

How Do I Know if I am Saved?

Many people ask questions about assurance of salvation: "How do I know if I am saved?"

Some would answer, "The Bible says, 'Once saved, always saved.' So if you truly believed in Jesus in the past, you have a ticket straight to heaven; you need never question your salvation."



So is the statement "Once saved, always saved" biblical? The answer is, "Yes, but not in the way many people understand it." Let me explain.

Many confuse "eternal security" with "assurance". The difference is one of perspective. "Eternal security" is from God's point of view, "assurance" is from ours. "Once saved, always saved" is true from God's perspective; it is not true from ours.

Jesus says, "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." (John 10:28-29)

Here, Jesus is talking about security, not assurance. He is not saying "No one who thinks he is saved will ever go to hell." He's saying, "No one who is truly Mine will ever fall away." If we are truly in Christ, we will never fall away.

On the other hand, Jesus also says:

"21 'Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who *does the will* of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' 23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' 24 'Everyone then who hears these words of mine and *does them* will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. 26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and *does not do them* will be like

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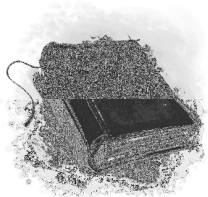
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a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it." (Matthew 7:21-27, emphasis mine)

Verse 22 says that "many" will be self-deceived about their status before Christ on the Last Day. Many will have looked like believers to others, when they are really workers of iniquity. Many will hear the words of Christ but not do them, and they will fall with a great crash.

So how do we know if we are among those whom no one can snatch out of the hand of the Father, or among those who are truly workers of iniquity, headed for a great fall? This is the question of assurance - it is a question from our perspective, not God's.



The Bible has a lot to say about this. It never tells us to go back and try to evaluate subjectively how sincere our confession was. It never tells us to rely on having our name written on a church membership roll, or to depend on our having been baptized. Instead, it tells us to examine our *present*

state - to examine ourselves *right now* (2 Corinthians 13:5).

So here in Matthew 7 Jesus tells us that the answer to the question of assurance in part is the same as the answer to the question: Are we obeying Him? Our obedience by no means saves us, but our persistent *disobedience* is evidence that no miracle has been wrought in our hearts - we still have hearts of stone, we still are dead in our trespasses and sins.

The entire book of 1 John is about assurance. Here the apostle gives us three tests of assurance which he repeats several times:

- First, is the pattern of my life one of obedience or is it one of sin? (1 John 1:6 and others)
- Second, do I hold to the right doctrine about the person of Jesus? (1 John 2:22,23 and others)
- Third, do I love my brothers and sisters in Christ? (1 John 2:9,10 and others)

To those who can answer those three questions rightly, John says, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). If we can't answer those three questions rightly, we have no basis for assurance - indeed, in that case 1 John tells us we "walk in darkness."

So can we ever know we are in Christ? Can we ever have assurance? Yes! That's why John wrote his first epistle! But we can never presume on past actions or past assurance to excuse or downplay present sinfulness. If I leave my wife tonight for another woman and continue in that adulterous relationship, I cannot say, "Oh, I know I'm saved because I walked the church aisle, I was baptized, I really meant it when I believed - I was even a preacher! I may be a carnal Christian, but I'm really saved!" No. If I make shipwreck of my faith, that's an indication that I never was saved at all - I just did a good job of playing a role for a long time, deceiving others and being deceived myself. And if I am in that situation, if I am living a life that makes a mockery of my confession, a faithful Christian should rebuke me and tell me I can have absolutely no assurance when I am living that overtly sinful lifestyle.

So can a Christian lose his salvation? No, a true Christian will never lose his salvation. This is what we mean by eternal security. However, a true Christian will "endure to the end" (Matthew 10:22, 24:13). If we do not endure to the end, if we begin to live a disobedient life, we *should* lose our *assurance* - for that persistent disobedience is evidence that we were never saved at all.



At Desiring God Community Church, we are committed to helping each other to endure to the end - this is one vital role of a New Testament church. We as a body are to consider one another, how we can spur one another on to love and good works. We are to hold each other accountable, to pray for each other, to encourage each other.

So, friends, let's do it! Don't make excuses for your own sin! Don't ignore sin in others! But pray earnestly and love deeply! Be instruments of God's grace in each other's lives!

Laboring with you so that we may present each one of us mature in Christ - holy, spotless, and above reproach,

Coty Pinckney
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