

# Secure in Christ: A love that will not let us go

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In John 10 one reads how Christ describes Himself as the Good Shepherd. Personally, I don't know a shepherd and don't know the details of taking care of sheep, but the people of Jesus' day would have. They would have been very familiar with the life of a shepherd.

The main part of Judea was a plateau, stretching for about 56 kilometers and averaging about 24 kilometers wide. The ground of this plateau was mainly rocky and not good for farming. It was much better suited for flocks of sheep. Because of this the shepherd would have been a very common figure in every community.

The life of the shepherd was a hard life. Working outside in the heat or in the cold. In the sun or in the rain. For hours or even days on end. With the limited food that he had in his satchel and the limited weapons that he had in his hand, every flock had to have a shepherd and the shepherd could never take a break. Because of limited grass, the sheep would often wander away looking for food. There were no fences, so it was the shepherd's responsibility to constantly be looking out for the whereabouts and the safety of the sheep. The sheep had no way to defend themselves, so it was all up to the shepherd. Whether it be protecting them from falling off of a cliff at the edge of the plateau, or fighting off wolves or thieves, the shepherd's job was never done.

The shepherd was supposed to meet every need of the sheep. You see it in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. Green pastures, still waters, clear paths, and even protection when death threatened. This was the job of the shepherd every minute of every day.

Now there were different kinds of shepherds. Some were "hired hands", who were merely people employed to watch the sheep. It was a job. Their main motivation was money, with no binding interest in the sheep. When there was danger, they ran. The other type of shepherd were those who actually owned the sheep. In Judea it was different than in other places. They did not raise the sheep so they could kill them and eat them, they raised the sheep mainly for their wool. With this in mind many shepherds had been shepherding their same sheep for many years. Some had grown up with the sheep and had grown very familiar with them, even to the point of naming them and thinking of them as companions and even friends. The sheep even followed him because they knew his voice

and his faithful provision. When danger came against this type of shepherd and his sheep he would be willing to stand and fight, even to the point of laying down his life.

This was the cultural situation that Jesus spoke into in John 10. About Himself, the Good Shepherd, he said:

***"I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep."***

***"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, 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."***

I have started with this whole introduction of the Good Shepherd to lead us to a phrase found in these final verses: ***"No one can snatch them out of the Father's hand."*** No "sheep" will ever be taken from the Good Shepherd. With this in mind we are led to this question:

### ➤ **Can a Christian lose his or her salvation?**

To answer this question we first must define what is a Christian? The only place we can go for the answer to this question is to God's Word.

In John 3:16 Jesus says, ***"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."***

Acts 16:31 recounts that, ***"They said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.'"***

Ephesians 2:8–9 declares, ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."***

Based on scripture we can say that a Christian is one who has believed in, put their faith in, put their trust in Jesus Christ. It is the idea of no longer relying on self or the things of the world, but putting one's full trust in Jesus Christ. It is one finally seeing the vanity, the sinfulness and emptiness of the self and the world, and then turning (repenting) and fully trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior.

With this in mind it puts away all other definitions. Attending church regularly does not make a person a Christian. Giving money to the church or to people in need does not make a person a Christian. Being from a family or country that calls themselves Christian does not make a person a Christian. Praying, fasting and reading one's Bible does not make a person a Christian. Being baptized does not make a person a Christian. Saying a prayer, walking down an aisle or even volunteering at church does not make a person a Christian. All of these things are good and should flow out of the Christian life, but even trying to be a good person does not make one a Christian. We all have sinned against God in many ways and this sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:2). We are all deserving of death and condemnation (Romans 3:23; 6:23). The only

way one can become a Christian is by fully trusting in Jesus Christ. Now let's reword the question and ask it again.

### ➤ **Is it possible for one who has truly put their trust in Jesus Christ to lose their salvation?**

This is a crucial question for the Christian who has lost his way. Has he lost his salvation? Has he gone too far? Has he past the point of no return? It may also be an important question for the Christian who faces life-threatening persecution. Can he be sure that the Lord's great reward awaits him? It is also important for the believer who, in the face of life's difficulties, needs to know definitively that she is loved by the Father even when she can't see Him working.

Some would argue that it is possible for a Christian to lose their salvation if they live a life of unrepentant sin, but 1 John 3:6 tells us, ***"No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him."*** In this situation the supposed Christian did not lose their salvation, scripture would testify that they never had it in the first place.

Others may argue that, "If we teach that a Christian cannot lose their salvation, then people will become Christians so they can go to heaven. Then, once they are guaranteed heaven, they will go out and live a sinful life with no consequences."

In that case, if a person appears to become a Christian, but then goes out and continues to live a sinful life with no conviction or remorse, then he is not a follower of Christ. He is not a child of God. He has not been born again. Rest assured, if one seeks to appear Christian while living in sin, God will not be deceived. God is not mocked. God knows the heart of man.

In Matthew 7:16 Jesus says, ***"You will recognize them by their fruits."*** This becomes clear in Christ's parable of The Four Soils. In Mark 4:14-20 Jesus explains this parable. The sower places the seeds on four different types of soils. The seed represents the Word of God. The soils represent the different conditions of the hearts of man.

***"<sup>14</sup> The sower sows the word. <sup>15</sup> And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. <sup>16</sup> And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. <sup>17</sup> And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. <sup>18</sup> And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, <sup>19</sup> but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. <sup>20</sup> But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."***

The first heart described has no openness to God's Word. The second receives the Word of God with joy and excitement, but once difficult times come they fall away. The third seems to grow, but are "choked" out by the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for things

other than God's Word. In the end, it becomes clear that the good soil, one who has truly received God's Word, is verified by the fruit that is born. True believers will be recognized by their fruit.

Others would claim that if belief is the way to enter into the Christian life, then if one stops believing in Christ then they lose their salvation.

1 John 2:19 instructs us that, ***"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us."***

Let me say it more plainly. If one truly puts his or her faith in Jesus Christ, it is impossible to lose that faith. I know that is a bold claim, but this is the key to our security in Christ. I am not speaking about people who just attend the church services, or those who are involved in some ministry, or those who try to do religious practices regularly. Many of those may lose faith or turn to a life of sin or godlessness. Like the soils we have already discussed. I am speaking about those who have fully placed their trust in Jesus Christ. Once a person is a true believer in Christ, they will always be a believer in Christ.

Imagine a hunter sees something moving in the bushes and shoots. He soon finds out that it was not an animal, but another hunter that he just shot. Although pulling the trigger caused the gun to shoot and caused harm to another, it is now impossible to "un-pull" the trigger to undo all that has now been done.

It is similar to being born again in Christ. As we look at Ephesians 2:8-9 we see that it is ***"By grace you are saved, through faith."*** The grace of God is what covers our sin and reconciles us to God, but salvation is "triggered" by our faith. Once we believe, we inherit all the promises that are due a child of God. This can never be undone. Things can never go back to how they were before. Once the power of God has been unleashed by our God-given faith, it can never be revoked. Even as we pass through moments when our faith struggles, His Spirit that lives in us will continue to work in us to bolster our faith and make sure it is secure forever. ***"If we are faithless, he remains faithful —for he cannot deny himself"*** (2 Timothy 2:13).

Let us look to the scriptures to see what occurs when one puts their trust in Jesus Christ.

A Christian is a new creation. ***"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come"*** (2 Corinthians 5:17). The Christian is a new person. Yes, they still look the same and have some of the same characteristics, but at the core of who they are they have been made new. They have been forgiven. They have been freed from their selfish desires and their "old selves". They are no longer slaves to sin. Something totally new has come. The old sinful person has died. Galatians 2:20 states, ***"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."***

Our old sinful self is not just sick, lying dormant or in some sort of spiritual hibernation or coma. The old self that was in bondage to sin and unbelief is dead and gone. For someone to be able to lose salvation, the new creation would have to be destroyed, the person would have to be removed from Christ, and the old self which has been put to death and put away would somehow have to be raised back to life. But the new reality is that ***"It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me."*** The unbeliever I used to be, is gone. Christ now lives in me. He is my new identity and He cannot disown

or not believe in Himself. The faith that has ushered one into salvation now is irrevocably connected to one's identity in Christ.

A Christian is redeemed. *“. . . knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot”* (1 Peter 1:18–19). The word ransomed or redeemed refers to a purchase being made, a price being paid. We could not buy salvation with silver or gold or even with our own good works. We were desperately lost in sin and in need of a Savior. *“The wages of sin is death”* (Romans 6:23), but we were purchased. . . ransomed, by the death of Christ, which was the price that was required to grant us life. There was nothing that we did to merit salvation. It was fully accomplished by Christ and through faith it became ours. Even our faith began with Christ, who is the Author and Perfecter of faith (Hebrews 12:2).

To lose our salvation, we would have to somehow revoke or return the “ransom” cost that Christ paid for us. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 declares that we “are not our own. We have been bought with a price.” We have become children of God, a co-heir with Christ. Even if it was possible, we no longer even have the authority to revoke the redemption that is over our lives. We are completely His.

A Christian is justified by faith. *“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Romans 5:1). Because of our faith, we have been declared righteous by God. For a Christian to lose salvation, God would have to somehow “un-declare” our already completed righteousness that was not based on our merit in the first place. God holds us secure because our salvation was totally accomplished by Christ. For one to lose his salvation, God would have to take the judgment seat again, retry us and count us guilty, revoking the peace from God that we gained through our Lord Jesus Christ.

A Christian is promised eternal-life. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16). A Christian has believed and is guaranteed eternal life, but to lose salvation God would have to break the promise of eternal life that has already been given.

A Christian has been marked by God and has received the Holy Spirit to dwell within them, as the guarantor of eternal life with Christ. *“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory”* (Ephesians 1:13–14). The Holy Spirit guides the believer into all truth, convicts of sin, and causes the believer to walk in the ways of God (Ezekiel 36:26-27). That guarantee would now have to be undone if one could lose their salvation. If this were possible, then the Holy Spirit would not have been the guarantor of anything.

One may agree that the Holy Spirit is guaranteeing that God will keep his side of the promise, but what if we don't keep ours? That is the whole issue that the Apostle Paul speaks about in the book of Galatians. Abram believed and it was counted to him as righteousness (Genesis 15). Then God made a one-sided covenant with Abram, because God knew that mankind would never be able to keep their side of a two-sided covenant.

It is the same idea when the Holy Spirit is given as a seal and a deposit. He is the guarantor that we will be sanctified and be recipients of eternal life. Once we are in Christ, it ultimately depends on Christ to make us like Himself.

Philippians 2:12-13 instructs us to, *“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”*

Romans 8:28-29 teaches that, *“We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. It has already been predetermined that all who are in Christ will be conformed to the image of Christ.”*

Once the Holy Spirit dwells in us, He is the one who “works in us” and “conforms us to the image of the Son.” He is our security of never losing our salvation.

A Christian is guaranteed glorification. *“And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified”* (Romans 8:30).

God has predestined, called, justified and glorified all believers. At the moment of salvation one is justified (Romans 5:1). That means “made right with God”. God then promises that those who have been justified will be glorified. This is looking forward to the perfect resurrection in heaven. If a Christian can be justified, but then not be glorified, then God is a liar who has broken His promise and that is not possible (Titus 1:2).

All of what the scripture says about those who are in Christ would be invalidated if the believer could lose salvation.

So back to the previous question: **Can a true believer stop believing in Christ? No.**

In scripture, the natural man, without Christ, is described as blinded by the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4). His mind is futile. He is darkened in his understanding. He is alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in him, due to the hardness of his heart (Ephesians 4:17-25). To him the message of the gospel is foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Once one has received grace through faith, the work of God takes over in one’s life and it cannot be revoked. Those who are believers have been given the Mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). Their minds have been renewed (Ephesians 4:23). We have been granted faith by Christ, the Author and Finisher of our Faith. The Holy Spirit now guides the believer into all truth. We now have seen the truth of Christ. No falsehood, no matter how convincing, can even begin to compare. We are now secure in the Truth forever.

In Christ we have been saved. We have been bought by His blood. We have been forgiven of all sin (Colossians 2:13). We have been declared righteous before God (Romans 4; 5:1). We have been redeemed and ransomed (1 Peter 1:18-19). We have been justified by faith (Romans 5:1). We have been promised eternal life (John 3:16). We have been adopted as God’s children (Galatians 3:26-4:7). We are a new creature (2 Corinthians 5:17). We have been born again (John 3:3).

We are no longer slaves to sin (Romans 8:1-4). We have been sealed by His Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14). We have been given a new nature (Colossians 3:10). We are no longer ours, but we are in Christ

and He is in us. We have been renewed in the spirit of our minds, and created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24).

The Spirit of God dwells in us (1 Corinthians 3:16). We have been given direct, unlimited access, to God (Hebrews 4:16). Our inner man is being renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16). With all of this in mind we stand in the confidence of Romans 11:29, *“For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”*

Our security in God does not bring perfection in the present, but we are daily being made more like Christ. We join the apostle Peter who Christ prayed for, *“That his faith would not fail”* (Luke 22:32). Yes, Peter denied Christ, but through it all his God-given faith carried Him and proved sufficient even in those times of failure.

So be encouraged. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ (Romans 8:38-39) and nothing can snatch us out of His hand (John 10:29). So those who are truly in Christ can rest in the fact that they will be made like Christ and that Christ has gone to prepare a place for us. So rest in His love and be compelled to righteous deeds by the love that we have been granted. We are secure in Christ with a love that will not let us go.

The same faith that brought us into Christ will be needed daily as one seeks to walk in step with the Spirit. We must cling to these spiritual realities that are the foundation of our Christian faith. These are now the true, irrevocable realities of our Christian lives.

Nothing can separate a child of God from the Father’s love (Romans 8:38–39). *“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,<sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

*“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ”* (Philippians 1:6).

*“Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them”* (Hebrews 7:25).

*“<sup>4</sup> Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”* (Jude 24-25).