

COMMON QUESTION NO. 14

CAN A CHRISTIAN BE FINALLY LOST?

You might immediately answer, 'Of course not'. But it depends how you define the term "Christian". Many students of the Bible point to people who did fall away. Others insist that 'Once saved, always saved'. Where is the truth? In a sense both positions are true.

1. YES, a professing Christian may be finally lost.

- Some who made a profession were lost – We are told that Simon believed and was baptized, yet his subsequent conduct made it clear he was still in bondage to sin (Acts 8:9ff.).
- Some who continued in that profession for a while were lost – Judas put on a good show for three years so that none of his fellow apostles suspected him. Jesus said that there are those who receive the word with joy, but later fall away (Matthew 13:20-21). The false teachers against whom John was writing had left the fellowship of God's people showing they were never really part of it (1 John 2:19).
- Some who even died professing are lost – The most awful warning Jesus gave concerned those who maintained their profession of faith all the way to the judgement day, only to be told to depart (Matthew 7:21-23). There are many warnings to professing Christians against deception, such as to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 6:9).

Therefore, just because a person professes faith in Christ, and identifies as a Christian even throughout their life, is no guarantee of final salvation.

2. NO, a genuine Christian cannot be finally lost.

At the same time the Bible is so very clear that a Christian cannot be lost. Consider the following and see who it is who is guaranteed of final salvation.

John 6:39 – All those given by the Father to the Son will be raised on the last day.

John 10:28-29 – Those who hear the voice of Christ, who are known by Him, and who follow Him, are the ones who cannot be taken from His hand (see verse 27).

Romans 8:30 – Those who are glorified are ALL those, no more and no less, who have been predestined, called, and justified.

1 Corinthians 1:8 – Paul is writing to God's church in Corinth, to people who are "sanctified in Christ Jesus" (verse 2). They have much spiritual gifting and have the hope of the return of Christ. It is to such that Paul says that they will be kept until the end.

Philippians 1:6 – Paul is writing to people who have been long-standing partners with him in the gospel (verse 5). He is sure that God has started a good work in them, and that he will complete that work when Jesus returns.

1 Peter 1:5 – It is to those who have been "born again" by God's mercy who are being "guarded ... for a salvation" that will come at the end. It is certain, because it is by God's power through faith.

We conclude that true, genuine Christians are those who cannot be lost. It is God who keeps us. Consider three truths about the Christian that guarantee the final salvation of Christians.

(1) The election of the Father. How can the electing purpose of the Father fail (see Common Questions #4)? His purpose in choosing was that we should be "holy and blameless before

Him" (Ephesians 1:4). When God calls us, it is according to His purpose. And that purpose stretches from foreknowledge through predestination to be like Christ (in glory), to calling, justification and glorification (Romans 8:28-30). If God's plans fail then He is not God.

(2) The death of the Son. The Father gave a people to the Son to come and save (see Matthew 1:21). He died for them. He paid the penalty for their sins. He has exhausted the wrath of God that they deserved. So the Bible asks if anyone can condemn God's elect? The reason why the answer is NO is because 'Christ died, rose from the dead, is at God's right hand, and intercedes for us' (Romans 8:34). How is it possible that such can go to hell?

(3) The indwelling of the Spirit. God has put His very Spirit in the hearts of all true Christians (Romans 8:9). God Himself says that this is His guarantee of final glory (read Ephesians 1:13-14). His indwelling is like a seal to protect us from being stolen away from God, like the soldiers were supposed to be a seal for Jesus' tomb (Matthew 27:66).

Praise God that we cannot be lost because of the work of the Triune God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit!

3. Why are Christians warned against apostasy?

If this is so, then why are Christians warned against apostasy, falling away from the faith into destruction?

There are such passages as Hebrews 6:4-6 (and 10:26-31). Although the experiences such have had are great there is nothing in verses 4-5 that demands that these people are true Christians. In fact the writer specifically says of his readers that he feels sure of "better things – things that belong to salvation" (verse 9). Such a warning is one of God's means to keep His people. He reminds them of how the people perished in the wilderness (3:16-19).

Then Christians are repeatedly told that they must persevere in order to be saved (Matthew 10:22, 24:13, Hebrews 3:6,14, 6:11, 10:36, 12:1). The emphasis of the Bible is on Christians persevering, not only on God preserving them. The phrase 'Eternal Security' can be dangerous. Yes, those who are in Christ are eternally secure, but they are the very ones who persevere in the faith. Those who do not persevere show they are not true Christians. This is so important because multitudes are told they are Christians because they have made some decision for Jesus, because they have said the so-called sinner's prayer, or because they have been prayed for by the evangelist. They are assured they are saved and never to doubt it. One writer has even claimed that if a person who once made a decision even became and died an atheist he would still be saved.

But the Bible is clear that there is no salvation on the last day without perseverance. A truly saved person cannot live as he chooses. You now belong to Christ to live for Him. If you do not live for Him then you do not belong to Him. But we do not persevere in our own strength. It is because God has promised to keep us that we are encouraged to press on. It is because God works in us "both to will and to work for His good pleasure" that we have the strength to work out our salvation (Philippians 2:12-13).

Do you have to live in doubt of your perseverance in the faith? No. Those who are relying on their performance to get into heaven have every reason to doubt. They do not know what tomorrow will bring. But Christians rely on the promise of God in Christ, that through faith in Him they can begin to rejoice in hope of the glory of God even NOW (Romans 5:2)!