

SALVATION

Protestant Position (Presbyterians and Baptists) All true Christians, regardless of how they live, have an absolute assurance of salvation, once they accept Jesus into their hearts as their personal Lord and Savior. It's called "once saved, always saved".

Catholic Position Salvation is a process instead of a one-time deal. Christians have a moral assurance of salvation, i.e. God will be true to His word and will grant salvation to those who have faith in Christ and are obedient to Him till the end.

Salvation as a Continuing Process The Bible speaks of salvation as a past, present and future event.

Past :

"For by grace you have been saved through faith" (Eph 2:8).

"For in hope we were saved" (Rom 8:24).

"He saved us and called us to a holy life..." (2 Tim 1:9).

"... he saved is through the bath of rebirth..." (Tit 3:5).

Present :

"... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12).

"... as you attain the goal of faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet 1:9).

Future :

"Our salvation is nearer than we first believed" (Rom 13:11).

"... the person will be saved, but only as through fire" (1 Cor 3:15).

"... you are to deliver this man to Satan... so that his spirit may be saved" (1 Cor 5:5)

"Christ, offered a second time,... to bring salvation " (Heb 9:28).

That justification is a process is evident in James too : Abraham is justified in Genesis 15 (James 2:23) and in Genesis 22 (James 2:21). It is not a one-time event.

Salvation Can Be Earned? The New Covenant is not a system of works-righteousness whereby a person can please God and earn heaven by doing a number of good deeds. As stated in Ephesians 2, none of those things which precede justification – whether faith or works – merit the grace itself of justification. This sanctifying grace comes from God, but if we are disobedient and sin, we are turning away from the free gift of grace and redemption.

Mortal Sin In 1 John 5:16-17, it is stated that some sins are mortal, some not. Any mortal sin leads to a loss of sanctifying grace and the risk of eternal damnation if we should die in this state. The Church defines mortal sins as sins whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent.

Heaven Guaranteed? Some Protestants often use Romans 8:39, Romans 10:9 and John 10:28 to address that salvation is a one-time deal. It is true that nobody is capable of removing you from the grace of God, but it does not mean that we are incapable of severing our own relationship with Him and forfeit the free gift of salvation.

In John 15, Jesus tells the apostles to remain in his love by keeping his commandments. But he who does not remain in his love is *"cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned"*. Similarly, Paul reminds Christians of God's severity and kindness: *"...severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you too will be cut off"* (Romans 11:22-23). He also warns, *"If we have died with him we shall also live with him; if we persevere we shall also reign with him"* (2 Tim 2:11-12). If we do not preserve, we shall not reign with him. In other words, heaven is not guaranteed.

Paul again warns Christians against being overconfident: *"Whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care not to fall"* (1 Cor 10:11-12), and *"I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified"* (1 Cor 9:27). This is not the language of "once saved, always saved".

History of "Once Saved, Always Saved" The first person to espouse the idea of "once saved, always saved" was John Calvin in the mid 16th century. Even Martin Luther didn't subscribe to the theory. Prior to Calvin, the unanimous consent of the early Christians was that a person is capable of losing his salvation by committing mortal sin.

In the 1st century, the *Didache* (Teaching of the Twelve Apostles) said, "Watch for your life's sake. Let not your lamps be quenched, nor your loins unloosed; but be ready, for you know not the hour in which our Lord comes. But you shall assemble together often, seeking the things which are befitting to your souls: *for the whole time of your faith will not profit you, if you be not made complete in the last time*" (*Didache* 16 [A.D. 70]).

In the 2nd century, Irenaeus wrote, "[God] may, in the exercise of his grace, confer immortality on the righteous, and holy, and *those who have kept his commandments, and have persevered in his love*, some from the beginning, and others from their penance, and may surround them with everlasting glory" (*Against Heresies* 1:10:1 [A.D. 189]).

READING

Halloween, High Street, and Holy Witnesses (*This Rock*, May/June 2001)

Further Research

- What happens to a righteous man who turns to wickedness at the end of his life? (Ezekiel 33:7-20)
- Is there salvation outside the Church? Are all Buddhists, Muslims and Jews condemned?