

Once Saved, Always Saved?

For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overpowered, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. ~ 2 Peter 2:20-21

IS IT POSSIBLE TO KNOW with absolute certainty that we are saved?

God's desire is that we know him with ease, firm certainty, and without error. For this purpose he has revealed himself in history and Sacred Scripture (see CCC 50-53). John 20:31 says, "*These [things] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.*" God has revealed everything that is necessary for us to know to obtain salvation. From this, we know that it is his desire that we have confident hope in his offer of salvation, which is his free gift to us.

However, God's grace is never in opposition to human freedom. God desires us to freely choose him; therefore, his offer of salvation is always extended to us as a gift that we are free to accept or reject. Even the great apostle Paul knew the importance of persevering in faith. He wrote, "*I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air; but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified*" (1 Cor 9:26-27).

Some Christians interpret certain passages of Scripture to mean that, once salvation is accepted by faith, it is "eternally secure," even if the believer later falls into habitual, serious sin. They may phrase this belief as "once saved, always saved." This poses a difficulty since Sacred Scripture is clear that some choices disqualify us from participation in God's life. "*Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger; selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God*" (Gal 5:19-21). St. Paul also writes: "*The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we shall also live with him; if we endure,*

we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us" (2 Tm 2:11-12). Many Christians who believe "once saved, always saved" explain this problem by concluding that a believer who later falls into serious sin did not experience a genuine conversion, or that his or her faith was not sincere, even though at the time it seemed sincere. However, this poses the further problem that the only way to determine if our faith is sincere is if we never fall into serious sin. Since none of us knows for sure what we may do in the future, this would make it impossible for anyone to ever know the way of salvation.

Yet God's desire is that we have a sure and steadfast hope, based on his revealed truth. "*For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope*" (Rom 15:4). "*We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf*" (Heb 6:19-20).

We must always be on guard that our selfish free choices do not separate us from God's gift of mercy and grace, but we can have absolute confidence in God's intention to lavish his love and mercy upon us. Jere-

miah, a prophet of the Old Testament, wrote, "*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness*" (Lam 3:22-23).

God has graciously given us the means of salvation, which include a way to receive forgiveness even for serious sins. By continually saying "Yes" to the gift of God's grace, we can have firm confidence that, through his mercy, we will indeed receive the outcome of our faith, the salvation of our souls (see 1 Pt 1:9).

(CCC 600, 1817-1821, 2016)



Christ in Glory, 13th century illuminated manuscript, from an English Psalter