

Perseverance and Apostasy:

Examining the Balance Between Eternal Security and Free Will in Salvation Theology

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ABSTRACT

This paper navigates the theological tension between Once Saved, Always Saved (OSAS) and Once Saved, Fall Away (OSFA), presenting a balanced view that emphasizes both the security of salvation and the role of free will. Salvation, grounded in Jesus Christ's atoning work, is a free gift that cannot be earned through human effort. Romans 10:9-10 underscores that salvation requires genuine faith and confession, not mere intellectual assent. While believers cannot lose salvation through sin alone, they retain the free will to reject their faith and walk away from God, as described in Hebrews 6:4-6. This work explores key scriptural teachings on perseverance, the struggle with sin, and the importance of enduring faith. It distinguishes between ongoing struggles with sin, which signify the Holy Spirit's work, and apostasy, a conscious and final rejection of God. The paper argues that the Christian life is marked by growth and endurance rather than perfection, affirming that God's grace remains sufficient while cautioning believers to remain steadfast in faith. The conclusion highlights the necessity of enduring faith, rooted in a relationship with God, to receive the promise of eternal life.

I. INTRODUCTION

Where I Stand

Where do I stand on Once Saved, Always Saved (OSAS) or Once Saved, Fall Away (OSFA)? My position lies between these two views. Salvation is a free gift from God, made available through Jesus' atoning work on the cross.¹ The only "work" required for salvation is stated clearly in Romans 10:9-10, "*You must confess Jesus as Lord and believe that God raised Him from the dead.*"²

While the devil knows the truth about God, he will never confess Jesus as Lord. Similarly, salvation is not about mere intellectual belief—it must be a confession from the heart. My main problem with OSFA is the question: How many sins will cause a person to lose salvation? If salvation could be lost every time we failed, then the cross would have been unnecessary.³ Salvation is not something we earn; it is a gift. Like a life preserver thrown to a drowning man, we don't boast about grabbing it—we thank the one who saved us.

However, the gift of salvation does not negate our free will. A believer can willingly reject the gift and walk away from faith. This is not Jesus "losing" us, but us choosing to return the gift.

¹ Geisler, Norman L. *Chosen But Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election*. Bethany House, 2001, 100–103.

² Romans 10:9-10, ESV.

³ Moo, Douglas J. *The Epistle to the Romans*. Eerdmans, 1996, 652–655.

II. THE ROLE OF FREE WILL IN SALVATION

I believe Jesus never loses anyone given to Him by the Father (John 10:27-30). However, believers retain free will after salvation. They can walk away from faith, as Hebrews 6:4-6 teaches. This passage describes people who tasted the truth but deliberately turned away—they cannot return.⁴

Struggling with sin is not the same as rejecting salvation. Every believer battles sin because the Spirit fights against the flesh (Galatians 5:17). Struggling is a sign that God's Spirit is at work. However, if someone no longer feels conviction for sin, they may have hardened their heart and rejected God's Spirit.

Walking away from God is, in my view, equivalent to blaspheming the Holy Spirit—the final rejection of God's grace. But struggling with sin reflects the Christian life.⁵ As long as the Holy Spirit convicts you, you are still on the path of salvation.⁶

Struggling with Sin vs. Apostasy

The life of a believer is one of growth and perseverance, not perfection. Jesus said we would know Christians by their actions (Matthew 7:15-23). A true Christian loves God and others (Matthew 22:37-40). Loving difficult people is possible only through the Spirit of God.

Falling into sin does not mean you've lost your salvation. Christians struggle with sin, but enduring in faith—never giving up on God—is what matters (Matthew 10:22,

⁴ Lane, William L. *Hebrews 1–8: Word Biblical Commentary*. Zondervan, 1991, 140–145.

⁵ Carson, D. A. *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*. Crossway, 2000, 82–85.

⁶ Packer, J. I. *Knowing God*. InterVarsity Press, 1993, 189–192.

Mark 13:13). If someone walks away from God completely, they commit apostasy. However, as long as the Spirit convicts you of sin, you have not fallen away.

III. SCRIPTURES ON SALVATION AND APOSTASY

Below is a detailed look at key scriptures, each with a brief interpretation based on my position.

- Matthew 7:15-23 – False believers will be known by their fruit. A Christian’s actions reflect God’s work in their life.⁷
- Matthew 10:22 – Endurance, not perfection, marks the saved. Christians who do not walk away will be saved.
- Matthew 13:18-23 – Some believers walk away due to worldly concerns. They won’t return to the faith.
- Matthew 24:24 – False teachers will arise, including cults that deny the deity of Christ.
- Matthew 24:42-51 – Those who stay faithful to God will be ready for His return.
- Mark 10:17-23 – If you can’t give something up for Christ, it owns you. God must be your only master.
- Mark 13:13 – Enduring faith leads to salvation. Struggling to live holy does not mean falling away.
- Mark 16:16 – Baptism is an act of obedience, not a requirement for salvation, as shown by the thief on the cross.

⁷ Blomberg, Craig L. *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. B&H Publishing Group, 1992, 125–128.

- Luke 12:47-48 – Those who know right from wrong but still sin will receive harsher judgment.

John's Teachings on Salvation

- John 1:9-12 – Receiving Christ brings salvation.
- John 3:3-16 – Being born again by the Spirit is essential for salvation. While OSAS proponents argue you cannot be “unborn,” I believe you can walk away.
- John 6:28-29 – Some OSFA believers see this as proof of works. I see it as a call to align your life with God’s will.
- John 10:27-30 – No one can take your salvation away, but you can choose to leave.
- John 15:6 – A Christian must show evidence of being connected to Christ. Those who claim to believe but don’t live it are not truly saved.

Acts and Paul’s Writings on Salvation

- Acts 8:17-21 – Simon the magician believed and was baptized but showed by his actions that he was never truly saved.
- Romans 2:6-8 – Works demonstrate faith. The struggle against sin shows the Spirit is active in you.
- Romans 3:27-30 – Struggling against sin keeps you focused on God. Failure doesn’t mean you’ve walked away.
- Romans 8:12-13 – If you reject God and turn back to the world, you will be lost.

Further Scriptures on Faith and Perseverance

- 1 Corinthians 3:15 – This passage refers to rewards, not salvation. Works done with the wrong motivation won’t count toward heavenly rewards.

- 1 Corinthians 9:27 – Paul warns about disqualification, not from salvation but from ministry.
- Galatians 5:4 – Falling from grace refers to legalism, not loss of salvation.
- Ephesians 1:13-14 – The Spirit’s seal marks salvation, but you can break the seal by walking away.
- Philippians 2:12-13 – Working out salvation is about perseverance, not earning salvation.
- 1 Timothy 4:1 – Some believers will abandon the faith, choosing to walk away from God.

Final Warnings and Encouragements

- Titus 3:5 – Salvation is through Christ’s work, though we retain the free will to leave.
- Hebrews 6:4-6 – Those who fully reject God after knowing the truth cannot return.
- James 2:14-17 – This passage speaks to the importance of helping others, not works-based salvation.
- 1 John 5:16-17 – The sin that leads to death is blaspheming the Holy Spirit. Other sins can be forgiven.
- Revelation 2:10 – Do not walk away from faith, or you will be lost.
- Revelation 22:18-19 – Those who alter God’s Word will face severe judgment.

IV. CONCLUSION: SALVATION AS GIFT, RELATIONSHIP, AND ENDURANCE

Salvation is a free gift from God, made possible by Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. The only work required for salvation is to believe in Jesus as Lord and confess that God

raised Him from the dead (Romans 10:9-10). Salvation is not earned, nor can it be maintained through works. Struggling with sin is part of the Christian life, and failure does not mean we have lost our salvation. The Holy Spirit's presence is evident in our fight against sin.

However, believers retain free will throughout their lives. Although no one can snatch us from God's hand, we can willingly reject salvation and walk away from God (John 10:27-30). This is not the result of sin struggles but a conscious rejection of God's gift, equivalent to blaspheming the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 6:4-6). Once a believer has made that decision, their heart becomes hardened, and they will not return.

The Christian life is about enduring in faith, not perfection (Matthew 24:13). Salvation is both a gift and a relationship with God. As long as the Holy Spirit convicts us, we know we have not fallen away. In the end, those who remain in Christ will receive the promise of eternal life. May we persevere in faith, trusting that the One who began a good work in us will bring it to completion (Philippians 1:6).⁸

⁸ Wright, N. T. *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*. Fortress Press, 2013, 900–905.

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