

The Security of the Believer

1) What does the Bible say about the security of the believer?

A) The testimony of Jesus Christ. During his earthly ministry, Jesus made several statements concerning the security of believers.

(1) “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24, ESV).

(2) “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:37–40, ESV).

(3) “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 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 10:27–29, ESV).

B) The testimony of Paul. Paul's majestic speech in Romans 8 is one of the most beautiful and compelling passages on the security of the believer.

(1) “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:29–31, 33–35, 37–39, ESV).

C) The seal of the Holy Spirit. The Father has graciously given the Holy Spirit to all believers as a pledge, or down-payment as it were, of their future redemption.

(1) “In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” (Eph 1:13–14; 4:30, ESV).

D) The keeping power of God. The NT is filled with statements concerning the ability of God to keep believers until the day of salvation.

(1) “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6, ESV).

(2) “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” (1 Pet 1:3–5, NKJV).

(3) “Even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1:6–9, ESV).

(4) “Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25, ESV).

(5) “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen” (Jude 1:24–25, ESV).

2) What does the Bible say about the danger of apostasy and the necessity of perseverance?

A) The danger of apostasy. Hebrews is filled with warnings about the danger of falling away from God because of unbelief.

(1) “Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every

transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?” (Heb 2:1–3a, ESV).

(2) “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience” (Heb 3:12–14; 4:1, 11, ESV).

(3) “For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, [while] they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt” (Heb 6:4–6, ESV).

(4) “For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?” (Heb 10:26–29, ESV).

(5) “See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven” (Heb 12:25, ESV).

B) The example of apostasy. The NT mentions individuals who had fallen away from God and were leading others to do the same.

(1) “This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Tim 1:18–20, ESV).

(2) “But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some” (2 Tim 2:16–18, ESV).

(3) “For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them” (2 Pet 2:20–21, ESV).

C) The need to stand firm in the faith. Several passages speak of the necessity of persevering in the faith.

(1) “And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister” (Col 1:21–23, ESV).

(2) “And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures [has endured] to the end will be saved” (Mark 13:13, ESV).

(3) “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful” (Heb 10:23, ESV).

(4) “But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity and does according to all the abominations that a wicked man does, will he live? All his righteous deeds which he has done will not be remembered for his treachery which he has committed and his sin which he has committed; for them he will die” (Ezek 18:24, ESV).

(5) “Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again” (Rom 11:20–23, ESV).

(6) “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent” (Rev 2:5, ESV).

(7) “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book” (Rev 22:18–19, ESV).

D) The concern for the faith of believers. Paul expressed concern in several of his letters for the faith of his new converts (he also expressed concern for himself).

(1) “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?” (Gal 3:1–4, ESV).

(2) “I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain. For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.” (Gal 4:11; 5:1, 4, ESV).

(3) “For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain” (1 Thess 3:5, ESV).

(4) “But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor 9:27–10:5, 11–12, ESV).

3) How do we reconcile the promises concerning the security of the believer with the danger of apostasy and the command to persevere in the faith?

A) The following is my attempt to harmonize the Scriptures above into a simple yet balanced position statement:¹

(1) The believer who is standing firm in the faith and is walking by the Spirit can rest in the certainty that they are kept by the power of God and their eternal salvation is secure.

B) Unpacking the statement.

(1) The phrase “standing firm in the faith” emphasizes that we stay saved the same way we get saved—by grace through faith. We do not get saved by grace and then stay saved by works. We

¹ This statement is not meant to be exhaustive in scope or to answer every question related to this issue. It is meant to be a place of common ground where those on different sides of the debate can come together in agreement.

remain in a saving relationship with God by standing firm in our faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ (Rom 11:20; 1 Cor 16:13; Heb 10:10).

(2) The phrase “walking by the Spirit” emphasizes that saving faith obeys. While we do not stay saved by works, our obedience to Christ demonstrates that we have true, saving faith (Jam 2:14–26). God wants us to be living holy lives and walking in the light (1 Pet 1:14–16; 1 John 1:17).

(3) The present tense wording of both phrases emphasizes that Scripture tells us to be actively “striving” to enter the kingdom (Luke 13:23–24, ESV). This keeps our focus where it needs to be—on persevering. It also emphasizes that true, saving faith is the attitude of a lifetime, not merely the act of a moment. The New Testament affirms that eternal life in Christ is the present possession of those who have a present, living faith.²

(4) The phrase “rest in certainty” emphasizes that the believer who is striving to enter the kingdom can have absolute certainty about the eternal destiny of their soul—Scripture is clear that nothing can separate such a person from the love of God (Rom 8:38–39).

(5) The phrase “kept by the power of God” emphasizes that God’s grace is working in the life of a believer to enable them to live a holy life and to be in a right relationship with Him. As Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him—this one bears much fruit, for apart from me you are not able to do anything” (John 15:5, ESV).

(6) The phrase “their eternal salvation is secure” emphasizes that the assurance of final salvation at “the day of redemption” is not a false hope or illusion—our eternal destiny is truly secure. The Father has given us to the Son, and no one can snatch us out of His hand.

C) Theological and Practical Implications.³

(1) Believers are told to examine themselves “to see whether you are in the faith” (2 Cor 13:5; cf. Phil 2:12). Those who do not have true saving faith must be converted; those who already believe must continue in the faith. This kind of examination should be done within the context of a local body of believers—hence the command not to neglect meeting together (Heb 10:24–25).

(2) The church has a great responsibility in the matter of perseverance. It is required not only to warn believers of the danger of apostasy but also to discipline them when they sin. If a believer continues in sin and does not respond to calls for repentance, the church has recourse

² *Eternal life is found “in Christ,” that is, it flows from a living relationship with the living Savior Jesus Christ. Thus the condition for possessing eternal life in Christ is a present, living faith (cf. John 1:12). See Robert Shank, Life in the Son: A Study of the Doctrine of Perseverance, (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), 63–64.*

³ Sourced from I. Howard Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God: A Study of Perseverance and Falling Away*, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007), 208–215.

to more serious methods of discipline, including excommunication (cf. Matt 18:15–17; 1 Cor 5:11–13). This discipline has two purposes:

(a) To show the offender the grim reality of their position. Their refusal to repent cuts them off from God and puts Christ to open shame (cf. Heb 6:4–6; 10:26–29).

(b) To bring the offender to repentance. Paul taught that the sinner should be received back into the church once he had repented of his sin (cf. 2 Cor 2:6–11).

(3) Believers are told to persevere in the faith. Our responsibility is to put our hand to the plow and not look back (Luke 9:62; Heb 10:38). We are to “throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles,” and we are to “run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (Heb 12:1b, NIV).

(a) God has promised to keep, establish, strengthen and sustain us. However, that does not mean that we no longer need to watch “lest we drift away” (Heb 2:1–4). God's power enables us to resist temptation, but God does not remove temptation or the necessity to fight against it. The way to victory is through daily submission to Christ.

(4) Jesus' imperative in Luke 13:24, “Keep striving to enter the kingdom,” also comes with a promise—“he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6). We need not and should not live in fear, continually worrying about the eternal destiny of our soul. We know that if we trust in God, His power will preserve us. Paul faced the test of martyrdom confident that he would be victorious through the power of God (2 Tim 4:7–8).

D) Conclusion.

(1) The Bible affirms our security in Christ and urges us to place our trust in His sustaining power. At the same time the Bible affirms the danger of apostasy and urges us to have a present, living faith. We must learn to balance these two truths—if we are standing firm in the faith and walking daily in the Spirit, God will keep us from stumbling. As we continue to trust and obey, we can rest in the knowledge that nothing can separate us from God's love. He remains faithful, and we are indeed kept by His power.