



Accents & Issues

Assurance of the Believer

Jesus and his apostles teach that those who believe in Jesus receive eternal life, which is both a new life in the present and a future hope to be fully realized in the last day. Jesus offers these words of assurance, “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” (John 10:27-28). Paul teaches that as believers we are adopted as God’s children (Eph. 1:5) and marked with a seal of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13) and that nothing can separate us from God’s love (Rom. 8:38-39). Jude assures us that God is able to keep us from falling (Jude 24).

If we receive Jesus as Savior and remain in him, we are eternally secure, protected by God’s power. If we stray from the faith like the lost sheep, we have a defender before God the Father, Jesus the righteous (1 John 2:1), and a way back to full fellowship with God through repentance and confession (1 John 1:9). God in his grace will restore his children who have strayed (Luke 15:4-6).

While believers are eternally secure in Jesus the Christ, we can forfeit that security. God will not keep us against our will. From creation God has given us free choice (Gen. 2:16-17). We choose to respond in saving faith to God’s offer of salvation, and our life in Christ continues by choice. By receiving Jesus, we do not surrender the right to make subsequent choices. If a child of God chooses to abandon or renounce faith, God respects that choice (1 Tim. 4:1).

The Scriptures also speak of those who appear to have faith in Jesus and identify with his followers but never become true believers. Jesus at one point referred to them as wolves in sheep’s clothing (Matt. 7:15). He also spoke of those who say: “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?” The Lord’s reply is, “I never knew you” (Matt. 7:22-23). John speaks of antichrists who “went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. ... their going showed that none of them belonged to us” (1 John 2:19). These sobering words add significance to Peter’s admonition: “be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure” (2 Pet. 1:10).

The Christian life is a delightful walk with the Lord in maturing faith and growing obedience, but it is not without pitfalls and challenges, severe trials, and subtle temptations. In the face of life-threatening persecution, a wavering believer may choose to renounce a profession of faith in Jesus. Disappointment or fear could lead to a bitter, blatant rejection of the divine love and grace once embraced. Persistent and willful sinning without repentance leads to hardness of heart. Such apostasy is a choice or, more likely, a sequence of choices. Hymenaeus, Alexander, and Philetus are examples from Scripture of believers who rejected the faith (1 Tim. 1:19-20; 2 Tim. 2:16-18).

Jesus spoke of persecution from false prophets, warning that many will turn away from the faith, but he also offered the assurance that those who stand firm to the end will be saved (Matt. 24:9-13). Similarly John the Revelator promised that those who are faithful unto death will receive a crown of life (Rev. 2:10) but also cautions that a share in the tree of life and the holy city can be taken away (Rev. 22:19).

In a similar vein, referring to those who having once known our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ but are later overcome by the corruption of this world, Peter writes,

It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them (2 Pet. 2:21).

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These strong words of caution contrast with Peter's encouraging words:

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:10-11).

This assurance is rooted in the abundant provisions and promises of God. While the warnings concerning a possible return to unbelief and the urgent call to faithfulness are not to be taken lightly, our confidence rests in God's power to keep those who trust him and walk in his ways. Jude assures those who keep themselves in God's love that God is able to keep them from falling (Jude 21, 24). God is at work in the lives of believers enabling them to act according to his good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13). God will preserve faithful believers without blame for the day of his coming (1 Cor. 1:8-9; 1 Thess. 5:23-24).

As believers we rejoice in the assurance that God's power is more than adequate to keep us from falling. In Christ we are secure; nothing but our own rebellion can separate us from the love of God, who enables us to endure to the end, to finish the race, and to win the prize — eternal life.

