

# The Security of the Believer

(Can a believer lose their salvation?)



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## Introduction

From the beginning I would like to make it clear that I believe three things that are essential to this subject.

1. A true believer, committed to living their life for God, is absolutely and totally secure in their salvation. The Spirit of God has marked them with a seal, guaranteeing their eternal home in heaven (See: **Ephesians 1:13-14**)
2. Just as a believer made a choice to believe and live their lives to the glory of God, they can, at any time, make a choice to either stop believing or to live for self rather than God. Such a choice is a choice to give up their salvation. Merriam Webster acknowledges the reality of such a decision: “**Apostasy**: *an act of refusing to continue to follow, obey, or recognize a religious faith.*”
3. A person can, either prior to becoming a Christian or afterward, make an irrevocable decision that they will reject God’s offer. This is a ‘once and for all’ decision to say “No” to the Spirit’s call. To come to that conclusion with the determination that you will never change your mind is absolute or unconditional apostasy. It is

unforgiveable only because the person chooses to NOT accept forgiveness. God's grace has no limits.

The subjects of 'predestination', election, and eternal security have been a matter of debate among theologians and Bible scholars over hundreds of years. There are two popular opposing views, both popularized in the 1500's. The website "gotquestions.org" does a pretty good job of describing the two views. (Note that this website acknowledges that both views have weaknesses, but *unlike myself*, the authors support Calvinism). The following is a direct quote from the website. It covers more territory than the question of eternal security, but it helps us understand how they got to their conclusion regarding it. If you want the short version, skip the highlighted paragraphs below.

*"Calvinism and Arminianism are two systems of theology that attempt to explain the relationship between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility in the matter of salvation. Calvinism is named for John Calvin, a French theologian who lived from 1509-1564. Arminianism is named for Jacobus Arminius, a Dutch theologian who lived from 1560-1609. Both systems can be summarized with five points.*

1. Calvinism holds to the total depravity of man while Arminianism holds to partial depravity. Calvinism's doctrine of total depravity states that every aspect of humanity is corrupted by sin; therefore, human beings are unable to come to God on their own accord. Partial depravity states that every aspect of humanity is tainted by sin, but not to the extent that human beings are unable to place faith in God of their own accord. Note: classical Arminianism rejects "partial depravity" and holds a view very close to Calvinistic "total depravity" (although the extent and meaning of that depravity are debated in Arminian circles). In general, Arminians believe there is an "intermediate" state between total depravity and salvation. In this state, made possible by prevenient grace, the sinner is being drawn to Christ and has the God-given ability to choose salvation.

2. Calvinism includes the belief that election is unconditional, while Arminianism believes in conditional election. **Unconditional election is the view that God elects individuals to salvation based entirely on His will, not on anything inherently worthy in the individual. Conditional election states that God elects individuals to salvation based on His foreknowledge of who will believe in Christ unto salvation, thereby on the condition that the individual chooses God.**

3. Calvinism sees the atonement as limited, while Arminianism sees it as unlimited. This is the most

*controversial of the five points. Limited atonement is the belief that Jesus only died for the elect. Unlimited atonement is the belief that Jesus died for all, but that His death is not effectual until a person receives Him by faith.*

*4. Calvinism includes the belief that God's grace is irresistible, while Arminianism says that an individual can resist the grace of God. Irresistible grace argues that when God calls a person to salvation, that person will inevitably come to salvation. Resistible grace states that God calls all to salvation, but that many people resist and reject this call.*

***5. Calvinism holds to perseverance of the saints while Arminianism holds to conditional salvation. Perseverance of the saints refers to the concept that a person who is elected by God will persevere in faith and will not permanently deny Christ or turn away from Him. Conditional salvation is the view that a believer in Christ can, of his/her own free will, turn away from Christ and thereby lose salvation."***

**Free will is fundamental to man and God's relationship.**

John Calvin stated: "We say, then, that Scripture clearly proves this much, that God by his eternal and immutable counsel determined once for all those whom it

*was his pleasure one day to admit to salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, it was **his pleasure to doom to destruction**. We maintain that this counsel, as regards the elect, is founded on his free mercy, without any respect to human worth, while those whom he dooms to destruction are excluded from access to life by a just and blameless, but at the same time incomprehensible judgment.”*

I find such teaching to be inconsistent within itself and with the nature of God. I assure you that it is NEVER God’s pleasure to doom anyone to destruction. *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16, NIV).* Speaking of Jesus, Paul writes: *“The death he died, **he died to sin once for all**; but the life he lives, he lives to God.” (Romans 6:10, NIV)*

God does not elect people to go to hell. That violates his very nature. How could He be a loving, good, gracious, and merciful God if He chose certain individuals to go to heaven and chose others to go to spend eternity in the fires of hell? Such thinking violates what we know about the nature of God.

**This topic is relative, because if a person believes that they are one of the ‘chosen’ for heaven, then they also believe they can’t be**

**‘unchosen’. So, once saved, always saved; or eternal security.**

In the very beginning, God gave Adam and Eve a choice. It was a choice to stay in the perfect world He gave to them, or to mess it all up, die spiritually (*separation from God*); and eventually physically. We all know what they chose. Now ***we*** have the opposite choice, choosing between remaining dead spiritually or being born again and receiving spiritual life. It was never God’s plan to make the choice for Adam and Eve, or us. Free will is fundamental to man and God’s relationship.

The word ‘predestined’ used in **Romans 8:29** is often used to support Calvin’s view. The verse says: *“For those God **foreknew** he also **predestined** to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.”* The word ‘predestined’ seems to jump of the page; but equal weight must be given to the word ‘foreknew’. God chooses people based on the fact that He lives outside of the confines of time. He chooses those that He knew would choose Him. **Jeremiah 1:5** is a perfect example of what I am talking about. *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”*

**God chooses people based on the fact that He lives outside of time. He chooses those that He knew would choose Him.**

Salvation is the free gift of God offered to **all** mankind. Mankind, by their own free will, can either accept or reject such an offer at any point in their lives. **Romans 1:16-17** *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to **everyone who believes**: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. 17 For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”*

## **The Security of the Believer**

One of my Profs in school used this illustration. If you were to purchase a ticket, go through security and board an airplane in Toronto that is destined to Montreal - once that plane takes off you are going to Montreal. Your flight is secure. You are on your way, UNLESS you decide to open the door and jump out. That would be kind of dumb, but the choice is yours. No one else is likely to do that to you, but there is nothing stopping you from doing it yourself.

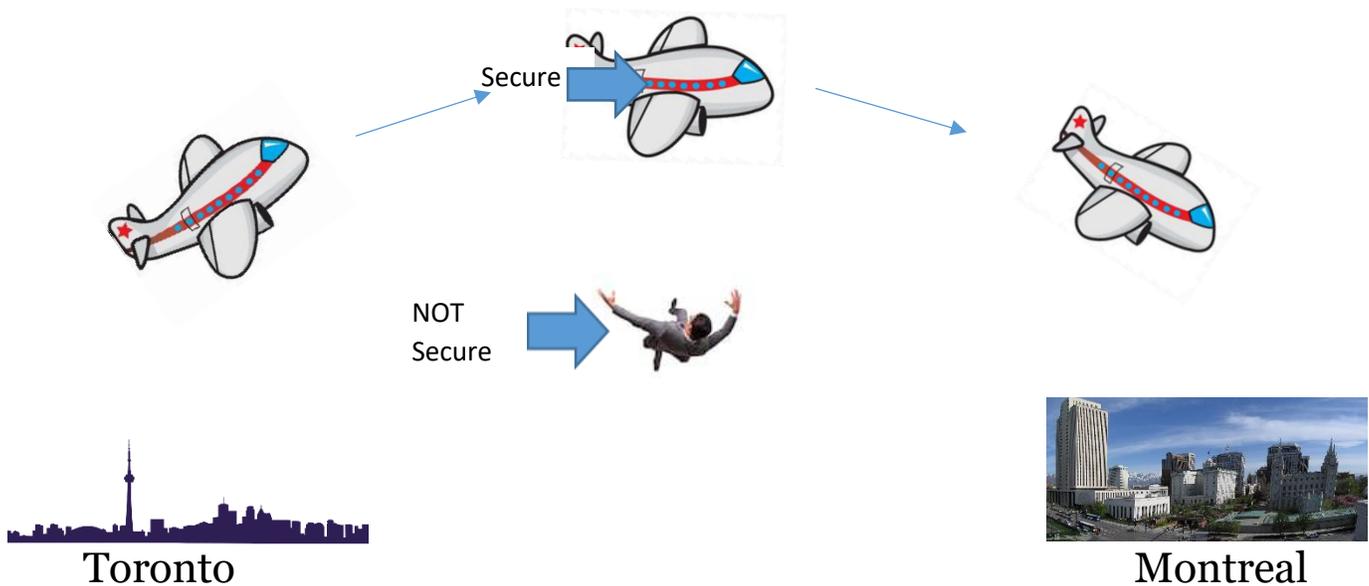
As long as you keep the door closed, you are secure in that airplane and you are going to Montreal. If you choose to open the door and jump, you are no longer secure by your own choice. You will not make it to Montreal.

It is a simple illustration of our security as a believer. Once we become a Christian, we are secure in our relationship with God. I referred to these verses earlier. **Ephesians 1:13-14 (NIV)** *“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is **a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.**”*

The apostle John wrote: *“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” (John 1:12, NIV)*

Jesus said it with certainty: **John 10:27-29 (NIV)** *“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; **no one will snatch them out of my hand.** 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.”* There is not a person or spiritual force that can rob you of your salvation. Period.

**John 10:28 (above)** is used as a verse to support eternal security, or the doctrine that once a person is saved they cannot lose their salvation. Clearly, Jesus states that no one can take a person's salvation. They are secure in Jesus hand. However, He does not say that the person cannot decide to jump.



**There is not a person or spiritual force that can rob you of your salvation. Period.**

## Evidence of an Ongoing Relationship with God

Salvation comes by faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Jesus lived a perfect life, died a perfect sacrifice, rose victorious over death, and ascended into heaven to prepare our eternal home. You can't earn it. You can't be good enough to attain to it. You can't sacrifice enough to secure your way into heaven. Jesus was the only one good enough, and was the only worthy sacrifice.

**Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)** *“For it is by grace you have been saved, **through faith**—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—**9 not by works**, so that no one can boast.”*

What some fail to realize is that faith, or belief, is more than an intellectual assent to the things I said about Jesus. True belief, or real faith, is a life-changing commitment.

Twice already I have quoted **Ephesians 1:13**, which states that *“When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.”* Having God's Spirit in us changes us. His character should be super-imposed over ours. The Apostle Paul wrote: *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,*

*forbearance (patience), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control.” (Galatians 5:22-23, NIV).* The true believer should notice ever increasing changes in his character as the Holy Spirit aligns his or her personality with that of Christ’s. He changes our character **and** our behaviour. The Spirit of God isn’t referred to as the “Holy” Spirit for nothing. **2 Timothy 1:7 (NIV)** *“For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.”* After becoming a Christian, if we don’t see changes in our priorities, the way we think, and the way we act it should raise a red flag. It could be that you have merely given assent to the Gospel message rather than applying true faith and being ‘born again’ (**John 3:3, 6-7**).

The Apostle Paul said it a different way to the Corinthian church: **2 Corinthians 5:15** *“And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”* He wrote the same thing to the church in Rome, using different words: **Romans 6:9-11** *“For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. 11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”*

Paul is teaching us how we can detect a true relationship with God in our own lives, as opposed to an intellectual assent to the Gospel message.

Proponents of the doctrine of election and eternal security suggest that true believers; the chosen, will always return to serving God wholeheartedly once they believe. And they will believe, because God predestined them to. I certainly know people who once accepted Christ, evidenced by the changes the presence of God made in their lives; but sometime later they fell back into old behaviours and character traits that were not Christ-like at all. Sometimes they still ‘talked the Christian talk’, but didn’t ‘walk the Christian walk’. It would never be my business to judge the individual. That’s God’s job, but generally speaking, that would give me concern that they had made a choice to no longer be alive to God but to allow sin to reign in their hearts.

**Paul is teaching us how we can detect a true relationship with God in our own lives, as opposed to an intellectual assent to the Gospel message.**

## The Permanency of Freewill

I have yet to find the Scripture that says we check our freewill at the door of the church. There is, however, plenty of Scriptural evidence suggesting the exact opposite. We never lose or give up the opportunity to choose our path.

Let me show you Jesus' view of this.

In John 15, Jesus speaks of our relationship as being like a vine and branches. Listen to verses 5-6 (NIV): “**5** *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 **If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.”*** Clearly, whether we remain connected to the vine, or not, is a choice we all get to make. Sadly, some choose wrongly.

The parable of the prodigal son makes this clear.

**Whether we remain connected to the vine, or not, is a choice we all get to make. Sadly, some choose wrongly.**

## The Prodigal Son

### Luke 15:11-32

31 “My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and be glad, because **this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.**’ ” Note: The son was alive, but is dead. He was lost and is found. His status changed with the exercise of His free-will.

In other parables, or in Jesus’ interpretation of them, Jesus makes the same point.

## The Faithful vs. the Wicked Servant

**Matthew 24:45-51** “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time?

46 It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.

47 Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.

48 But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time,’ 49

*and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards.*

***50 The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of.***

***51 He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”***

In this case the man was a servant of the Master, but over time his character and behaviour changed. He made a choice to no longer live to serve the Master, and paid a great price.

## **Parable of the Talents/Bags of Gold**

### **Matthew 25:14-30**

*26 “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed?*

*27 Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.*

*28 “So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags.*

*29 For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.*

*30 And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'*

Here we have another servant who was given an opportunity to serve, but chose to do nothing. Like Jesus taught in John 15 (*see page 14*) the servant chose to bear no fruit, and he too paid a great price.

These passages highlight two things that support the premise of this little booklet. A relationship with the Master, or being a servant of God changes our character, our priorities, our motives, and our behaviour. When those things aren't changing to line up with the character, priorities, motives and behaviour of Christ it is a strong indication that the individual has made a choice to serve the old nature rather than the nature of the Holy Spirit. In doing so he can lose his salvation.

## The Unpardonable Sin(s)

Most people are aware that there is an unforgiveable sin. Many live in fear of having committed it, but are uncertain as to what it is. I would suggest that if you fear having committed it, you haven't committed it. Your concern is an indication that your heart's desire is still open to the idea of living in a way that honours God. Those who have committed the unconditional sin simply don't care.

Even fewer realize that the Scripture really teaches that there are **two unpardonable sins**. The first is most familiar, and is committed by an unbeliever. It doesn't really relate to the subject at hand, but let's take a quick look.

Jesus taught us, in **Matthew 12:31-32** *“And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but **blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.** 32 Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but **anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.**”* The context would suggest that Jesus is saying that if someone attributes the work of the Holy Spirit to Satan, they have committed the unpardonable sin. Mark actually makes this clearer

in his gospel: **Mark 3:29-30** “*but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.*” **30 He said this because they were saying, ‘He has an impure spirit.’**” I believe that Jesus is talking about more than just words spoken, but of those who truly believe such an accusation in their heart of hearts.

The second relates very much to the subject of eternal security. The author of the book of Hebrews wrote: “*It is impossible for **those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age 6 and who have fallen away,** to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.*” (**Hebrews 6:4-6, NIV**)

It is very important to understand these few verses. Clearly the writer is talking about a person who was once a Christian. They have tasted the heavenly gift and shared in the Holy Spirit, but they have fallen away.

The concern is that the writer is making a blanket statement that ALL who have fallen away are unable to be brought back to repentance. Before addressing this, let’s look at **Hebrews 10:26-31**

**(NIV)** *“If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, 27 but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.*

*28 Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.*

*29 How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?*

*30 For we know him who said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge his people.”*

*31 It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”*

I firmly believe that these two passages in Hebrews are speaking of those who have reached a state of unconditional apostasy, people who have made a ***firm and final decision*** that they will turn their back on a true, life-changing relationship with God, that they will no longer yield to the Holy Spirit, and that they will live their lives the way they want to. **Hebrews 10:26** describes them as people who “*deliberately keep on sinning.*” They won’t allow the Word of God or the Holy Spirit to change that. No matter what they say they believe regarding the

person and work of Jesus, they are going to live their life their way no matter what.

**The writer to the Hebrews is talking about a person who was once a Christian. They have tasted the heavenly gift and shared in the Holy Spirit, but they have fallen away.**

Does this mean that every person who has given up their relationship with God are eternally lost? A thousand times “No!” To fully understand the Word of God it is essential to compare scripture with scripture. So, lets look at this next verse.

## **Bring Them Back**

**James 5:19-20 (NIV)** *My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, 20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.*

James makes some vitally important statements in these two verses.

- First, he was concerned about people who wander from the truth.
- Second, those who do so are destined for death (eternal separation from God). Clearly they are no longer in relationship with God and have lost their salvation.
- Third; ***they can be brought back*** no matter how many sins they have committed!

I would suggest that the unconditional apostate, those who were once in a relationship with God but have made a firm and final decision to not yield to the Holy Spirit's life-changing work, are few. Secondly, we do not have the ability to make that determination about others since we don't know the condition of a person's heart no matter what things look like on the outside. What we do have is the opportunity, privilege and responsibility to do all we can to bring those who have wandered away back into faith.

Don't stop loving them, and showing it. Don't stop praying for them. Don't stop being a godly example to them. And when the Spirit of God leads

you, speak to them about their relationship with God.

**What we do have is the opportunity, privilege and responsibility to do all we can to bring those who have wandered away back into faith.**

## **Conclusion**

The answer to whether or not a person can lose their salvation seems scripturally clear to me. As long as one is born again, growing in faith, and their character is becoming more like that of Jesus, they are secure in their relationship with God. But, when one decides to enter a relationship with God through faith in the person and work of Christ they do not give up their free-will. People can just as easily make a decision to end that relationship. The evidence of such is found primarily in the hearts of men and women made visible by their willingness to let the Holy Spirit do His work in their life.