

Two views of the permanence of salvation:

Will the person who becomes a Christian, who is genuinely regenerated, justified, adopted by God, and united with Jesus Christ, always remain a Christian?

The importance: If there is no guarantee of permanent salvation, one can experience a great deal of anxiety and insecurity that will take away from our major tasks as believers. Or, if our salvation is absolutely secure, and one's mindset is that we don't need to worry about what we do, one can feel lax and indifferent to the moral and spiritual responsibilities.

The Calvinist and the Arminian hold certain beliefs in common. That God is powerful and faithful, willing and able to keep his promises. Salvation is not received or retained by works of the person. The Holy Spirit is at work in all believers. The completeness of salvation provided by God. But with eternal security of the believer, they differ.

The Calvinist View:

“They whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.” Westminster Confession of Faith 17.1.

The Indestructible quality of the salvation which God provides

1 Peter 1:3-5. The persistence of and power of divine love in support of security of the believer: Romans 8:31-39, Phil 1:6. Jesus and the Holy Spirit intercede for us: Hebrews 7:25, John 11:42. One can overcome temptation and withstand obstacles, Romans 14:4, 1 Cor. 10:13.

Statements of Jesus: John 10:27-30. Paul had confidence: 2 Tim 1:12. Other Relevant passages: Heb 6:11, 10:22, 2 Pet 1:10, 1 John 5:13. Eph 1:14-15 How could one lose salvation when there is this assurance?

The Arminian View

The danger of being led astray: Matt. 24:3-14, would Jesus have offered such a warning to his disciples if it were not possible for them to fall away and lose their salvation? Paul suggests some conditions to salvation in Col. 1: 21-23. Paul offers warnings: 1 Cor 10:12. The writer of Hebrews: Heb 2:1, 3:12-14. Armenians point to texts which urge believers to remain in the faith: Heb 6:11-12, 1 Cor 9:27.

That people do apostatize, Heb 6:4-6, 10:26-27. Where people have fallen away: Saul in 1 Sam 28:6, Judas, Ananias and Sapphira Acts 5:1-11, Hymenaeus and Alexander who shipwrecked their faith 1 Tim 1:19-20, Hymenaeus and Philetus 2 Tim 2:16-18, Demas 2 Tim 4:10, false teachers and those who follow them 2 Peter 2:1-2.

Two issues can be mentioned here. First, The Arminians make use of two basic methods in formulating their view. First, they focus on didactic passages (i.e. passages which are intended for instruction, moral instruction. Second, they point to historical and



biblical narratives which tell of specific people who apparently did fall away through didactic material. Arminians point to people from history and personal experience of people who at one time gave the appearance of being saved but who later abandoned the Christian faith. This is based on experience rather than on biblical teaching.

A Resolution:

Is there truth in both or do we choose between one or the other? One way to deal with this dilemma is to study the major texts which support both sides. The two key passages are John 10:27-30 and Hebrews 6:4-6. In John 10:27-30 John uses a double negative to make an emphatic point, “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.” or “They shall not, repeat, shall not ever perish in the slightest.”

For the Hebrews 6 passage there are three interpretations.

1. The writer has in mind genuinely saved persons who lose their salvation. It should be noted that once they have lost their salvation, there is no way to regain it. One cannot renew salvation, a point which Arminians ignore.
2. The persons in this passage were never true believers. They merely tasted the truth, were exposed to the word of God but they did not fully experience these heavenly gifts. They apostasize from the spiritual truth.
3. The people in this passage are genuine believers and permanently saved; they are not lost. Their salvation is real and the apostasy is hypothetical. The “if” clause does not really occur. The writer is saying what would happen if a true believer were to fall away (an impossibility).

Looking at these three options carefully the second option is difficult to accept. The description here is of true believers. There’s no other way to interpret the language. The choice must be between options 1 and 3.

Part of the difficulty in option 1 is interpreting “if they commit apostasy” or “if they fall away”. Verses 4-6 placed in context with verses 7-9, indicate that they are genuinely saved people who could fall away but verse 9 indicates that they will not fall away. Verses 4-6 explain what would happen if someone were to fall away. They could but they will not.

The persistence of the believers in verses 4-6,9 is evidence that they will not fall away. The writer of Hebrews knows that his readers will not fall away, he is convinced of better things regarding them, the things that accompany salvation (see verses 10-11).

While Hebrews 6 indicates that genuine believers can fall away, John 10 teaches that they will not. There is the possibility of apostasy, but it will not happen to true believers. The grace of God prevents them from apostasizing. God does this not by making it impossible for believers to fall away, but by making it certain that they will not. Again, true believers are capable of rejecting their faith, but will freely choose not to.



If salvation is permanent, what is the point of the warnings and commands given to the believers? They are a means by which God renders it certain that the saved individual will not fall away. Illustration.

It is not that God renders apostasy impossible by removing the very option. Rather, he uses every possible means of grace, including the warnings contained in Scripture, to motivate us to remain committed to him.

What about those who appeared to go apostate in the NT and OT? Saul was from a different dispensation. Looking at 2 Tim 2:17-18, Hymenaeus and Philetus were possibly not believers to begin with by looking at the context in verse 19. In 1 Timothy 1:19-20 is difficult to interpret because we do not know what it means that Paul delivered them over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme. When Paul remarks that they do not really know what they are saying may be an indication that they are not true believers. They swerve from the truth.

Hymenaeus and Alexander may have been believers who were disciplined for wandering from the truth, or they may have been superficially involved individuals who were cast out of the fellowship. As for Demas, there is insufficient evidence to come to the conclusion that true believers can fall away. Peter backslide (not apostasy) when he denied the Lord and early indications indicate that Judas was not a true believer. Judas was not a true believer according to Jesus in John 6:68-69.

Even less reliable is people from history or personal experience who seemed to become apostate. The difficulty here is one can look at persons who said they were never saved but were thought to be so. We must also distinguish between temporary backsliding such as Peter and real abandonment of the faith. Jesus warned of false prophets who come in sheep's clothing but who are ravenous wolves (Matt 7:15-23). People are to be evaluated by their fruits rather than their verbal claims.

The parables of the sower is another indication that what appears to be genuine faith may be something quite different (Matt 13:1-9, 18-23). Matt 7:16-20 according to Jesus is what makes a person truly regenerate. That is, those who bear fruit. Endurance is also important in Matt 24:12-13.

Our understanding of eternal security of the believer is not a room for becoming lax in our responsibilities and obedience to the word. Someone who says "now I'm saved and can live any way I want" may not be saved in the first place.

For further study:

Christian Theology by Millard Erickson. Pg. 985-997

The Online Bible, using Strong's Greek and Hebrew words, Matthew Henry's commentary.

Vines Expository dictionary of NT words.

NIV and Ryrie Study Bibles

