

January 22, 2012

Matthew 24:15-25 / Rom. 8:28-39 / Rom. 11:19-26 / Hebrews 6:1-6
Most Pressing Questions Series (#3) - Can One Lose Their Salvation?

When Randy and I met this week, I told him: *"This is another topic where it's going to be hard to cover everything I need to cover in just one message."* Yet, I am going to try and attempt it anyway -- even at the risk of being misunderstood.

And since we have so much to cover, I'm going to jump right into reading you the question as presented by the person who asked it. A person who preferred to remain anonymous -- though the handwriting (to me) looks like that of a female, since it's too neat and artistic (in my opinion) to be that of a man! It goes like this:

"What does Matthew 7:21-23 (where Jesus says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 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? Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me you evil doers.'")...

What does that mean in light of John 10:27-29? (where Jesus says: "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.")

And in this case when Jesus claims to be "one" with the Father, I believe it means one in purpose, and not, one in essence. They are "one" is their unified purpose of holding on to believers so tightly and securely that once they have truly come to faith in Jesus, no one will ever be able to snatch them out of the grip of His grace.

And the questioner also went on to ask: ***"What is apostasy, and is it possible for someone to "lose their faith" or "fall away"? And where does Hebrews 6:1-6 (which I just read to you before I began) fit into all this?"***

And let me say this: Those are good, fair and legitimate questions to ask. In fact, I chose it out of the 15 or so that I received, because it's one that comes up over and over again, and deserves a well-reasoned response, regardless of which side of the argument, you or the one who asked the question, stand on.

Because it is easy to understand how someone might see them as contradictory / or be led to ask why there is a warning about falling away -- if falling away is not possible!

And since its actually three separate questions in one, I'd like to take each one as they come, and hopefully wind up with a conclusion based on what we learn from all three.

So **FIRST**, "***What does Matthew 7:21-23 mean in light of John 10:27-29?***"

And the most sensible response is that in Matthew, what Jesus is doing is assuring us that there is a world of difference between thinking we believe and thinking we know Christ as Lord / and truly believing and truly knowing Him as Lord.

There is a vast difference between simply confessing or saying Christ is Lord with our words / and actually believing upon Him with a faith that produces a submission and obedience to the stated will of God for us.

It's the same theme James speaks about in his epistle. And it's not hard to see why, because it's obvious to anyone who reads his epistle that he knew or had spoken with people in churches who claimed to be believers / and claimed to be saved / and even publically confessed Jesus as Lord / while everything in their life implied they did not believe and were not saved.

To use Jesus words in Matthew 7, they said with their lips: "Lord, Lord," but in their lives they never did the will of the One they were calling Lord. There was either no fruit or fruit that was entirely contrary to a life of faith.

And as James points out -- true faith / or saving faith / or a faith that justifies, reconciles and makes a person right with God / must bear some degree of the fruit of godliness or obedience over time (even if it's only in some slightly measurable way).

As I've mentioned before, quoting R. C. Sproul: "***We are saved by faith alone, but NOT by a faith that remains alone.***" That's James whole point. A faith that remains alone is "dead faith" and not saving faith. / A "faith" that is only evidenced (over time) by what one says -- and nothing else -- is not a faith that saves. ***FAITH which OVER TIME produces NOTHING but words / or NOTHING by way of obedience to Christ / will save nobody.***

In fact, (surprisingly) Jesus tells us there are people who will, "prophesy in His name" / and even possess some type of "faith" that enables them to "cast out demons" and "do miracles" / and yet be unsaved, unbelievers, who do not "know" Christ or have no saving relationship with Him.

And here it would do us well to remember: Even the Egyptian magicians and Simon Magnus in Acts 8 were able to do miracles (through whatever type of faith or magical arts they used) though they were not believers / and were not saved / and did not know Christ as Lord when they did them.

So we see: There are church-going people who will not only confess to be believers / but even do spiritual or miraculous things that we would normally think only Spirit-filled believers could do -- yet they will not be.

Therefore, what we find in these verses are NOT true believers turning away from the faith / or the saved losing their salvation / but people who merely "say" they're believers being shown for what they really were -- possessors a dead faith and not a saving faith. Because whatever type of faith they did have (if they had any faith at all) / it did not produce the fruit of obedience to Christ in their lives.

Was there spiritual activity going on their lives? Yes. / Did they share prophetic messages they claimed to be from God? Yes. / Did they use the Name of Jesus to cast out demons and actually have those demons flee? Yes. / And did they have a faith or tap into some type of power source that enabled them to do miracles (real ones)? Yes.

Yet despite the fact that they did all these thing "***in His name,***" God did not know them, for they did not belong to Him. In fact, He probably calls them "evildoers" because they were doing what they did with sinful / or self-

righteous / or self-centered motives (possibly for money like the false prophets) / or to get people to admire them like the Pharisees) / with no desire whatsoever to bring glory to Jesus or see people won to Christ.

So, what's the connection between Matthew 7:21-23 and John 10:27-29? ***There is none!*** For in Matthew Jesus is speaking of non-believers who are either deluded into thinking that all one has to do is say they believe / or are masquerading as believers for self-centered reasons.

While in John He's talking of His sheep who listen to His voice (His chosen ones / whom He Himself knows intimately and has called personally by name. / Those He has savingly graced / and latched hold of with His Almighty grip / and will never let go of!)

The two passages, then, are speaking of two entirely different groups of people -- true believers vs. mere talkers.

Then **SECONDLY**, our inquirer asked: ***"What is apostasy, and is it possible for someone to "lose their faith" or "fall away"?"*** As far as what apostasy is, I can tell you it comes from the Greek word "*apostasia*" which means "to stand apart, defect, separate from, turn away from or abandon." And therefore, in the Christian sense, it would be, "a willful falling away from, or rejection of, once held Christian truth. Primarily, it's the rejection of Christ by one who had previously professed Him, or had claimed at one time to be a Christian (some would say "had actually been Christian").

Yet this is the problem: The word "*apostasia*" only occurs twice in the entire NT, and only ONCE when used in this sense (II Thess. 2:3). And in that one passage it does not say if "apostasy" is the rejection of the faith by those who once truly believed and were saved / or the rejection of the faith by those who only confessed, and appeared to be saved, but really were not.

That's where the differences of opinion come in, because Scripture doesn't clarify that for us. All 2 Thess. 2:3 says is: ***"Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion (or the apostasy) occurs, and the man of lawlessness is revealed..."***

Yet this is where I Jn 2:18-19 is helpful. Because there he basically speaks of the same thing, and then *ADDS SOMETHING* that helps us understand apostates. Speaking of "antichrists" (that is, people once in the church who have not only turned away from the faith, but now speak against Christ and attack or persecute those who continue believe) -- Of **THEM** John says:

"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."

So, what do we have? We have people who at one time looked an awful lot like true believers! People other believers thought were believers! People who would have claimed to believe in Jesus / and had joined the church there in Ephesus / and had participated in the fellowship and worship.

And to do so they would have had to: Publically repent of their sins / publically confess Jesus as Lord (and be baptized in His Name) / at least claim to have experienced being born again of the Holy Spirit / and at a minimum have affirmed the most basic doctrines of the Christian faith.

Yet, despite of the fact that they had done all that (convincing even the church elders they were true believers and could thus join the fellowship) what does John say? ***"They did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But their going (apostasy) showed that none of them belonged to us."***

So, what's John's take on apostasy (because he is very clear on it)? He says that if a person apostatizes or turns away from the faith or renounces Christ / it's NOT an indication that they lost their salvation. / It's a revelation that they had never really had it in the first place.

It's NOT an indication that the person had saving faith and then lost it / or were saved and are now lost. It's a revelation that they had never truly born again of the Spirit and had never truly believed / or been justified / or saved / or reconciled to God / in the first place. John is pretty clear: ***"Their going out showed (or displayed or revealed) that none of them belonged to us."***

So to answer our inquirers question, what does the Bible have to say about this issue? It tells us that those who appear to have had faith / and then "lose it" or "fall away" / show themselves to have never really had it. And therefore, they don't really fall away, they display they were never really a part of it to begin with.

Which brings us to the **THIRD** question put forth by our anonymous enquirer: **"Where does Hebrews 6:1-6 fit into all this?"** And although the questioner asks about verses 1-6, I will focus mainly on vv. 4-6 since that's where the primary issue of contention lies.

There it says: "It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened / who have tasted the heavenly gift / who have shared in the Holy Spirit / who have tasted the goodness of the word of God / and the powers of the coming age / 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."

Now in our Wednesday Night Bible Study on Hebrews (back in 2009) we covered these verses in great depth for at least two, possibly three weeks running! Thus I'll share (in greatly condensed fashion) what I shared with that group.

And I hope you have your pencils ready, because some day someone is going to ask you about this! There are only 3 possible types of people we could be dealing with in these verses:

1st) Seekers, who are being or have been instructed, in the basics of the faith (as in vv. 1-3). / **2nd)** People who have been brought into the church fellowship on the basis of confessing faith in Jesus, yet as we've seen, have not yet truly been born again (or saved). / **And 3rd)** Truly converted, born again, Gospel-believing disciples who have placed all their faith and trust for salvation in Jesus and fall away.

And our job -- by looking at what he says -- is to try and determine which group or groups of people he's giving this warning to. And after much study, my own personal conviction is that he's referring to the first two groups and not the last -- though all must take this warning seriously.

Why do I say I believe it's the first two groups? **FIRST**, because of the verse that follows it states: ***"Land which drinks in the rain often falling on it and produces a crop useful to those who farm it, receives the blessing of God. But land which produces thorns and thistles is worthless and in danger of being cursed. It's end is to be burned."***

It's an agricultural metaphor. And in it, what type of land is being compared to those he is warning about apostasy? The land that produces nothing but thorns and thistles. And as we know from other metaphors in the NT, good soil or land that produces a harvest of fruit always refers to true faith and true believers / while bad soil or land that is fruitless, always refers to false believers or unbelievers -- Matt. 3:3-10 / Matt. 7:15-23 (which we already looked at) and Matt. 12:33-35.

The MOST trustworthy evidence of one's true spiritual condition is the fruit they bear in their life. And as Wayne Grudem points out, the fact that in this metaphor it's the bad land that produces the negative fruit he warns against, and bad land usually refers to unbelievers, it suggests that, ***"the author is talking about people who are not genuinely Christian."*** If they were genuine Christians, the soil of their lives would produce good fruit.

Then **SECONDLY**, although some have argued that the long list of things these people have experienced suggests they ARE truly born again -- the force of the argument loses its power to convince -- when we look at each of the 5 descriptions individually.

What is said of these people? They are people, ***"who have once been enlightened."*** Yet the Greek word used here, "photizo," simply refers to, ***"learning in general, and not a learning that stems from, or results in salvation."*** We know this because John uses this same word in Jn 1:9 where he writes: ***"The true light (that is, Jesus) who gives light to (or enlightens) every man, was coming into the world."***

And obviously, just because Jesus ***"gives light to every man,"*** it does not mean every man is saved, or as a result becomes a born again believer. The word "enlightened" simply suggests that the people in question had come to

grasp some of the truths of the Gospel -- like atonement for sin, or justification by faith. But it does not in any way prove in any way that they were saved people! For if it did then in light of John 1:9 we would have to say that all people are saved since he gives light to **"every man."**

Then, the next characteristic of these people is that they, **"have tasted the heavenly gift"** and **"have tasted of the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come."** And here, the key word is **"tasted."** For as Grudem again points out, **"Inherent in the idea of tasting is the fact that tasting is temporary, and one might decide not to accept that which is being tasted. For example...those crucifying Jesus, 'offered Him wine to drink, mingled with gall, but when he tasted it, He would not drink it."**

In fact, one of the most common ways to taste something is either to lick it, or take the smallest sip or morsel, and then, either spit it out or swallow it.

You see, one can "taste" without ever eating it / or swallowing it / or digesting it / or taking it into themselves. In fact, by choosing to use the word, "tasted" as opposed to the word, "received" or eaten" or "fed upon" he implies that their acceptance of it is questionable. / They're still in the "tasting" mode.

Therefore, FAR from convincing anyone that these verses refer to one who has received or accepted the heavenly gift (as a true believer would have) / or eaten and digested the Word of God (as a true believer would have) / or actually participated in the powers of the age to come and entered the kingdom of God (as a true believer would have)... / the persons described here have only "tasted of them" -- a word that suggests they have NOT IN ANY WAY committed to accepting, eating, swallowing, or digesting what they've been exposed to -- all of which indicate an unconverted person.

And the same is true even though these verses say these people have **"repented"** and **"shared in (or become partakers of) the Spirit."** These are really the only ones that could possibly be used to persuade someone that we are dealing here with true believers. Yet even here, the argument is NOT conclusive.

For as Jesus assures us in Luke 17:3-4, a person can "repent" and still go on to do the same exact thing "**seven more times that same day.**" Repentance, therefore, being no guarantee of a saving change of heart.

And likewise, to "share in" or "partake of" the Holy Spirit is odd language to use word to use when everywhere else in Scripture true believers are said to: "have the Spirit" (Rom. 8:9-11) / or have "received the Spirit" (I Cor. 2:12 / Acts 19:2) / or been "filled with the Spirit" (Acts 2:4) / or been "sealed by the Spirit" (Eph.4:30) / or been "given the Spirit" (I John 4:13) / or "baptized with the Spirit" (Acts 1:5) / or have the Spirit "living in within us."

Nowhere else in all of Scripture is a true believer said to "**share in**" or "**partake of**" the Holy Spirit. Which in the Greek is a word which can mean "*to have a close participation with*" (as in Heb. 3:14), but can also mean, to simply "*have a loose association with*" (as it does in Luke 5:7).

So what are we most likely talking about here? People who have been in a community of faith where the presence of the Holy Spirit was felt / and the power of the Spirit had been at work / to heal / and convict / and cause sorrow for sin / and even cause tears to flow / and joy to be experienced.

Yet for me, the most conclusive proof of all comes in v. 9 where we read: "**Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case — things that accompany salvation.**"

In other words, he doesn't see anyone in the church at that time as being included in this list, because of them, he is "confident of better things—things that accompany salvation." It's his way of assuring us that the people he describes in verses 1-6 do not have salvation. Because if they did, they would have those things that accompany salvation!

And **LAST** (ever so quickly) let me just say: **The warnings are given / and they are REAL / and if any person (even a true believer) were to do what the warnings forbid, they would be in grave eternal danger.** Too many people, schooled in a "once saved, always saved," environment / or taught, "eternal security" / mock, or laugh at, or ignore these warnings

completely to the detriment of their soul, forgetting that a truly saved person is kept in that state of grace, not by ignoring the warnings of Scripture, but by heeding them!

The person of true faith responds in faith to BOTH the promises and warnings of Scripture. In fact, let me close with Jesus words (which do give us reason to be cautious) where He says: ***"False prophets and false Christ's will come, and produce great signs and wonders, so as to deceive even the elect, if that be possible."***

Note that Jesus doesn't say: *"which is absolutely, unequivocally, impossible."* No. When it comes to sin and spiritual deception, Jesus wants even the elect to know they need to heed the warnings of the Bible, and always be alert, and never let sin remain unchecked in their soul.

Overconfidence in regard to one's "eternal security" is a very dangerous mindset to adopt when it comes to embracing, entertaining or toying around with sin -- even if you are a true believer. Passages like Rev. 3:1-6 and 3:14-22 make that very clear.

Hear me well: ***I do believe the "elect" ARE eternally secure.*** But I also know from Scripture, that even to the elect God gives very stern warnings that must be heeded -- warnings which if not heeded could indeed lead to the things He warns about.

They are **NOT** *"fake warnings"* which true believers or God's elect can simply look at and say, *"Nope, doesn't apply to me."* Because to do that, as Phillip Hughes writes, is to dismiss them (and with them major portions of Scripture) ***"as trifling, worthless, and ridiculous."*** They are **NOT** imaginary warnings. They are very, very real.

Yet as Jesus points out: ***The issue is NOT whether the elect need to take them seriously, but whether it's possible -- in the end -- for them not to!***