

Can I Lose My Salvation?

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Date: 20 November 2022

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[0 : 0 0] All right, as we come to God's Word this morning, as promised, we're going to be dealing with this question. Can I lose my salvation?

It's a big question, and so I hope you don't mind. There's going to be a big answer, and we're going to go a few minutes longer today, so grace yourselves. Kids, feel free to get a clipboard if you haven't got one yet.

I can't really chop this into two pieces, and I will try to go a few minutes less next Sunday. So here we go. Can I lose my salvation? We've come to this as we've been exploring Jesus' teaching about vine and branches and fruit in John 15, and he's made some statements that kind of get us wondering.

He, referring to his father, said, He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit. And then again in verse 6, he said, If you do not remain in me, you're like a branch that is thrown away and withers.

Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire, and burned. So the question arises, is Jesus saying that there's a real danger of losing our salvation, or of losing our vital connection with Jesus once we have it.

[1 : 2 2] We're going to be moving pretty quickly today. There's lots of scriptures, so let's go. Let's start with verse 2. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit.

The big question here is, what does Jesus mean when he says that the branches are in me? And there are two views, two major views.

One view is that every branch in me refers to genuine, born-again followers of Jesus, and that being cut off refers to them losing their saving connection to Christ.

The second view is that every branch in me refers to all visible followers of Christ, all who claim the name of Christ, and that the branches that are cut off refers only to those among the visible church who are not true, born-again believers, who are believers in name only.

And while there's debate and disagreement over this, I will tell you today that the second view is really the only one that fits with the rest of the Bible's teaching on the subject.

[2 : 3 2] And we're going to look at that teaching today. We can also reason this out and arrive at number two just by looking a little more closely at Jesus' own words in this passage.

Which branches are cut off? Well, Jesus says it's the ones that bear no fruit. And down in verse five, he says, If you remain in me and die in you, you will bear much fruit.

So there's a guaranteed fruitfulness for all branches that remain in the vine. All who stay connected to Christ, who continue to follow him, continue to believe in him.

Which means that the branches that are cut off are only those who don't remain in Christ, who don't have that faith, who don't continue to follow him.

We might picture it this way. If the church is a fruit tree, Jesus is the trunk. Those who attend the church are the branches. And at the end of our church's story, there will be some branches which look dead and have no fruit on them at all.

- [3 : 43] While others around them will have much fruit on them. And it will be obvious. Those that have no fruit and look dead are that way for a reason.
- There has been a problem with their connection to the tree. They haven't really been connected as the other branches have all along. And that's why there's no fruit.
- That's why there's no life in the branch. Now they might look from the outward view of things to be connected to Christ, to be part of the tree, but it's really the fruit produced.
- That's the evidence of whether they have the life-giving flow of the tree coming into them. And in all such cases, the problem is not with the tree, the main trunk.
- The problem is not with Jesus, the source of life, the one who enables us to produce much fruit. The problem lies with the branch and its own connection to the tree.
- [4 : 41] Did that person remain in Christ? Did they truly repent and believe in Him and hold fast to Him and His word? Or was it only a superficial thing?
- A thing of appearances? Were they merely pretending? Calling themselves Christians, but not really believing from the heart? What Jesus is getting at here is this.
- The mark of every true believer is the presence of fruit in their lives. And it makes sense. The mark of everyone who has been born again by the Holy Spirit is the fruit that the Holy Spirit produces in our lives.
- And there's no defectiveness in God's Spirit. If the Spirit of Christ lives in you, you will bear that good fruit. And if the Spirit of Christ does not live in you, the branch of your life will be bare and you will be cut off, says Jesus.
- These words of Jesus are a warning that there is no substitute for genuinely remaining in Jesus. There's no substitute for sincerely embracing for sincerely embracing Jesus Christ.
- [5 : 59] All that He is. All that He did. All that He says. There's no substitute for a sincere faith. And eventually it will become obvious who are the pretenders and who are the real deal.
- who are the imposters and who are the true children of the kingdom. So that's verse 2. On to verse 6.
- Jesus says, If anyone does not remain in Me, he is thrown away like a branch and dries up. And they gather them and throw them into the fire.
- And they are burned. Again, there are two views here. Some may suggest that you can't stay connected to Jesus unless you've been connected in the first place.
- And accordingly, they might say, Well, you could choose at some point in your life not to continue with Jesus. This view would say that you had eternal life, but then you lost it.
- [7 : 05] The other way of understanding this would be this, that this warning Jesus gives is for all who claim to be a follower of Jesus, for all who visibly identify themselves with Jesus in some way.
- And this warning by God's grace causes those who are truly born again to remain in Him. They see the consequences of forsaking Him.
- But some who are now claiming to be followers of Christ and are not truly born again, they are the ones who do not remain in the vine and suffer this awful fate described.
- And again, I think this second view better reflects what the rest of the Bible teaches about our salvation. All of this has to do with an important doctrine of our faith.
- Eternal security is sometimes what we call it. Eternal security of the believer. Other times, it's referred to as the perseverance of the saints. Now, some Christians will get into a squabble about the labels and which one is the right one.
- [8 : 16] You might hear, I believe in eternal security. And those perseverance of the saints people, you guys are preaching works-based salvation. Or, I believe in perseverance of the saints.

It's all over the New Testament. And those eternal security people are giving people false assurance of salvation. salvation. But when it comes right down to it, there is no need to squabble about this.

Both of these labels are helpful and they capture a biblical truth. It's not a case of either or. It's both. Neither of these biblical truths on their own tells the whole story of how we are saved.

So let's get into some passages and see both of these clearly taught from the Word of God. First of all, Jesus and the apostles did teach that true born-again believers are secure in their salvation and cannot lose it.

John chapter 10 verse 26. But you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice.

[9 : 25] I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.

My Father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. So Jesus describes his relationship with those who truly believe as being they are his sheep.

He is their shepherd. They are his sheep. And there's no superficiality here. There's no wondering whether or not they are true sheep. Jesus says I know them and they follow me.

I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No one can snatch them out of my hand. No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.

Eternal life. Never perish. It doesn't say they'll never perish unless they change their mind about me. No.

[10 : 30] We'll never change our mind about Jesus our shepherd because we know him. He is in us. We are in him.

We love him. Now some have noticed here that it says no one can snatch them out of my hand. And some will say well it doesn't say that we can't jump out of the Father's hand or remove ourselves from the Father's hand.

I'm going to defer this one to the words of Wayne Grudem. To those who suggest we might remove ourselves from Christ's hand this is what he has to say.

He says that seems to be pedantic quibbling over words. does not no one also include the person who is in Christ's hand.

Moreover we know that our own hearts are far from trustworthy. Therefore if the possibility remained that we could just remove ourselves from Christ's hand this passage would hardly give the assurance that Jesus intends by it.

[11 : 36] I agree. We shouldn't pick at the words here and what seems to be missing from them at the expense of the whole point Jesus is making. Jesus is saying that his sheep are secure forever.

That there's no threat. There's no danger. Nothing can change that. Let's look at another passage which affirms that true born again believers are secure in their salvation and cannot lose it.

Romans chapter 8 verse 29. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters and those he predestined he also called.

Those he called he also justified. Those he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us who can be against us?

He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all. How will he not also along with him freely give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?

[12 : 51] It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died more than that who is raised to life is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword as it is written for your sake we face death all day long we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered no in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us for I am convinced that neither death nor life neither angels nor demons neither the present nor the future nor any powers neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord this is probably one of the strongest passages affirming that true born again believers are secure in their salvation and cannot lose it Paul tells us that we are foreknown by

God predestined to be conformed to the image of his son called justified and glorified and it's it's like it's an unbreakable chain in his mind it's so certain that he even refers to the glorified part in the past tense all those who are justified will be glorified God will see to it and what is the point of this huge list of things that cannot separate us from the love of Christ but to make it unwaveringly clear that there is nothing that can separate us from his love once we have been united to him true born again believers are secure in their salvation and they can never lose it one final verse to make this abundantly clear 1 John chapter 3 verse 9 no one who is born of God will continue to sin because God's seed remains in them they cannot go on sinning because they have been born of

God now there's some translation difficulty here with the tense of the verbs from Greek to English this does not mean that once you're born again you'll stop sinning for the rest of your life it means that the person who is truly born of God will not continue or go on sinning as the general pattern or characterization of their life sin is disobeying God's good and righteous commands that's the overall pattern and characterization of our lives before we're born again we're sinners but after the overall pattern and characterization of our lives changes to now obeying God's commands doing what's right living good and loving lives we stop doing some of those sinful things we used to do all together and we intentionally and continually and increasingly put those old ways those old behaviors to death living in obedience to

Jesus we don't ever do it perfectly and we still do sin but the general pattern and characterization of our lives has changed can we go back to the old ways and I don't mean just in moments where we're tempted and fall but can we make it again our overall life mission to sin as much as possible and just to satisfy ourselves and live for ourselves as much as possible ignoring God's commands can we go back to that John's answer here seems to be no we can't we won't because God's seed remains in us he says they cannot go on sinning because they have been born of God the new birth that God gives to his people when they truly repent and believe it changes us so deeply and so permanently that even if we do stray or wander or sin we always come back and we always repent and humble ourselves before

[17 : 35] God we come back to recognizing again acknowledging that he is our life and our love and nothing else in this world compares a life of willful pervasive perpetual sin is enough to secure our eternal damnation but the good news of Jesus is that the new birth renders us incapable of such a life forever more we who are born again by God's spirit are eternally secure once our salvation has been effected it can never be undone now this kind of leads us this last passage into the biblical doctrine of the perseverance of the saints time and time again the scriptures also warn us that we must persevere in our faith and we must also persevere in the obedience that springs from that faith that fits with that profession and if we don't we will perish this is the other side of the coin this is what

Jesus warnings in John 15 are aimed at branches will be cut off thrown away burned in the fire but they are those branches that did not persevere they did not remain in Christ at one time they identified themselves as Christians as followers of Jesus they were part of the tree from outward appearances but for one reason or another they left off from him and they didn't come back so let's see this truth now in other passages if if you hold firmly to the word

I preach to you otherwise you have believed in vain the Corinthians were about ready in some of them to deny whether Jesus had even been raised from the dead Paul is saying you have to hold to that truth of his resurrection if you don't hold fast to that in faith you perish you have no hope Galatians chapter 5 verse 19 and 20 the acts of the flesh are obvious sexual immorality impurity and debauchery idolatry and witchcraft hatred discord jealousy fits of rage selfish ambition dissensions factions envy drunkenness orgies and the like I warn you as I did before that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God if you persist in doing evil in disobeying

Christ you are showing that God's seed is not in you you are proving that you have not been born of God that his spirit is not in you Galatians chapter 6 verses 7 to 9 following shortly after this Paul says do not be deceived God cannot be mocked a man reaps what he sows whoever sows to please their flesh from the flesh will reap destruction whoever sows to please the spirit from the spirit will reap eternal life so let us not become weary in doing good for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up again we see this encouragement that we must persevere in doing the deeds that fit with our profession of faith we cannot pull the wool over

God's eyes and take the offer of salvation but no I'm just going to go and live wickedly no God says if you do live like that persistently as the pattern of your life you will not inherit the kingdom of God 1st Corinthians chapter 6 verses 9 to 11 or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God do not be deceived neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God and that is what some of you were but you were washed you were sanctified you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God here it is again there is a real change that takes place in our lives through the spirit of

[25 : 47] God those things how we used to live they can no longer characterize us anymore we must turn away from those things and if the spirit of God really truly lives in us we will and we would be deceived to think that we could continue living like that willfully ongoingly doing those things and still be saved at the end one more passage 2nd Timothy chapter 2 verse 19 nevertheless God's solid foundation stands firm sealed with this inscription the Lord knows those who are his and everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness again we see that we must persevere in faith and in the obedience that fits that profession there are more passages like these we haven't even looked at the ones in

Hebrews there's James chapter 2 there's the letter to the seven churches in Revelation but they all make this very clear we must persevere in our faith and in the obedience that springs from our faith and confirms that faith until the end and if we do not we will perish so now we bring these two biblical truths together eternal security perseverance of the saints and this is what we get I'm going to borrow again from Wayne Grudem and his systematic theology all those who are truly born again will be kept by God's power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives and only those who persevere until the end have truly been born again we we have been born of

God so we come to the answer to this big question can I lose my salvation no if you are born again by God's spirit you cannot undo that you are secure you still must remain in him consciously and intentionally and persistently and because of God's gracious work in your life you will but here's the deal there's no autopilot to this God's word never tells us your salvation is secure so now you can just go and live however you want and the outcome will be the same either way just sit back relax let God do it for you God never tells us that he never tells us just let go and let God as if once we're saved and born again it's just all automatic from there we don't have to try we don't have to put in any effort because

God will just do it for us in fact the scriptures speak to us in the opposite direction second second second Peter chapter one verse five for this very reason because God has given us his very great and precious promises and has given us everything we need for life and godliness for this very reason make every effort to add to your faith goodness and to add to your goodness knowledge and to add to your knowledge self control and to add to your self control perseverance and to perseverance godliness and to godliness mutual affection and to mutual affection love slipping down to verse 10 in the same passage therefore my brothers and sisters make every effort to confirm your calling and election for if you do these things you will never stumble and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our lord and savior Jesus Christ our remaining in Christ and our persevering in obedience it's not just an autopilot thing it's not a passive thing it's a thing we must make every effort to do and by God's gracious power we can and we will he sees to that consider Philippians chapter 2 verse 12 therefore my dear friends as you have always obeyed not only in my presence but now much more in my absence continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose no if you are born again by God's spirit you can't lose your salvation but that doesn't mean that you're finished running the race if you do not remain in Jesus if you allow yourself to drift away if you decide no I'm going to continue cherishing sin doing as I please well I'll come to church I'll do the bare minimum you know just to keep my fire insurance with Jesus oh no it doesn't work that way the assurance that you are born again at least one of them is that you remain in him and you obey his commands that you don't go on sinning I hate to say this but some of you may very well come to that place where you have deceived yourself so badly thinking all along I'm born again I'm safe I'm good I'm doing enough I'm a child of God and yet you're proving again and again and again by disobeying Christ intentionally deliberately persistently that you discover I never was I never was born of God this is the final sobering peace those who seem to fall away may have had some external marks of a true believer but God knows every heart and we can't pull the wool over his eyes Matthew chapter 7 verse 21 not everyone who

says to me Lord Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven many will say to me on that day Lord Lord did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles and I will tell them plainly I never knew you depart from me you evil doers they claim to have done these good things in Jesus name but Jesus evaluation of how they lived is not that they have done all this good but that they have done evil they deceived themselves they were Christians in name only according to external behaviors they had some of those or so they thought but there was no real true living persistent faith in

[34 : 22] Jesus or obedience to his commands they continue to live wicked lives while calling themselves Christians God never gives assurance of salvation to a persistent unrepentant sinner I don't care who you are or how long you've been a Christian or how closely related you are to me you cannot rest in God's promise of salvation if you are willfully intentionally and persistently walking in disobedience to Christ's commands real faith in Jesus does not do that that's why Paul says work out your salvation with fear and trembling that's why he says to the Corinthians in 2nd Corinthians 13 5 examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith test yourselves do you not realize that

Christ Jesus is in you unless of course you fail the test God's children are secure in him he keeps them by his power they are predestined to be conformed to the image of his son and as Jesus said I will remain in you that's wonderful assurance and we for our part we take hold of that assurance and we confirm that he lives in us by remaining in him by holding firmly to our faith in him and by continuing to do the things that real faith in him leads us to do that's obeying his commands God gives us the strength and the power by his spirit to do that he lovingly disciplines us he brings correction into our lives when we need it we must persevere to the end we must finish the race and

God ensures that every true believer does as we make every effort to do it we will end with these words penned by Jude the brother of the Lord Jesus to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy to the only God our Savior be glory majesty power and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord before all ages now and forever more amen