

CAN A SAVED PERSON EVER BECOME LOST?

Introduction:

The doctrine "Perseverance of the Saints," "Once Saved, Always Saved" or "Eternal Security" is stated this way in the Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., page 65: "They whom God hath effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, CAN NEITHER TOTALLY NOR FINALLY FALL AWAY FROM THE STATE OF GRACE; but shall certainly persevere therein unto the end, and be eternally saved." (emphasis mine, WEP) But, is it stated in ANY form in the Scriptures? Since this is a widely held view, it is important that we consider "What does the Bible say about it?"

I. CAN A TRUE CHRISTIAN FALL?

- A. If there are Scripture passages, addressed to those called "saints," "brethren" or "the church", which WARN against falling, does that make it POSSIBLE or IMPOSSIBLE for such persons to fall?
- B. If it is NOT POSSIBLE to "fall", then why should Christians be warned AGAINST falling?

II. WHAT DOES THE NEW TESTAMENT SAY ABOUT "FALLING AWAY?"

- A. Gal. 5:4. From WHAT does Paul warn the Galatian churches that they COULD fall away? What is said about these people's relationship to Christ?
- B. Heb. 3:12. To whom is this warning addressed? From WHOM does the writer of Hebrews warn that they COULD fall away? What kind of HEART is said to produce this falling away? What happens to "unbelievers?" (See Rev. 21:8)
- C. I Tim. 4:1. From WHAT are people warned that they COULD fall away? What is meant by "the faith?" (See Jude 3)
- D. Heb. 12:14-17. From WHAT are people warned that they COULD fall short? (Or "fall back from" ASV margin; "miss" NIV) What are the consequences of "falling short of the grace of God" as illustrated by the example of Esau? (see verses 16-17)
- E. Heb. 6:4-8. What evidence is there that the person here described had once been a Christian? (See Syriac translations of the phrase "once enlightened" [verse 4] - Murdock, Etheridge, Lamsa.

III. OTHER PASSAGES WHICH TELL OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF FALLING AWAY

- A. II Pet. 2:20-22. What are the people described here said to have escaped? By what means are they said to have escaped this? What is said COULD happen to them again? In what sense is their "last state" now "worse" than their "first?"
- B. Heb. 10:36-39. Who is meant by "my righteous one?" (verse 38) How is this "righteous one" to live? (verse 38) How does God feel toward those who "shrink back?" (verse 38) What is said to be the fate of those who "shrink back?" (verse 39) What is said to be outcome of those who do NOT "shrink back" but rather have "faith" (NAS) or "believe" (NIV)? (verse 39). [See other uses of the word "destruction" or "destroyed" - Acts 8:20; Rev. 17:7-8; II Pet. 3:7]
- C. I Cor. 8:9-13. What is said CAN occur to the "weak brother?" (verse 11) The word "ruined" (NAS) or "destroyed" (NIV) is the same as "perish" in John 3:16.
- D. Rom. 14:13-15. What two things are said to happen to the "brother" who stumbles over someone's example of eating certain foods? (verse 15) The word "destroy" (verse 15) is from the same Greek word in John 3:16 translated "perish."
- E. James 5:19-20. How is the person who "strays" (NAS) or "wanders" (NIV) into error referred to? Whoever turns this "sinner" from such error is said to save him from WHAT?

Other discussion questions

1. Why would someone take the position that a person CANNOT fall away from God, grace or the faith?
2. Why would the fact that a "brother" could "perish" or be "destroyed" reflect negatively on God? What about other "unbelievers?" (See Rev. 21:8)