

What if a believer stops believing?

In answer to John 10:27 - 29 ("My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand") some will reply, "No one else can take me out of God's hand, but I can take **myself** out of His hand. If I stop believing, I will lose my salvation."

First of all, what kind of shepherd would Christ be if He could take care of the wolves and bears that seek to take their lives, but could not take care of the worst enemy the sheep have -- their own wandering nature which takes them out where the predators are?

In the second place, looking carefully at the Greek of the passage, it probably should be translated somewhat as follows: "I give unto them eternal life and they shall not, **no they shall not** [double negative] utterly destroy [the meaning of 'perish'] **themselves** [middle voice], neither shall **anyone** [else] snatch them out of My Father's hand."

The idea that if a believer stops believing he loses his salvation is based upon two misconceptions. First of all there is a failure to understand what happens when a man is saved.

Suppose a hunter sees something moving in the brush and, thinking it is a deer, pulls the trigger on his gun -- only to discover he has shot another hunter. He thinks to himself, "I moved my finger one way and the man fell dead. Now if I move it the other way he will come back to life!"

It doesn't work! It was not the moving of his finger that killed the man, it was the power packed in the shell that drove the bullet through his body. The movement of his finger only released that power. Once it is released, the finger has no more control.

So also it is not **faith** that saves, it is **grace** that saves. The faith only **releases** the power of **God** to do what **we can never undo**. When Paul tells the Philippian Jailor, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved" he is saying, in effect, "The gun is loaded, the power is in the shell, just pull the trigger!" Notice Ephesians 2:8 does not say, "By **faith** you are saved," but "by **grace** you are saved, **through** faith." That saving grace is described in 2 Cor. 8:9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." This grace is totally involved with what **Christ** has done. It is true, we cannot be saved without faith any more than the man would have died if the hunter did not pull the trigger. But when, by truly and wholly believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, we set God's saving power free to work, **God does what we can never undo!**

If we "lose our faith" He deals with that in the area of sanctification, not justification. He chastens His child, He does not disown him!

The second misunderstanding is equally important. While a **true** believer may at times have severe doubts and may even come to a place where he thinks he is not a Christian, losing his

profession, he will not **truly** "lose his faith." Christ prays for us, as He did for Peter, in that very area of our need.

Peter lost his courage, his loyalty, and even his profession, for he cursed and swore and twice said, "**I do not know the Man!**" (Matt. 26:72, 74). He was not happy with his denial, however, for when he saw Christ looking at him he went out and wept bitterly (Matt. 26:75). Later he told the other apostles, "I am going back to fishing for a living" (Kenneth S. Wuest's rendering of John 21:3), evidently thinking he had lost his commission as an apostle (John 21:3). Christ probed his heart, not by asking him, "Do you believe?" but "Do you love me?" Much as his faith seemed, even to Peter, to have failed, it was never in question with Christ, for He had prayed for Peter that his faith "fail not" (Luke 2:31, 32). That He does the same for us is set forth in Heb. 7:25 -- "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

While "the Lord knoweth them that are His" (2 Tim. 2:19) it is very difficult for us to know this concerning those about us. The lengths to which profession can masquerade as faith, and the depths to which a believer may fall in his life, make it easy for us to be deceived. If Judas had been killed by some over zealous Pharisee before he sold Christ, and Peter had had a fatal heart attack right after he had denied Him, those looking on could have put Judas down as a martyr and Peter as a counterfeit.

It is sadly possible for an unsaved person to **profess** faith, **appear** for a long time to live the life, and then turn his back on it. Such people were never saved in the first place and have nothing to lose. But those who have truly trusted Christ need not fear that lapses in faith, serious and heartbreaking as they are, will cost them their souls.

---- William P Heath. Bible Study # 63-B

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See Bible Study # 63-A -- the original, and flawed, version. (< bibstudy\unfaith.sam > -- AmiPro)