

The background of the cover is a sunset sky with warm orange and yellow tones. In the center is a wooden cross made of two logs. A purple cloth is draped over the horizontal beam of the cross, hanging down on both sides. The text is overlaid on this background.

Eternal Security

or Once-Saved-Always-Saved?

Can Christians
Lose Their
Salvation?

Steve Highlander

An Emmaus Road Publication

Eternal Security or Once Saved Always Saved?

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND EMMAUS ROAD MINISTRIES

Emmaus Road Ministries is dedicated to helping Christians encounter the living Christ and the Church to return to her first-century expression of faith and practice. If you would like more information, please contact us. One of our visions is to provide church workers worldwide with resources that they might otherwise not have access to. We are committed to utilizing the power of the Internet to make audio, video, electronic, and printed material available to anyone who wants to love and serve Jesus Christ more than ever. Visit EmmausRoadInstitute.org for free resources.

Our passion is for everyone to find their place in the Body of Christ and serve the Lord to their full potential. Everything we do is to this end.

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Brother Steve Highlander has served the Body of Christ as a pastor, teacher, chaplain to at-risk teens, and missionary. He founded Door of Hope Prison

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Ministries and produced and spoke on two popular radio programs.

Steve is a published author and has written three books.

Test the Spirits, is based on the Biblical admonition, “Brothers, don’t believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God.” This book examines the serious warning from Jesus and every New Testament writer concerning the deception Satan releases in the end times. Steve offers ten tests to try any person, message, movement or experience. Discover how you can develop more spiritual discernment and be encouraged to prepare for the greatest spiritual harvest of the ages as we move toward the last day.

Four Anointings Every Church Should Have explores Paul’s revelation of the Body of Christ. Four Anointings looks at the three Old testament anointings God gave to manage his Kingdom and how the translate into the Five-fold ministries of the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher revealed in Ephesians chapter 4.

He has also authored numerous study booklets. Steve developed and manages several websites, including: www.TalkToAPastor.com, is dedicated to answering questions about the Bible and life from people around the world. www.EmmausRoadInstitute.org provides free resources and online training for third-world leaders and gospel workers worldwide. His personal

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Thank You

ETERNAL SECURITY

A question that occasionally arises in Christian circles is the issue of losing one's salvation. It is obviously an important issue and one that needs to have a clear biblical answer. The Bible must be our guide for all matters of faith and doctrine, so it is to the pages of the Bible that we will look to find our answers to this question also.

THE ETERNAL PURPOSES OF God

Before we can answer the question "Can a person ever lose their salvation?" we must understand something about the eternal purposes of God. Is God's whole purpose in the universe just to get people into heaven? Is being "**born again**" the end of God's plan or just the beginning? Is God concerned with us overcoming sin, or just being delivered from its penalty? Are there any clear pictures in the Bible that show us God's plan for his people?

These are questions that must be answered first before we can properly understand the issue. A major problem arises when we look at "salvation" or the "born-again" experience as the end of God's dealing with a person.

To understand God's plan and to answer the question at hand, we need only look at the Old Testament picture of the Jewish exodus from Egyptian slavery.

In this story we have the complete picture of salvation by faith in the blood of the Lamb, deliverance from bondage, water baptism, the baptism in the Holy Ghost, being led by the Spirit

of God and the complete plan of God for His people. We will also find the answer to our questions.

God's plan for Israel was greater than simply delivering them from Egypt. He wanted more than a simple born-again experience. His perfect plan also included blessing them with a new promised land they could call their own.

But God's purpose did not stop there. He wanted His chosen people in their own land so that he could show His loving kindness through a particular people. Israel was to be a light in the midst of pagan darkness to declare the reality and glory of God.

Deliverance from Egypt was simply the first step in the plan of God. The newly freed captives would have to pass through the wilderness and go through a variety of experiences teaching them to trust the Lord. All this with purpose of preparing them for the day they would have to make a decision about entering the Promised Land where the plan of God was to be fulfilled.

We will see that the Bible plainly says that those who came out of Egypt never fulfilled the complete plan of God and the reason was unbelief. They had enough faith to leave Egypt, but not enough to enter into the Promised Land, or the complete purposes of God.

The Bible says that everything that happened to them were examples to us about our New Testament salvation (I Cor. 10:6; 10:11). We shall see how three New Testament passages specifically refer to the exodus story and relate to the question of losing one's salvation.

ETERNAL SECURITY VERSUS ONCE-MADE-ALWAYS-MADE

I believe the Bible teaches that we are eternally secure in Jesus, but the Bible does not teach once-made-always-made. Let me explain. Jesus said, **“And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck out of my hand.”**

Some have made this verse to mean that a person who accepts Jesus as Savior can never, ever, under any circumstance, lose that salvation. That is a tremendous thought if indeed it is true, but a closer examination of the scriptures reveals another thought. Certainly, *no man* can pluck you out of God’s hand. That is, no person or devil can rob you of your salvation. That is eternal security.

To know that I do not have to worry from day to day if God is going to change His mind and damn me to hell is security. I stand secure today in that which God has wrought for me.

However, salvation has always been contingent on our believing God. Maintaining our salvation is also contingent on our continuing faith.

MADE BY FAITH

For by grace you are saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. Ephesians 2:8-9

The issue of salvation is an issue of faith or believing. We do not become saved by doing enough good works or by quitting

enough sins. We are saved when we place our faith in Jesus Christ.

Likewise, we cannot lose our salvation by not doing enough works or by sinning too much.

There are two extremes we need to watch out for. Some say we can never lose our salvation, and others teach that people are lost if they die with some unconfessed sin in my life. Both views are equally wrong. The only way a person could ever lose that which was a gift from God is if he were to personally reject it by unbelief after he had received it by faith. Do people lose their faith? Yes! And if faith is required for salvation, then salvation is lost too.

Here someone might say (and truthfully) that God will never leave us or forsake us. What a great truth this is. How comforting to know that God is ever faithful. But that scripture doesn't say that we can't forsake God.

BACKSLIDING VERSUS LOSING ONE'S SALVATION

Here we need to clarify a point. A person can backslide and miss out on the best that God has for him, yet still, be saved and go to heaven. The Bible tells us,

"If any man's work be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." 1 Corinthians 3:15

Paul uses the illustration of a man going through a fire and escaping with nothing but his own life - everything else burned up. How awesome is God? How loving and gracious, but how awesomely just He is and will always be.

Backsliding can cause us to lose everything we have labored for in the Kingdom of God, but backsliding is also the first step for those that ultimately lose their salvation. The Bible is plain when it tells us that repeated, willful, unconfessed sin hardens our heart against the grace of God. The possibility of it causing a person to lose hope and faith and thus reject God and His salvation is real.

THE EXODUS EXAMPLE

Is there clear teaching in the Bible concerning the issue? Yes. The Bible says in the mouth of two or three witnesses, let everything be established.

I offer four witnesses.

(For the sake of space, I cannot repeat all the verses here, so I encourage you to read these passages.) **Exodus chapters 12-17; 1 Cor.10:1-12; Hebrews chapter 3:6 - 4:11; Jude 4-5.**

God painted a picture of our New Testament salvation in the story of the exodus of the Jewish nation from slavery in Egypt.

The Israelites had a lot going for them. They were God's chosen people. They had a covenant relationship with God. When God finally delivered them, He told them to kill a lamb and place the blood on the doorposts of their houses. When the death angel passed through Egypt that night, the blood of the lamb would be a token in God's eyes that a substitutionary death had already taken place in that home. God called that His "*Passover*" because his judgment would *pass over* any house with blood on it. Paul tells us in the New Testament that "**Christ our Passover is slain for us.**" 1 Cor. 5:7 Three days later, the Israelites went through the Red Sea, and again Paul relates it to our New

Testament experience by calling it a baptism (1 Cor. 10:2). The cloud of God's presence also led them. In the same verse, Paul relates this to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:14 says, **“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”**

I Corinthians chapter 10 goes on to tell us that **they all ate the same spiritual meat and drank of the same spiritual Rock...and that Rock was Christ.**

Here we find an illustration of a covenant people who had experienced the Passover, been baptized, led by God, and had eaten and drank spiritual things. It might be well to note that these people are still under a covenant of grace because the Ten Commandments had not yet been given.

However, verse 5 tells us something else. God wasn't pleased with many of them. To prove his point, Paul reminds us that they were “overthrown in the wilderness.” Or, to put it another way, they never made it to the Promised Land. They made it out of Egypt. They were saved from the slavery of religion, but God had much more in mind than that. He had promised them a special place. Nearly all that came out of Egypt died without making the Promised Land. Why? Unbelief, which was generated by their sin.

Consider two passages here; then, we will move on.

“Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.” 1 Cor. 10:16

“Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the

ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” 1 Corinthians 10:11-12

The book of Jude repeats the example and warning, stating that some turn the grace of God into a license to sin.

“I will put you in remembrance, though you once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.” Jude 5

You will note again that the issue wasn’t the sinfulness of the people but their unbelief.

In the book of Hebrews, Paul takes much time to expand on this example. (I encourage you to read the whole passage from 3:6-4:11, as I cannot repeat it here.)

Paul warned them repeatedly not to allow their hearts to be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin (**verses 7 & 8; 13; 15; 4:7**).

He warned them repeatedly of the danger of unbelief.

“Take heed brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of UNBELIEF, in departing from the living God.” Hebrews 3:12

Notice the issue again was *unbelief!* Here Paul addresses “brothers.” And how is it possible to “depart” from someone or something that you have never come to in the first place? Notice the **IF** in verse 14.

“For we are made partakers of Christ **IF** we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.”

“And to whom did He swear that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.” Hebrews 3:18-19

Another warning comes in verse one of chapter four:

“Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.”

In verse 2 he states emphatically that the “gospel” was preached to them and to us, but they didn’t mix it with faith, so it was of no profit to them.

“Seeing therefore it remains that some must enter in, and those to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief.” Hebrews 4:6

And finally, Paul sums up the entire passage with a warning:

“Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man should fall after the SAME EXAMPLE OF UNBELIEF.”

THE EXAMPLE OF THE FIG TREE

In Romans 11:17-23, Paul warns the Gentile Christians against bragging about how they are in Christ while many Jews rejected Jesus. Again we find clear teaching that a saved person could be “removed from the tree.”

“Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also

spare not you... if you continue in His goodness: otherwise you also shall be cut off.” Romans 11:20-21

Notice again the issue of unbelief versus abiding faith.

ENTANGLED AGAIN

Peter also sides with Paul on the issues. In 2 Peter 2:20, Peter tells us,

“For if after they have escaped the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than at the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, then after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them”

Again we are warned of allowing ourselves to become entangled in the same old sins that we were delivered from. Notice it wasn't just returning to the old sins that worried Peter, but that some would be **overcome**.

Peter states it would have been better never to know than to have known and turned back. This isn't just head knowledge of Christ, but an experiential knowledge. Peter is speaking of someone who had known Jesus as Lord and Savior, then turned away.

THE HEBREWS 6 PROBLEM

In Hebrews chapter 6, Paul makes a powerful statement.

“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made

partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted of the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame.” Heb. 6:4-6.

A problem arises here for those who claim “once-saved-always-saved.” Paul does say that it is impossible for somebody to know about Christ, reject Christ, then change their minds, and accept him. If we were to say that it could not be a saved person that Paul is talking about, then we are left to conclude that he indeed is speaking of a lost person who has not yet accepted Christ. If that is the case, then how could a lost person “crucify Jesus afresh?” Seeing how he had never accepted the crucifixion in the first place.

To apply this verse to the lost is to believe that this person has no further opportunity once he or she hears the gospel message and rejects it. It would be a “limited time offer,” so to speak. That isn’t true, for few people accept Christ the first time they hear the message.

The language Paul uses here to describe who he is referring to is important. He wants no misunderstanding, so he makes it plain. He declares them to have been **“once enlightened, having tasted of the heavenly gift, made partakers of the Holy Ghost, tasted of the good word of God and the powers of the world to come.”** If language means anything, Paul was trying to convey to us the fact that these were people who had an experience with God.

We must conclude that Paul is talking about a once a believer, but then turned and rejected Christ, renouncing his faith. Only a

person who knew and believed could bring such **open shame** on Christ.

PAUL'S CONCERN ABOUT HIS OWN MINISTRY

Paul was concerned about his own life. Not fearful, mind you, but concerned. Read his own thoughts on the matter.

“But like a boxer I buffet my body, handle it roughly, discipline it by hardships, and subdue it, for fear that after proclaiming to others the Gospel and the things pertaining to it, I myself should be unfit (not stand the test and be unapproved) and rejected (as a counterfeit). 1 Corinthians 9:27

Interestingly, this thought leads directly to the examples in 1 Corinthians 10 that we have already discussed.

In the King James Version, the word **castaway** is used. Paul was concerned that he could be a **castaway**. That word is translated **reprobate** six times in the New Testament. Paul was saying that he knew it was possible to preach the Gospel as an apostle and still wind up as a reprobate if he didn't discipline himself.

ANOTHER GOSPEL?

So far, we have concentrated on someone who gets discouraged or overcome by sin—leading them to reject their faith. But there is another issue concerning unbelief. Those that turn from the truth to lies. All the New Testament writers urged and warned their followers to beware of false teaching, lest they end up believing in vain.

“But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” 2 Corinthians 11:3

THEY BELIEVED NOT THE TRUTH

In his second letter to the Thessalonian Church, Paul tells us that there will come a great **falling away** before the Antichrist is finally revealed.

This phrase **falling away** is the Greek word **Apostasia**, which means **defection or apostasy**. Only those who once believed can properly be said to apostatize. The term is the feminine version of the word **Apostasion**, which means “**a divorcement, a writing of divorce, or a repudiation.**” It is not God who divorces us, but we who divorce God by unbelief.

Once again, we see the issue is a person losing faith, whether through sin and discouragement or false doctrine.

We know that false doctrine abounds today and that it is an effective trap used by Satan to snare the faithful. Many have overcome the sin issue and are not as vulnerable to that ploy. Satan has another trick for the more mature; to get us caught in some doctrine that ultimately takes us away from simple faith in Christ.

In verses 9-13 of 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, Paul addresses the key issue again. He warns us that Satan would come with all kinds of lying signs and wonders to deceive in the end times. Those who believed the lies did so “**because they did not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved.**”

Elsewhere in the Bible, we find the same warnings to be on guard for the subtlety of false doctrine. (**Galatians 3:1 and following; Jude 3-4; I John 4:1-3; Ephesians 4:11**, to name a few.)

We must diligently guard against the many popular, flesh-pleasing doctrines being trumpeted in this day and hour. Our eternal souls are at stake.

While there are some other scattered scriptures we could look at, these should suffice to answer the question, “*Can a person lose their salvation?*” Both the Old Testament example and teaching of the New Testament writers confirm that it is possible.

POSSIBLE BUT NOT NECESSARY

It is possible to lose one’s salvation through unbelief, but it certainly isn’t necessary to do so.

God is gracious! I do not think one need be overly concerned about losing his/her salvation. As I stated early on, there is **eternal security** in Christ. The issue is faith and confidence in Christ. If you know that dividing line, you can be more careful to stay away from it.

Know this. It is your faith that Satan wants to rob from you. He will engineer his traps and snares to cause you to lose your faith, but you don’t have to fear or lose sleep worrying about it. To be forewarned is sufficient.

AN HISTORICAL EXAMPLE

In the early days of the Church during the Roman persecution and during the Dark Ages when the Catholic inquisition took place, the emphasis of the persecutors was the same. *“Renounce Christ, or we will torture you to death.”* It is evident that Satan was behind the persecution of the Church.

What was his point of attack? The renunciation of salvation by faith. Was Satan operating on the scriptural principle, **“Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it?”** Luke 17:33

NOW THE GOOD NEWS!

It was necessary to concentrate for a time on the bad news to lay a biblical foundation for eternal security. Now, the Good News.

“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen” Jude 24-25

We don't have to fear. God is faithful, but we need to be diligent. We can live our lives in confident trust in the saving power of Jesus Christ. The problem occurs when we allow discouragement, sin, or false doctrine to harden our hearts and bring about the situation and circumstances that make it possible to fall away from Christ.

Listen again to what Paul teaches Timothy.

For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am ashamed; for I know whom I have

believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. 2 Timothy 1:12

We too, can have the same confidence Paul had as we commit the keeping of our souls to God as unto a faithful creator.

The Biblical fact that we can lose our salvation should be a motivating factor to overcome every difficulty and trial that comes our way. It is too easy to give in and slide by when life gets tough or the battle is hot.

The danger is not in committing some sin and dying with sin in our lives. The real danger is allowing that sin to overcome us with shame and discouragement that we stop trusting Christ and thus fall away, or else to get deceived by a false doctrine and allow it to rob us of our faith in Christ.

DON'T GET DISCOURAGED!

Dear brother or sister in Christ, don't be discouraged. Maybe you are struggling in your Christian life right now. It is easy to feel as if you are failing and God doesn't love you; it is easy to believe you'll never make it, but your salvation really doesn't depend on how well you're doing this minute. It rests in your faith to trust Jesus to get the job done in your life.

God had already promised the Israelites the land before they ever left Egypt. He planned to bring them into their inheritance. The only reason they did not make it was unbelief. Do you have some "giants" in your life today? God said that if we trusted and obeyed, He would fight the battles for us. Ask God to increase your faith.

“If you are suffering according to God’s will, keep on doing what is right and trust yourself to the God who made you, for He will never fail you.” 1 Peter 4:19 (TLB)

“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all that love His appearing.” 2 Timothy 4:7-8