wrote: "Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you." (2 Peter 1:10-11).

In verse 10, "these things", which the believer is exhorted to practice in order "to make certain about His calling and choosing you", are the things discussed in verses 5-8. Peter urged believers to be diligent in cultivating in their lives, in ever increasing measure: goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. Some would say this is evidence that diligent effort in cultivating these qualities is required, if a believer is to not "stumble" or fall away from the faith.

Let us recall what Paul taught clearly in Ephesians 2: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; ***and that not of yourselves***, it is the gift of God; ***not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.***" (Ephesians 2:8-9, emphasis added). If we were saved by grace but kept in this state of grace by our diligent pursuit of good works, then we would be able to boast that our works were good enough to keep us saved. However, Paul taught that our salvation is not the result of any works of our own, so no one may boast that he had anything to do with his salvation.

Therefore, when Peter spoke of "making certain" about God's calling and choosing of us, he was not speaking of ensuring our own salvation by way of our diligence in the pursuit of the good works mentioned in verses 5-8. ***What Peter spoke of in this passage of 2 Peter 1:10-11 is "making certain" in our own hearts and minds that we are indeed among those whom God has chosen and called; he was speaking about our personal confidence or assurance concerning our own salvation.***

As we have mentioned previously, the Scriptures teach us that a genuine believer will always bear good fruit as a result of his conversion to faith in Christ (Matthew 7:17-20, 13:1-23, John 15:8). Therefore, the qualities mentioned in 2 Peter 1:5-8 will be manifested in the life of every believer to some degree (Matthew 13:23, Galatians 5:22-23). This bearing of good fruit is evidence of our genuine faith.

However, as a result of our own disobedience at times, we will find ourselves building upon the foundation of our faith not with the “gold, silver, and precious stones” of obedience to God’s word, but with “wood, hay, and straw”, which will not stand the test of fire that is to try all of our works, as Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15. This disobedience will not result in the loss of our salvation as we see from verse fifteen, but it will result in the loss of rewards, both now and in eternity.

As a result of some particularly grievous sins, we might lose our confidence or assurance about our own salvation. This loss of confidence in our salvation can manifest itself at other times as well, especially in the lives of young believers who may not yet be grounded in the truth of the word of God as taught in the Scriptures.

If we have been involved in very grievous sin, Satan, the “accuser” of God’s people (Revelation 12:10, Zechariah 3:1-2), will do the accusing in our own minds, suggesting to us that surely we could not be saved in view of the sins we have committed. And he may be allowed to accuse us forcefully enough for us to wonder if in fact this could be the case. But even the accusation of Satan will be made to serve God, in that the fears that will come upon us as a result of having fallen from our once secure position of assurance will send every genuine believer running back to His Savior for forgiveness and restoration.

In order to better understand the exhortation given to us in 2 Peter 1:10-11, let us consider the life and experience of the one who wrote this exhortation, the Apostle Peter. Jesus predicted that Peter would deny Him, and this prediction is recorded in all four Gospels. Also recorded in all four Gospels is an account of Peter’s denial following Jesus’ prediction.

Peter’s assurance about his own salvation must have been shaken severely after his grievous sin of having denied that he even knew Jesus, not once, but on three occasions. After all, he was with Jesus and heard His teaching when He said that whoever denied Him before men, He would deny before His Father in Heaven (Matthew 10:32-33).

Given his own dreadful failure during a time of testing in his life, Peter surely understood better than most of us the torment that goes with one believing they may have fallen from grace. And this is why he exhorted us to be diligent in the pursuit of the qualities he mentioned in 2 Peter 1:5-8, always striving to move forward living our lives in love and in obedience to God's word. If we do these things, then we will not experience the torment of believing that we might not be saved in view of our own failures.

In John 21, we see a lesson given to us through the failure and the subsequent restoration of Peter, even after he had denied His Lord and Savior three times. In this passage, Jesus appeared to His disciples after He had been resurrected.

The disciples had been fishing all night but had caught nothing. Jesus was standing on the shore, and at first the disciples did not recognize Him. He called out to them asking if they had any fish. They replied saying that they did not. Then Jesus told them to cast the net on the right side of the boat, and they would find some fish there. When they did so, they caught so many fish that they were not able to haul the net into the boat.

At this point John recognized that it was the Lord who had called to them, and he told Peter. As soon as Peter heard that it was Jesus, he could not wait to get to Him, and he jumped into the water and swam toward Jesus ahead of the others, who followed behind in the boat, dragging the net full of fish.

Paul taught us that no one will seek God if left to themselves (Romans 3:10-11). However, God had determined before the world began that He would bring Peter to faith in Christ (Ephesians 1:4-5). God Himself had caused Peter to follow hard after His Lord and Savior (Psalm 63:1, 8). Just as it happened in the life of Peter, when we experience the accusation of the devil that we have lost our salvation because of some grievous sin in our lives, every true believer will run toward their Savior for forgiveness and restoration, so that they may once again experience the joy of their salvation that comes from fellowship with their Lord.

In John 21, we read of Jesus' restoration of Peter, even after he had failed Him so miserably. And just as Jesus restored Peter, so also will He restore every one of us as His sheep if we should fail Him.

*Through his own experience of a grievous and severe failure in his walk with the Lord, and his subsequent restoration, Peter came to understand the unchanging, irrevocable decision of God to preserve everyone whom He has called to faith in His Son Jesus Christ, regardless of how badly we may fail Him.* This is why he wrote in his first letter that every one of God's elect has been given an inheritance in Heaven "which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away", and that we are "protected by the power of God", through the faith in Christ which we have been given (1 Peter 1:1-6). Our powers may fail; God does not fail.

*In summary, 2 Peter 1:10-11 speaks of our assurance and certainty about our own salvation, and not the issue of losing our salvation as a result of our own failings after we are saved.* Later in 2 Peter, he warned believers to be on their guard, so they would not be led astray by the "error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness" (2 Peter 3:17). Once again, Peter was not referring to the possibility of a believer losing their salvation. Rather, he was warning of the deception and error that can be planted in the minds of believers (especially those who are young in the faith) by false teachers.

Though the false teacher may lead a believer astray for a time, perhaps causing them to sin and to fall from the once steadfast position of assurance they held regarding their own salvation, *only* their assurance will be shaken. Their salvation itself, on the authority of the word of God, is eternally secure. Even if only one is straying and all the rest are safe, *Jesus is coming for His straying sheep. God our Father is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost* (Matthew 18:10-14).

### *In Conclusion*

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ Himself told us in clear language that all of those whom the Father has given to Him (His sheep, or the elect) will come to Him. And then He also said that whoever comes to Him He will *never* drive away. Jesus said that He did come not to do His own will, but His Father's will. And He said it was His Father's will that He should lose *none* of those who had been given to Him, but that they would *all* be raised up at the last day (John 6:37-40).

Jesus also taught us that as His sheep, we are known by Him. He said that He gives us eternal life, and we will *never* perish. Jesus said further that *no one* can snatch us out of His hand or His Father's hand (John 10:27-30). And *no one*

means that not even we are able to snatch ourselves out of God's hand through any transgression of our own.

Paul taught us that *there is no power in all of creation that is able to separate believers from the love of God, which is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Romans 8:31-39). And Paul taught us again in Romans 8 that our salvation is God's own doing from beginning to end (Romans 8:29-30). He also taught us clearly that the gifts and the calling of God are *irrevocable* (Romans 11:29).

We also see from the Scriptures that we are not kept safe by our own power and ability to obey God, but we are kept safe by the power of God, and He is the One who will preserve us in our faith to the end (1 Peter 1:4-5, 1 Corinthians 1:8-9, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24). Let us therefore be fully and completely confident, as Paul was when he assured us: "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6).

God Himself began the work of salvation within us, and God Himself will carry our salvation through to its completion. Let us rejoice and give thanks to God the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, because He has guaranteed our salvation from beginning to end, and He has left none of it in our own hands.