

NOW IS THE DAY OF SALVATION

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The sixth chapter of 2 Corinthians begins with these words (verses 1-2): “*We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)*” Who was being beseeched not to receive God’s grace in vain? And who was being urged to remember that now is the accepted time and now is the day of salvation? In finding the answer to that question, we learn that *Christians* must take heed not to lose their souls.

The falsehood of “once saved, always saved”

The doctrine of “eternal security,” “perseverance of the saints,” or “once saved, always saved” (the doctrine goes by many names, but is the same at its core) is the doctrine that a Christian can never be lost, no matter what he does. The doctrine of “once saved, always saved” is proven false by 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2. The epistle of 2 Corinthians was written “unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia” (2 Cor 1:1). The “church” and “saints” can only be Christians. Therefore, the epistle is addressed to Christians, not to those who had not yet become Christians. Yet Paul beseeched and begged these *Christians*: “be ye reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20). All Christians by definition have been reconciled to God (Rom 5:6-11; Eph 2:16; Col 1:20-22). Yet these Christians were again being told to be reconciled. It is beyond dispute that some of these Christians had gone astray and their souls were in jeopardy if they did not repent. They were reminded that Christ had died for their sins so that they might be made righteous (2 Cor 5:21). These Christians were presently living *unrighteously*. Paul then beseeched them to “receive not the grace of God in vain” (2 Cor 6:1). This has absolutely no meaning whatsoever if it is impossible for a Christian to fall from grace. If these wayward saints did not repent, then the grace of God that *they had already received* would be in vain, because they would be eternally lost anyway.

Conditional salvation

It is to these straying sheep that Paul quoted Isaiah 49:8: “For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2). Though this principle certainly applies to those who have never been saved, in this context it is specifically applied *to Christians*. It was the “day of salvation” and the “acceptable time” for the erring brethren of Corinth. They needed to repent or else they would be lost. The unfaithful Christians in Asia

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(continued)

were also told by Christ himself to “repent or else” (Rev 2:5,16,22; 3:3,16-19). Without question or doubt, it is possible for a Christian to be lost. Many other passages of scripture also refute the false doctrine of “once saved, always saved.” For example, Ezekiel 18:24-26 clearly teaches that the righteous *can* turn from their righteousness to wickedness and become lost. *“But when the righteous turns away from his righteousness, and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All his righteousness that he has done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he has trespassed, and in his sin that he has sinned, in them shall he die. Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal? When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, and commits iniquity, and dies in them; for his iniquity that he has done shall he die.”*

Christians who become sinners again will *not* inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10). We have eternal life now in the form of *hope* for the promise, *if* we meet the conditions for it (John 5:24; Rom 8:24).

Christians are warned against falling into condemnation (Jas 5:12; 2 Pet 3:17). Salvation is conditional upon continued obedience and it can be forfeited (1 Chr 28:9; 2 Chr 15:2; John 15:6; Rom 8:12-13; 1 Cor 16:22; 2 Tim 2:12; 1 John 1:6-7).

What is possible

It is possible for those who have “escaped” from the world and know the way of righteousness to be lost (2 Pet 2:20-22). Being God’s “house” is contingent upon our holding fast to the end (Heb 3:5-6). It is possible for *brethren* to depart from God, and, again, holding fast to the end is a condition for salvation (Heb 3:12-15). It is possible for Christians to come short of the promise (Heb 4:1). It is possible for those who have been enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift to become “fallen away” (Heb 6:4-8). It is possible for those who have received the knowledge of the truth to turn away and be lost (Heb 10:26-31). It is possible to “draw back unto perdition” (Heb 10:37-39). It is possible to be a disciple, put the hand to the plow and then look back and be lost (Luke 9:61-62; 17:32). It is possible to become severed from Christ (which means they were first joined together) and fall from grace (Gal 5:4). Branches that are *in Christ* but do not bear fruit will be taken away, cast forth, withered and burned (John 15:1-6). Jesus warned of two categories of Christians who “for a while believe,” but later “fall away” (Luke 8:13-14). We must work out our own salvation with “fear and trembling,” which is meaningless if we can never be lost (Php 2:12).