

# Once Saved—Always Saved?

**Can a truly converted Christian ever lose his salvation? Many evangelical fundamentalists say it is impossible. A person can no more “work” his way out of salvation, they say, than he can “work” his way into salvation. But what does the Bible say?**

While some fundamentalists do not believe in the doctrine known as “eternal security” (commonly known as “once saved, always saved”), most apparently do. It seems that in the minds of many, the doctrine is one of the “essentials” of Protestant Christianity.

The idea is that since there is nothing a sinner can do to earn salvation, there is nothing a saved person can do to lose it. The moment a person “accepts Jesus,” they claim, his salvation is secured and he faces no risk of ever losing it.

Some fundamentalists claim that a saved person will not commit serious sins. They say that anyone who claims to be “saved” and yet commits serious sins never was truly saved.

But others claim that no matter what a saved person does, he can *never* lose his salvation. Salvation, they say, is not a matter of choice. Just as a person cannot “work” his way into it with righteous deeds, he cannot “work” his way out of it with unrighteous deeds!

Here’s the way Wilson Ewin puts it: “...the person who places his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His Blood shed at Calvary is eternally secure. He can never lose his salvation. No personal breaking of God’s or man’s laws or commandments can nullify that status” (*There Is Therefore Now No Condemnation*).

Fundamentalists think that if personal sin can result in loss of salvation, then Christ’s redemptive work is not “all sufficient.” They apparently expand the word “all” to take in unrepented sins.

But does the Bible support such a view? Does freedom from condemnation mean that loss of salvation is impossible? If not—if a Christian can, through returning to a life of sin, lose his salvation—then the “once saved, always saved” doctrine is *heretical* to the very core!

Let’s see what the Bible really says on this matter.

## **Loss of Salvation Through Willful Sin**

The writer of the book of Hebrews said, “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries” (Hebrews 10:26).

How do fundamentalists explain this passage? They claim that it is not speaking of truly converted Christians, but pertains to those unsaved persons who, after receiving the knowledge of the truth, still refuse to accept the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

However attractive, this interpretation does violence to the context. The “we” of verse 26 includes both the writer and the readers of the epistle.

Notice the preceding verses:

“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. [The writer clearly does not have unconverted people in view! He is speaking to people who have already experienced baptism and spiritual cleansing.] Let us hold fast the profession of our faith [“hold fast” means to “hold onto,” not “receive for the first time”] without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as we see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:22-25).

The above admonition forms the context wherein verse 26 is set. The writer is clearly not speaking to non-Christians, or “unsaved” persons; he is urging truly converted members of God’s New Testament church to hold tenaciously to the Faith once delivered.

Notice the author’s use of “us” and related terms: “Let *us* draw near...Let *us* hold fast...let *us* consider one another...Not forsaking the assembling of *ourselves*...” Then, after all this admonition, he says, “For if *we* sin willfully...there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.” Can there be any doubt that the writer is speaking to truly converted Christians? None whatsoever! The context will allow for no other conclusion.

And there’s more proof that the writer is saying that Christians can lose their salvation. Notice what he says in the verses immediately following his warning of “judgment and fiery indignation” for those who “sin willfully”.

“He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, *wherewith he was sanctified*, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?” (verses 28,29).

The writer does not say “wherewith he could have been sanctified had he only accepted Jesus”; he says “wherewith he *was* [had been] sanctified [set apart, forgiven].” Clearly, he is saying that a Christian—a converted, Spirit-begotten, member of God’s true church—can lose his salvation by returning to a life of sin!

Some fundamentalists recognize the problems with trying to make this verse speak of non-Christian persons, so they have found another interpretation that enables them to hang on to their “once saved, always saved” doctrine. This interpretation depends on the word “if”: “For *if* we sin wilfully...there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.” The writer is merely presenting a hypothesis, they say, and does not mean that any true Christian would ever turn again to a life of sin.

Nonsense! What’s the point of saying it if it is nothing more than a hypotheses? Again the passage should be understood in light of its context, not in light of Protestant evangelical tradition.

The author is not trying to say, “Now this is what would happen to a Christian *if* it were possible for him to sin wilfully...” No, he is exhorting God’s people to stay close to their High Priest, to hold tenaciously to the Faith, and to encourage each other *so that* they can avoid the temptations that could lead them into sinfulness and result in loss of salvation.

A few chapters earlier, the writer states unequivocally that loss of salvation is a very real possibility. He writes:

“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew the again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame” (Hebrews 6:4-6).

Incredibly, this passage is just not clear enough to prove to some Protestant fundamentalists that loss of salvation is possible! They get around the obvious by claiming that Judas Iscariot experienced all the good things mentioned in this passage, but was never converted.

True, Judas was never truly converted, but to claim that he had been at once unconverted *and* a “partaker of the Holy Spirit” requires that several important scriptures be twisted beyond recognition! And to say that becoming a partaker of the Holy Spirit and experiencing spiritual enlightenment and divine revelation does not indicate true conversion is simply untenable.

Some are shocked to learn that the apostles were not “partakers of the Holy spirit” until *after* the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ! During the final hours of His life as a mortal human being, Jesus promised His disciples that God would send the Holy Spirit, and that the spirit would lead them into “all truth” and show them “things to come” (see John 14:16,17; 15:26; 16:13). This indicates that the apostles had at that time yet to be “partakers of the Holy Spirit,” and had yet to be “enlightened” or to taste of the “heavenly gift...the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come.”

Jesus told the apostles that the Spirit “dwelleth *with* you, and shall be *in* you” (John 14:17). After His resurrection but before the Day of Pentecost, He “commanded them [the disciples] that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4). He said to them, “For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence” (verse 5), and added, “But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you...” (verse 8).

The Bible reveals that some few throughout Israel’s history had received the Holy Spirit, but the availability of the Spirit was greatly limited before the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). On that day, *thousands* received it, and in the ensuing decades, many more became “partakers of the Holy Spirit.” These facts destroy the idea that Hebrews 6:4-6 speaks of unconverted people.

Further, the expressions “fall away” and “renew them again unto repentance” show that the writer does not have non-Christians in view. He would not have spoken of the impossibility of being renewed (or restored) “*again* unto repentance” had the people he had in mind not previously experienced repentance. Nor would he have spoken of “falling away” from something that had never been experienced.

While the truly converted Christian should have a sense of assurance about his salvation, he should also recognize the fact that salvation *can be lost!*

### **The Goodness and Severity of God**

Paul encouraged the churches to rejoice in the assurance of salvation. He wrote: “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38,39).

Yet, he also warned of the possibility of loss of salvation. Speaking of converted Gentiles, Paul said: “Be not high-minded, but fear [i.e., the people of Israel who rejected Christ], take heed lest He also *spare not thee*.”

“Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, *if thou continue in his goodness*: otherwise thou also *shalt be cut off*. And they [unbelieving Israelites] also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be graffed in: for God is able to graff them in again” (Romans 11:20-23).

Paul was not speaking of merited “rewards”; he was speaking of unbelievers becoming believers and believers becoming unbelievers! He acknowledged the possibility of loss of salvation!

He also warned the Galatians of this very real possibility: “Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised [for the purpose obtaining salvation], Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace” (Galatians 5:2-4).

Some fundamentalists strain the passage to say that “fallen from grace” is not to be taken as an *actual* fall from grace, but as merely a departure, on the part of the believer, of dependence on grace as the basis of the Christian’s relationship with God.

What utter nonsense! If Paul intended to say, “You no longer depend on grace,” then why didn’t he? Why did he instead insist upon such powerful phrases as “Christ shall profit you nothing,” “Christ is become of no effect unto you,” “ye are fallen from grace,” and “be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage”? Why did he insist that “as many as are of the works of the law [i.e., depend upon works of the law for justification] are under the curse” (Galatians 3:10)?

If Paul thought loss of salvation an impossibility, why did he write, “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (1 Corinthians 9:27)? Does becoming a “castaway” have to do only with loss of “rewards,” but not loss of eternal life?

Notice that Paul said, “lest that by any means, when I have preached to others...” What did Paul preach to others? He preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the message of salvation, did he not? Then what was he speaking of when he said “lest...I myself should be a castaway”? Obviously, he was speaking of the possibility of losing out on the very salvation he had so vigorously preached!

The fundamentalists’ doctrine of “irresistible grace” is clearly foreign to the revelation of God’s Word. Man was endowed with the power of free choice. If a person, once called and converted, gives in to his fleshly lusts, turns away from the way of life to which he was called, and wilfully returns to a life of sinful behavior, there remains only a “fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.”

Of course, it must be said that God is not willing that any should perish, and that any time a “backslider” chooses to cooperate with the Spirit of grace, repent, and return to God through the mediatorship of Jesus Christ, *he can!*

However, be warned! The Bible admonishes, “Seek ye the LORD *while He may be found*, call ye upon Him while He is near” (Isaiah 55:6). This indicates that there will be a time when God cannot be found—a time when there will be no more opportunity to repent.

In spite of the evidence that loss of salvation is possible, fundamentalists still have ways of reasoning their way around the truth. They resort to a limited interpretation of favorite “proof texts.” Let’s examine several of them.

### **The Father Wills That Christ “Should Lose Nothing”**

Jesus Christ said: “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me. And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which He hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day” (John 6:37-39).

Fundamentalists force at least two assumptions into this passage to make it fit their “once saved, always saved” doctrine. First, they assume that Christ’s statement, “I will in no wise cast [him] out,” is unconditional. Second, they assume that “the Father’s will” is God’s unconditional decree, rather than simply His *desire*

Notice that Jesus describes His followers as “all which He [the Father] hath given me.” The same description is found in Jesus’ prayer on the night of His betrayal.

Notice: “And now I am no more in the world, but these [His disciples] are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom *thou hast given me*, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: *those that thou gavest me* I have kept, and none of them is lost...” (John 17:11,12).

Now, if we stop right there, after the phrase “none of them is lost,” and apply the fundamentalists’ way of reasoning to this passage, we would conclude that all Christ’s disciples, having been kept in the Father’s name, were to be everlastingly one in spirit and purpose, and none would ever be lost. However, the remaining words of verse 12 leave no room for such an interpretation:

“...and none of them is lost, *but the son of perdition* [Judas]; that the scripture might be fulfilled.”

Clearly, Judas had been one of those the Father had given to Christ; yet, he was “lost.” He did not go on to become one of the foundational “stones” of the New Testament church; did not become an apostle who, like Peter, John, Paul, and others, went out and preached the Gospel powerfully, calling on thousands to “Repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins!”

Christ’s statements as recorded in John 6:37-39 are clearly conditional. He will not in any wise cast out those who come to Him. On the contrary, He will nurture them, protect them, give them strength enough to resist any adversary that would lead them astray. But if they choose to disobey God, choose to reject the grace by which they were called, choose the way of the Devil and the world over the way of God, then Christ will not force them into submission. He will always be there for them, ready to hear their cries of repentance, ready to intercede on their behalf if and when they turn from their wicked ways and seek to return to God, but He will not take away their power of will or freedom of choice.

The “Father’s will” is that all His children abide in His will. But He wants each of His children to willingly submit to His will. He refuses to create androids that can only do whatever they are programmed to do. God doesn’t want mindless automatons; He wants thoughtful, loving *children*!

It may be a father's will that his son go to college, study hard, and become a doctor. But the father's will does not overpower the son's ability to choose his own road in life. The same is true of the Heavenly Father's will. He "wills" that all His children obey Him, but He does not take away their power of choice, does not force His will upon them.

Fundamentalists are inconsistent in the way they handle the Scriptures. They point to the above passage as "proof" that saved persons cannot lose their salvation. Yet, other texts wherein God's will is stated are interpreted differently.

Take, for instance, 1 Timothy 2:3,4: "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved...."

Fundamentalists rightly point out that this passage simply means that God desires that all accept His offer of salvation, but does not mean that all *will* be saved. If they would apply the same mode of understanding to John 6:39, they would be able to see the "Father's will" is not God's determinate decree, but is simply His purposeful *desire*.

### **Can Christians be "Plucked" From Christ's Hand?**

Another scripture fundamentalists often quote as "proof" of indefectibility is John 10:27-29:

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

Does this passage say that it is impossible for a "sheep" to lose his place in the Good Shepherd's fold? No, it does not! It simply says that the Father and the Son are stronger than any one who might attempt to "pluck" the believer from the Father's (or Son's) hand. But we should not read this scripture as an unconditional promise.

A passage such as this should not be the basis on which a doctrine is developed, but should be understood in the light of other, clearer, texts. Hebrews 10:26-29, for instance, is clear. It tells us that there is "no more sacrifice for sins," but only "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation," for those members of God's church who deliberately, of their own free will and volition, return to a life of sinful activity.

Now, in light of this clear scripture, how are we to understand John 10:27-29? Let's take it verse by verse:

Verse 37: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." This was said to a group of unbelieving Jews who obviously were not His "sheep." Jesus did not need to state the fact that it is possible for a sheep who follows Him to turn away from the lead of the Shepherd and stray from the flock.

Verse 28: "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." Jesus was looking beyond this life to the eternal state ("they shall never perish"), and was expressing the ideal outcome for all those God calls to eternal life. God is infinitely stronger than any sheep stealer, whether human or angelic. A Christian who returns to sinful living, perhaps through the influence of others, should realize that his "fall from grace" was not due to God's inability to protect him.

Verse 29: "My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." Again, the point is that God is greater than any would-be sheep thief. No Christian returns to a life of sin because God was too weak to

sustain and protect him. People return to sinful living because they are enticed by their own lusts that war in their members.

James wrote: “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of *his own lusts*, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:13-15).

James was writing to converted, Spirit-filled members of God’s true church! This passage proves that a true Christian is capable of giving-in to his own lusts and returning to sin, which, if unrepented, will result in the “second death” in Gehenna fire! (See Revelation 20:14-15).

Matthew 10:28 throws more light on the words of Jesus (as recorded in John 10:27-29).

Jesus said: “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him [God] which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell [Gehenna].”

Jesus simply meant that men can kill the body, but are unable to take away God’s gift of eternal life. Don’t fear them, Jesus said, but fear the One who can destroy *both*!

Just as men cannot take away God’s gift of eternal life, cannot destroy the spiritual “embryo”—the “new creature in Christ”—that is forming and developing within every Spirit-begotten member of God’s church, men cannot “pluck” the true follower of Jesus Christ from the Father’s hand.

Remember, Jesus was speaking to His disciples, those who would become converted on the Day of Pentecost, and who would become part of the foundation of the New Testament church. He plainly told them to fear Him who has the power to destroy them in a lake of fire!

To “fear” God is to stand in absolute awe of Him, with deepest respect, trembling at His Word! If loss of salvation were impossible, why would Jesus tell His disciples to fear the One who has power to take it away?

### **What About “Predestination”?**

The doctrine of “irresistible grace” states that human will cannot resist the will of God; therefore, when God draws an individual to Himself, the individual *will* submit. Those who hold this belief say that all the saved, from the time of Adam to the end of the age, were “predestined” to salvation before the world began. Those not chosen for salvation before the foundation of the world cannot be saved, no matter how diligently they seek it. But the predestined, those chosen of God from the beginning, cannot escape salvation. Their eternal destiny was secured eons before they were born.

One of the chief proof texts used to support this doctrine is Romans 8:29,30:

“For whom He [God] did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified.”

Does “foreknowledge” suggest that God determined thousands of years ago who would be saved and who would not? No! The term simply suggests that God knew us before we knew Him, that His knowing us was essential to our knowing Him.

John wrote, “We love Him, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Paul asked, “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?” (Romans 11:35, NIV). In his

epistle to the Galatians, he said, “But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God...” (4:9), meaning that a person can come to know God in a personal, intimate way only after God has known him.

The above passages show that God’s people came to know and love God because God first knew and loved them. Once we were “known of Him,” we had the opportunity to “know” Him as our Heavenly Father—hence, He “foreknew” us.

Those foreknown of Him were *predestined* to be “conformed to the image of His Son.” Does this mean that the eternal destiny of those chosen of God is sealed, and that the “predestined” person has no choice but to enter the Kingdom of God?

No, it does not! The term “predestination” simply suggests that God has predetermined the destiny of those He calls, but does not indicate that He has predetermined whether they will remain faithful to their calling. Our destiny is to be “conformed to the image of His Son.” But just as it is possible for an airplane “predestined” to land in a given place within a given time frame to crash and never reach its intended destination, so it is possible for those “predestined” to God’s Kingdom to “fall away” and never reach the destination God had established for them.

Much of the misunderstanding seems to stem from preconceived ideas about such terms as “foreknowledge” and “predestination.” Some modern English translators give clarity to the passage by replacing these terms with words more meaningful to the modern reader.

Notice how Williams translates Romans 8:29,30: “For those on whom He set His heart beforehand He marked off as His own to be made like His Son, that He might be the eldest of many brothers; and those whom He marked off as His own He also called; and those whom He calls He brings into right standing with Himself; those who He brings into right standing with Himself He also glorifies” (*New Testament in the Language of the People*).

This passage gives no support to the “irresistible grace” theory. Rather, it agrees perfectly with the many scriptures that speak of conditions believers must meet in order to continue in justification.

### **Conditions for Believers**

Those who are saved by grace through faith cannot continue in the state of justification if they refuse to put away their old, sinful habits.

Jesus said: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch *in me* [this is clearly not speaking of unbelievers!] that beareth not fruit [i.e., continues in his old way of life, making no changes, being unfaithful to his calling] He *taketh away*; and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.... Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.... If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned” (John 15:1,2,4,6).

This passage clearly says that those who are in Christ can lose their salvation by refusing to *abide* in Him! This concurs with many scriptures. Notice the following:

I Corinthians 15:1,2: “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye



are saved, *if* ye keep in memory [or “hold fast”] what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.” Notice the conditional “if.”

Colossians 1:21-23: “And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled In the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblamable and unreprouvable in His sight: *If ye continue in the faith* grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel....” If one does not “continue in the faith,” can he expect to be presented “holy and unblamable and unreprouvable”? Obviously not!

1 John 2:24,25: “Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. *If* that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father. And this is the promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life.” If “that which ye have heard” does not “remain in you,” then the promise of eternal life no longer applies.

If it is impossible for a saved person to fall from a right standing with God, then he need not be concerned about falling. Yet, Paul cautioned, “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12); and Peter warned, “Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness” (2 Peter 3:17).

The closing words of James’ epistle would make little sense if falling from grace were impossible. James wrote: “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (James 5:19,20). James was speaking of Christians erring from the truth, and said that those who err are sinners. Can a Christian become a sinner in need of forgiveness? This passage says *yes!*

Peter also spoke of the possibility of erring from the truth: “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire” (2 Peter 2:20-22).

Peter was not speaking of people who, though having a knowledge of salvation, had never actually become converted members of God’s true church. Had he had the unconverted (unsaved) in view, he would not have described them as people who “have escaped the pollutions of the world.” Further, if loss of salvation were not in view, it would have made no sense for Peter to say that “the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.”

If a person could not resist the power of grace drawing him to the Faith, then surely grace would not allow him to depart from the Faith once he arrived. Yet, Paul warned of apostasy: “Now the spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils” (1 Timothy 4:1).

Giving heed to evil spirits is one way to fall from grace. The love of money is another way. In the same epistle, Paul warned: “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred [margin: “been seduced”] from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:10).

If Paul didn't believe it was possible to fall from grace, it would have been pointless for him to exhort Timothy to "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses" (verse 12).

Of course, those who believe in the "once saved, always saved" doctrine have ways of "explaining" all the above scriptures. But anyone who simply reads the above passages, and realizes that the scriptural authors used ordinary language in order to convey the truth as clearly as possible, should have no difficulty in understanding the truth of this matter.

### **On the Positive Side**

The fact that salvation can be lost may be troubling to some, especially those who have for years believed the opposite. But it shouldn't be, for there are as many—if not more—words of assurance as there are words of warning. The believer is not left alone with no real assurance of salvation. We lose out only when *we* choose to do so. But many passages of Scripture speak of God's faithfulness, of His ability to keep and help us, of His promise to never forsake us.

Some of the most encouraging words of Scripture are found in Romans the eighth chapter. Paul wrote: "If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.

"Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long: we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

"Nay, in all these thing we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us" (Romans 8:31-37).

If we have come to God through faith in Jesus Christ, we are not half-conquerors, nor are we *just* conquerors; we are *more than conquerors*—so says your Bible! Not only have we been declared righteous on the basis of faith, but we have the assurance that God, Who loved us enough to send His son to this earth to die an excruciatingly painful death in our stead, will not just give up on us.

When we err, He gives us every opportunity, nudges us with His Holy Spirit, chastens us that we may see the error of our way and repent. He assures us that there will never come a trial too great to endure, as long as we keep our eyes on Christ. And we can rest assured that He is always there, always willing to hear our confessions, forgive us our transgressions, help us through difficult times.

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). □