

Falling Away

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Some teach that once you're saved, you will always be saved and there's nothing you can do to lose your salvation. However this does not seem to be the case according to God's Word.

Below are thirty-three scriptures that indicate, either directly or indirectly, a person can fall away and lose his or her salvation.

1. Matthew 24:9 "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. 10 **At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other,**

Jesus tells us many will turn away from the faith during the end times.

2. Mark 4:16-17

16 Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. 17 But since **they have no root**, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, **they quickly fall away.**

These received the Word with joy! But they quickly fall away. Jesus' words are actually translated as "fall away."

3. Luke 8:13 **Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.**

This is the re-statement of the Mark 4:16-17 passage. However, it is an indication that the statement is not an aberration of Mark's Gospel.

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4. 1 Timothy 3:6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and **fall under the same judgment as the devil**. The Devil stands condemned (John 16:11). This verse indicates believers can fall into the same situation.

5. Hebrews 6:4-6

4 **It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened**, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, 6 **if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance**, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

7 Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. 8 **But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.** 9 Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case—**things that accompany salvation**. One who has “been enlightened,” in this context has “been saved.” And yet the passage clearly indicates falling away is a possibility. Not only that, but an analogy is made with land that produces thorns: that it will be burned.

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6. 2Peter 1:10 Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager **to make your calling and election sure.** For if you do these things, you will never fall,

Peter is writing to Christians, and yet he expresses the need to make your election sure, and indicates the possibility of falling.

7. 2Peter 3:17 Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, **be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position**

Peter says we can indeed fall from our secure position.

8. 1John 2:19 They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.

“They went out from us” tells us that some whom we thought were saved are not.

9. Acts 8:20 Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! 21 You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. 22 **Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.** 23 For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

We have every indication Simon was a believer, and was saved. But Peter strongly indicates his salvation was in jeopardy.

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10. Acts 5:1-5

1 Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. 2 With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

3 Then Peter said, "Ananias, **how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit** and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?

4 Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? **You have not lied to men but to God.**"

5 When Ananias heard this, **he fell down and died.** And great fear seized all who heard what had happened

There is no reason to conclude Ananias and Sapphira were not believers, but God judged them immediately. Would those who incur such judgment still be offered eternal joy?

11. Galatians 5:4 **You who are trying to be justified by law** have been alienated from Christ; you **have fallen away from grace.** This clearly says these Christians have fallen away from grace; they have been alienated from Christ.

12. Hebrews 4:1 Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us **be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.**

What would it mean to fall short of the promise of entering His rest?

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13. Revelation 2:4-5

4 Yet I hold this against you: **You have forsaken your first love.**
5 Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. **If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.**

What would it mean for these Christians to have their lampstand removed from its place?

14. Romans 1:7 & 2:5

1:7 To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:

...

2:5 But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, **you are storing up wrath against yourself** for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

Note: The passage is written to believers: "...loved by God and called to be saints".

These Christians were being chastized for their unrepentance. What form might God's wrath take against unrepentant ones?

15. Titus 3:10 Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, **have nothing to do with him.**

This ties in with 1Corinthians 5:1-5 and 11-13 where it says to hand such a one over to Satan. Would a Christian who is removed from fellowship have any share with the bride of Christ?

16. 1Timothy 5:20 Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may **take warning.** (NIV)

What is the purpose of the warning if it is not to prevent these others from falling away?

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17. 1Corinthians 5:1-5

1 It is actually reported that there is **sexual immorality among you**, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. 2 And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? 3 Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. 4 When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, 5 hand this man over to Satan, **so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.**

The strong indication here is that by handing this person over to Satan, he will repent and be saved on the day of the Lord; yet at the time of handing over, the person is not saved!

18. 1Corinthians 5:11-13

11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? 13 God judges those outside. "**Purge the evil person from among you.**" (ESV)

After having been brought under the forgiving grace, this passage indicates a brother who is put out of the Church! Can this person still be under same grace as before?

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19. James 1:21 Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, **which can save you.**

This passage is written to Christians. Living a holy life is part of what saves you.

20. Philippians 3:10-12

10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to **attain to the resurrection from the dead.** 12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, **but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.**

Salvation is inexorably linked to the resurrection from the dead, and yet, Paul is still working to attain it.

21. Romans 11:19-22

19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." 20 Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. 21 **For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.**

22 Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, **provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.** What does it mean to be cut off? It sounds like death for the branch to me.

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22. 1Corinthians 15:2 By this gospel **you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word** I preached to you. **Otherwise, you have believed in vain.**

The word “if” here is very important. It necessarily indicates, “if not,” you are not saved. If this is not the case, what does it mean to “believe in vain”?

23. 1Timothy 2:15 But women **will be saved** through childbearing—**if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.**

The word “if” here is likewise very important. It necessarily says, “if not,” you are not saved.

24. 1Corinthians 9:27 No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, **I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.**

Paul viewed himself as being in a situation in which it was possible for him to be disqualified for the prize. The prize is the crown that will last. Some might view this crown as being a reward, apart from salvation, as mentioned in 1Corinthians 3:12-15. I believe that to be out of context however, as it speaks of the daily activities that, while are not sinful, are of no spiritual account. Paul is talking about the overall race, and disqualification. 1Corinthians 3:12-15 is not talking about anything that would lead to disqualification—quite the contrary. (also see this text referenced below)

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25. 2Peter 2:1,4,9

1 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be **false teachers among you**. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even **denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves**. ...

4 For **if God did not spare angels when they sinned**, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment;...9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to ... hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment

The “teachers” had to be recognized as Christians in order to have been classed as “among you.” Then the comparison to angels that were not spared when they sinned, indicates these who were among them sinned ...and fell away ...and will not be spared..

26. Colossians 1:21-23

21 And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled 22 In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprieveable in his sight: 23 **If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel**, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister;

The word “if” here is again very important. If you do not “continue in the faith,” you will not be presented “unblameable and unreprieveable in his sight.”

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27. 2Tim.2:12

12 if we endure, we will also reign with him.

If we disown him, he will also disown us;

We will be disowned IF we disown him. We can be disowned!

28. Colossians 2:18 **Let no one cheat you of your reward**, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels,

We can be cheated out of our reward—most likely by Satan, if we let him! Again, some will say this is referring only to treasures in heaven, and not about salvation, as we addressed previously.

29. 1Timothy 4:1 The Spirit clearly says that in later times **some will abandon the faith** and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons

How much more clear can words be? Abandoning the faith can only be done by someone who had the faith to begin with. The idea of abandonment is synonymous with falling away.

30. Hebrews 10:26 If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left,

The subject (the context) of this passage is redemption from sin.

31. Mark 13:13 All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

These are the words of Jesus, and they clearly indicate we must stand firm to the end because our salvation is at stake.

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32. Ephesians 5:5 For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

This written to Christians as a warning after a stern enumeration of behaviors not to practice. Such a person has any inheritance in the Kingdom of God.

33. 2Timothy 1:15-18

15 As you know, all the Christians who came here from the province of Asia have deserted me; even Phygelus and Hermogenes are gone. 16 May the Lord show special kindness to Onesiphorus and all his family because he often visited and encouraged me. He was never ashamed of me because I was in prison. 17 When he came to Rome, he searched everywhere until he found me. . 18 May the Lord show him special kindness on the day of Christ's return. And you know how much he helped me at Ephesus.

Paul states all had deserted him. He requests God grant Onesiphorus special kindness, as if to indicate some special kindness was in order and needed.

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Objections:

Many try to defend the idea that you cannot fall away by using Romans 8:39

Romans 8:39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

However, the verse is stating that no external or third-party entity can separate us from the love of God—**not** that we can't reject it of our own will.

Other verses some use to say we cannot fall away are:

John 10:27-28 where Jesus said His sheep will never perish;

John 6:47 where salvation is described as everlasting life;

Romans 8:1 where it is said we have passed out of judgment;

1 Corinthians 10:13 where God promises to never let us be tempted beyond what we can handle;

and

Philippians 1:6 where God is the one being faithful to perfect us until the day of Jesus' return.

None of these verses indicate one cannot lose salvation. They don't even address the issue. They indicate the state of a believer.

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Wherever an "if" is used, as in the following verses, there is necessarily an "if not" alternative and a consequence.

Colossians 1:23

“If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel.”

So, “If you do *not* continue in the faith grounded and settled....”

John 15:14 You are my friends if you do what I command.

So, “If you do *not* do what I command....”

1Corinthians 15:2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

So, “If you do *not* hold firmly to the word....”

Then, there is the “They were never Christians in the first place” explanation:

That is, if you “fall away” you weren’t ever saved.

Matthew 7:22-23

22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

But then, how do you know you are a Christian now? How do you know you’re “saved” now? Those who “were not Christians in the first place” certainly thought they were Christians, as did many others around them, until they fell away! That’s a doctrine of mortal insecurity! If this can be said of those who

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have fallen away, you can't know you're saved until after you're dead!

It seems to me arrogant and flippant to haphazardly assert one cannot lose one's salvation. We cannot hold God hostage. God cannot tolerate a rebellious, sinful soul. The "wages of sin is death." Our faith must result in our continued efforts toward holiness. Faith is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for salvation. Even the devils believe and tremble!
(James 2:19)

(See also the documents "God's Elect" "Chosen" and "From the Foundations of the world")