

## The Possibility of Apostasy

Tim Haile

Is it possible for a child of God to behave in such a way so as to be eternally lost? Many people from a cross-section of religious backgrounds believe and teach that such is not possible. They hold to the doctrine of the *"impossibility of apostasy."* This doctrine is otherwise known as *"once saved always saved," "cannot fall from grace," "eternal security," "perseverance of the saints,"* and the *"preservation of the saints."* As we shall see in this study, the Bible teaches that apostasy **is possible**. It is possible for one to *fall from grace* (Galatians 5:4), to *fall away from the faith* (1 Timothy 4:1) and to *fall away from God* (Hebrews 3:12). Judas *"fell by his own transgression"* (Acts 1:25). **It cannot be said that one "fell" if no change occurred in his position, condition or circumstance.** This answers the "never-saved-to-begin-with" quibble that is often made by denominationalists.

It is easy to see why the *once-saved-always-saved* doctrine is so popular and appealing: If true, no *believer* would ever need to be concerned about his behavior, regardless of how godless, sinful or inhumane that behavior might be. Some proponents of the *can't-fall-away* theory have argued that they could die *"in the very act of sin,"* including the act of cold-blooded murder, and still be guaranteed a place in heaven. We are told that salvation is guaranteed to the believer even in the absence of any repentance or remorse on his part for the sins that he has committed. This is not what the Bible teaches.

While I grant that the notion of eternal security is indeed comforting, this comfort is based upon a lie. It provides a false hope. Just feeling good about a theory does not make it fact. *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death"* (Prov. 14:12; 16:25). In the spiritual realm we must look to God's word in order to determine the legitimacy of ideas. We must *"prove all things and hold fast that which is good"* (1 Thess. 5:21). The Bible repeatedly teaches and demonstrates that it is possible for a child of God to conduct himself in such a way that he loses his salvation. Paul said, *"But the Spirit explicitly says that in the later times some will fall away from the faith"* (1 Tim. 4:1). Though a coming *apostasy* was the subject of *explicit* affirmation by the Holy Spirit, yet some religionists affirm that such a condition *"is not possible."* This claim directly contradicts the Scriptures. Will we accept the *"explicit"* affirmations of the Holy Spirit, such as recorded by the apostle Paul, or will we accept the claims of mere men?

### Apostasy Passages

**Ezekiel 33:12, 13** - *"The righteousness of the righteous man will not save him when he disobeys...The righteous man, if he sins, will not be allowed to live because of his former righteousness. If I tell the righteous man that he will surely live, but then he trusts in his righteousness and does evil, none of the righteous things that he has done will be remembered; he will die for the evil he has done."*

The objection might be raised that this passage is invalidated on the basis that it is an Old Testament passage. As we shall see later, Paul, Peter, Jude and the Hebrew writer, all cite Old Testament examples of apostasy in their efforts to warn New Testament Christians. For now, let it at least be admitted that apostasy *was possible* in Old Testament times.

Jeremiah repeatedly warned the Jews against “backsliding.” The word “backsliding” means to *defect* or *turn away*. Many of Jeremiah’s brethren had *turned away from God*, and were about to be severely punished for it.

**Jeremiah 3:6** – “The Lord said also to me in the days of Josiah the king: ‘Have you seen what backsliding Israel has done? She has gone upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there she has played the harlot.’” (see also **Jeremiah 3:8, 11, 12, 14, 22; 8:5; 31:22; 49:4**, NKJV)

I remind the reader that Jeremiah prophesied against the house of Judah and the city of Jerusalem, warning them of God’s judgment against them because of their sins. The book describes the Babylonian siege and invasion of Judea. Many were killed by famine, sword and pestilence. Many others were transported to Babylon where they served as slaves for 70 years. The city of Jerusalem and Solomon’s great Temple were devastated and the religious articles of the Temple were carried to Babylon.

**Luke 8:11-15** – The parable of the sower shows the fallacy of the once-saved-always-saved doctrine. By identifying the “seed” as the “word of God,” Jesus links the parable to the subject of *salvation*. The gospel of Christ is “the power of God to **salvation**” (Rom. 1:16). The “way-side” hearers of verse 12 were never saved at all, for the faith-producing seed of God’s word (Rom. 10:17) was not permitted to take root. The “rocky” ground hearers were different, in that they did “believe” God’s word (v. 13). However, shallow rooting caused them to “fall away” in a time of temptation. Jesus plainly teaches the possibility of apostasy.

**Luke 22:3** – Like the other apostles, Judas Iscariot was personally selected by Christ (Lk. 6:12-16). Of Judas, Peter said, “He was numbered among us, and was allotted his share in the ministry” (Acts 1:17). It is notable that after citing Judas as one of the 12 apostles, Luke added, “who became a traitor.” Along with this, Luke 22:3 describes the time when “Satan entered into Judas...” Obviously, Judas was not *born* a traitor: he *became* one. Satan was not *always* in Judas: Satan *entered* Judas when he made the financial arrangements with the chief priests and officers for the betrayal of Christ (Lk. 22:4, 5). Judas’ conduct was later described by Peter as constituting *wickedness* (Acts 1:18), and Peter went on to say that “Judas by transgression *fell*” (Acts 1:25). In order to “fall,” one had to have previously *stood*. Jesus described him as being “lost” [the “son of perdition,” Jn. 17:12]. Judas was not always “lost.” He became lost as a result of his godless actions against Christ.

**John 15:1-6** – The parable of the vine and the branches well demonstrates the possibility of apostasy. The “branches” of the passage are individuals: “Every

*branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away...*" (v. 2). "If **anyone** does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch..." (v. 6). Like the olive tree analogy of Romans 11, the parable of the vine and branches illustrates the possibility of apostasy. As a branch can die, become unproductive, and must then be pruned, a Christian can become unfaithful and must be pruned from the vine of Christ. Will such a person really be lost if he doesn't repent? Listen to Jesus: "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (Jn. 15:6). "Fire" is the eternal fate of the wicked (Matt. 13:42; Mk. 9:44, 46, 48; Jud. 7). The application is clear: One who once enjoyed fellowship with Christ can conduct himself in a way that results in his being severed from Christ and worthy of everlasting punishment.

**Acts 5:1-10** - In a time of great need among believers in the early church (Acts 4:32-37), Ananias and Sapphira joined others in selling personal property and contributing to the benevolent cause. However, they were killed by a direct act of God because they lied about how much money they had given. One might somehow argue that Ananias and Sapphira's deaths did not imply their fall from grace. However, Peter accused them of "testing the Spirit of the Lord" (v. 9). This is what rebellious Jews did to God in the wilderness (Heb. 3:9), which resulted in their not being admitted into "rest." The Hebrew writer goes on to explain that this "rest" was more than just the land of Canaan: It was ultimately *Heaven* (Heb. 4:7-11). Furthermore, God did not strike people down because they were doing things that pleased him (consider Herod, Acts 12:20-23). Rather, He struck down those who *displeased* Him. We must therefore conclude that God **condemned** Ananias and Sapphira for their actions.

**Acts 8:13-24** - Simon, the former sorcerer of Samaria, "also believed and was baptized..." That is, he responded to the gospel in precisely the same way as did other Samaritans. This means that he received the remission of sins and was **saved** (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16). Some time after being saved, Simon committed a sin. He saw what happened as the result of apostles laying their hands upon believers, and he desired that ability. Peter charged him with *wickedness*, saying that he was "in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity." His rebuke was effective and Simon repented. Those who insist that apostasy is impossible are forced to argue that Simon was "not really saved to begin with." This claim has absolutely no scriptural support. What we know from Scripture is that Simon met the same conditions of salvation, as did others who were saved. To affirm otherwise is to speak presumptuously, and not as the oracles of God.

**Acts 20:30** - Speaking to the elders of the Ephesian church, Paul warned of a coming apostasy. It would be spawned by false teachers from without, and from corrupt leaders from within. Paul said, "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." "Draw" disciples "away" from what? Verse 32 supplies the answer. Disciples would be drawn away from their *inheritance* in sanctification. They would lose their salvation. They would fall from grace.

**Romans 11:11-24** – Paul used the pruning and grafting process to describe the “fall” of certain Jews (vs. 11, 12) and the salvation of certain Gentiles. Unbelieving Jews were “broken off” and believing Gentiles were “grafted in” (Rom. 11:17, 20, 23, 24). So, what happened to branches that were broken off? They lost *life* as a result of their losing connection to the “*root and fatness*” of the olive tree. What is true in the natural realm is also true in the spiritual realm. God’s spiritual laws are as inflexible as his physical laws (Gal. 6:7, 8). This means that just as a tree branch can no longer sustain physical life after it is severed from the tree, a child of God can no longer sustain [spiritual] life after he is severed from Christ.

**1 Corinthians 5** – A “brother” (v. 11) in the church at Corinth was having sexual relations with his father’s wife. Paul described the unusual nature of this sin when he said that it was “*not so much as named among the gentiles, that one should have his father’s wife*” (v. 1). This man’s behavior was wrong, but also wrong was the tolerance of his behavior by the Corinthian church. Paul condemned these sins, and the necessary corrections were subsequently made (2 Cor. 2:6; 7:11). But what was the spiritual condition of the fornicator before his repentance? If he remained saved, why did Paul command the Corinthians to withdraw their association from him (vs. 4, 5, 9, 11, 13)? Did the fornicator remain *saved* while engaging in sin? The “once-saved-always-saved” proponent will have to say yes. However, the Bible says differently. By comparing the list of sins in 1 Corinthians 5:11 with the list in chapter 6:9, 10, we learn that a Christian can commit the same sins that can be committed by a non-Christian. We also learn the consequence of these sins. Paul said that those who do such things “*shall not inherit the kingdom of God*” (1 Cor. 6:9, 10). This means that before his repentance and forgiveness, the Corinthian fornicator had lost his access to heaven – he had fallen from grace.

**1 Corinthians 9:27** – Just before discussing the wilderness apostasies, the *apostle* Paul had described the possibility of *his own* apostasy. He wrote, “*But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified (reprobate).*” Was apostasy possible for Paul, but not for us? Paul was a man of like passions as we are (Acts 14:15), but is someone prepared to argue that our salvation is more sure than Paul’s?

**1 Corinthians 10:1-12** – As I mentioned before, some may think it inappropriate to consult Old Testament teaching and examples when addressing the topic of salvation. However, that is precisely what this *New Testament* passage does. The apostle Paul cited Old Testament examples of apostasy in order demonstrate the possibility of apostasy today. Like Christians today, the Jews of old were God’s chosen people (1 Pet. 2:9; Ex. 19:5, 6). As Christians are baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27), the Jews were baptized into Moses (1 Cor. 10:2). However, some “*did not please God*” and were “*scattered in the wilderness*” (1 Cor. 10:5). We are twice told in this chapter that, “*these things are examples*” that we “*should not lust after evil things as they also lusted*” (1 Cor. 10:6, 11). These stories are related for the benefit of those on whom “*the ends of the worlds are come.*” These apostasy examples are

given for *our* benefit. That this is Paul's purpose is obvious from the next verse, which says, "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). The Greek word for "fall" suggests a change in one's circumstance or condition. In this case, as in the Old Testament examples cited by Paul, one "falls" from God's favor. His condition changes from being approved by God to being disapproved; from being saved, to being lost.

**2 Corinthians 6:1** - Paul cautioned the Corinthians against "*receiving the grace of God in vain*" (2 Cor. 6:1). God's grace can be rejected by man. Since "*the grace of God that brings salvation*" is manifested in the form of *teaching* (Tit. 2:11), then to reject that teaching is to reject God's grace. Since our salvation is contingent upon our living according to this teaching (Tit. 2:12; 2 Jn. 9), then to reject the teaching of Christ is to fall away from the faith (*see Rom. 10:17 for the connection between God's word and man's faith*).

**Galatians 2:11-14** - Paul spoke of the *possibility* of his own apostasy, but to the Galatians he described a time in the apostle Peter's life when Peter actually *did fall away*. Peter committed the sin of *hypocrisy* by disassociating from Gentiles upon the arrival of certain influential Jews. Paul withstood Peter to the face because "*he stood condemned.*" Paul's language is severe, but only because Peter's actions had such severe consequences. Though an apostle, Peter sinned and "*stood condemned*" as a result. Are we to believe that apostasy was possible for the apostle Peter, but not for us?

**Galatians 5:1-4** - Certain men of Paul's time were teaching that one had to become a Jew in order to become a Christian. They required non-Jews to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses if they wished to be saved. Paul wrote, "*Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by the law; **you have fallen from grace.***" Paul's language is clear. Those who seek justification from the Law of Moses fall from God's favor! Interestingly, two prominent religious errors are simultaneously answered by these verses: 1) the doctrine of the impossibility of apostasy, and 2) the doctrine of justification by the Law of Moses. Paul teaches that apostasy is possible, and that it is wrong to use the Law of Moses for our standard of religious authority today.

**2 Thessalonians 2:1-12** - Certain ones at Thessalonica had reached the faulty conclusion that the return of Christ was eminent. In this second epistle to them, Paul assured the saints that such was not the case. He foretold of a "*falling away*" or "*rebellion*" that would occur before the return of Christ (v. 3). He said these people would "perish" because they "*refused to love the truth and so be saved*" (v. 10). Notice the interchangeable terms: "*falling away,*" "*perishing,*" and "*(not) saved.*" How can anyone honestly claim that apostasy is impossible? As we shall see a little later, Paul also told Timothy of a coming apostasy (1 Tim. 4:1).

According to 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15, some brethren were so affected by the false doctrine of the eminent return of Christ that they had quit their jobs and had become troublemakers and busybodies. Paul instructed faithful saints to disassociate from these rebels for the purpose of evoking shame in them. Some have cited verse 15 of this chapter in an effort to prove that since rebellious people are still classified as “brethren,” then they must still be *saved*. This, however, does not necessarily follow. As subsequent passages reveal, the term “brethren” does not inherently suggest “salvation.” “Brethren” can “*err from the truth*” and “*depart from the living God,*” and “*fall*” from steadfastness (Jas. 5:19; Heb. 3:12; 2 Pet. 1:10; 3:17, 18).

**1 Timothy 1:19, 20** – Paul said that Hymenaeus and Alexander committed blasphemy, thus renouncing and “*making shipwreck*” of their faith. Paul individually took the same action against them that he commanded the Corinthians to take against the fornicator (he “*delivered*” them “*to Satan*”). They had fallen away.

**1 Timothy 3:6** – In giving the qualifications of an elder, Paul said, “*He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.*” To serve as an elder in a local church one must meet certain qualifications relating to faith and practice. Yet, an elder can *fall* into “*condemnation.*” We have seen in equally clear expressions of truth that *apostles* could fall, and we will later see that *angels* can fall. We here see that *elders* can fall. Are we to believe that angels, apostles and elders can apostatize, but other servants of God cannot?

**1 Timothy 4:1** – “*But the Spirit explicitly says that in the later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of devils.*” Like Acts 20:30 and 2 Thessalonians 2, this passage predicted an actual apostasy. Some *would definitely* fall away. Was the Holy Spirit wrong? No, and this means that those are wrong who teach that apostasy is not possible.

**1 Timothy 6:9** – “*But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.*” While it might be argued that the word “*destruction*” may have reference to the *physical* consequences of materialism, this cannot be said of the word “*perdition*” (Gr. *Apoleia*). The word is used predominately of *spiritual* destruction. This means that Paul is here warning the people of the increased risk of *apostasy* that is associated with being rich.

**2 Timothy 2:17, 18** – In this passage, Hymenaeus is linked to Philetus, and the two are charged with uttering “*profane and vain babblings.*” Specifically, they taught the erroneous doctrine that the resurrection had already happened, which overthrew the faith of some. The fate of false teachers is eternal “*destruction*” (2 Pet. 2:1), but notice also the fate of their victims: Their faith was *overthrown*.

**2 Timothy 4:10** – Paul reported that “Demas” had “forsaken” him, *“having loved this present world.”* This constituted apostasy, for those who “love the world” do not have the love of God within them (1 Jn. 2:15-17).

**Hebrews 2:1-4** – *“Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we reject so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by those who heard him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will?”* This is just the first of many apostasy warnings that are issued by the Hebrew writer. While this passage lacks the strong language that we will see in subsequent apostasy passages of the book, it does emphasize the role of *free agency* when apostasy does occur. The fault is not with God or His word. Apostasy is the fault of man. It is the result of his free but faulty choice. According to this text, by departing from God’s instructions a child of God “drifts away” and “rejects salvation.” There is no need, as John Calvin felt compelled to do, to invent a theory about the *indefectibility of God’s grace*. God’s grace is certainly indefectible, but that is not the issue. Calvin’s concoction was unnecessary because it was based upon the prior false assumption that the elect are saved by an irresistible act of God, and that God can’t be wrong in His soul-saving selections. Calvin was consistent, howbeit consistently *wrong*. He failed to understand *free agency*: that trait that enables man to choose *salvation*. Obviously, free agency also enables one to later choose that he no longer wants that salvation. Apostasy is as much a free will choice as salvation. Calvin didn’t see salvation as a matter of human choice, so he was forced to conclude that apostasy was not possible. Yet, according to the above text, it is possible.

**Hebrews 3:12, 13** – *“Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called ‘today,’ so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”* As we shall see in James 5, the writer speaks to “brethren.” He refers to them as “partakers in Christ” (vs. 14). Even so, it was possible for these brethren to “fall away from the living God.” The Hebrew writer had just cited the fate of the wilderness wanderers of old, that they were denied access to the “rest” that God had prepared for them. The Hebrew writer develops his argument into chapter 4, making the application to God’s people of *this* dispensation. He says, *“Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief”* (Heb. 4:11). His point is clear: Just as Old Testament rebels were denied access to “rest” (Canaan and Heaven), New Testament rebels will be denied access to “rest” (Heaven). The statement in Hebrews 3:12 is clear, and its implications are inescapable – sin can cause a child of God to lose his heavenly reward.

**Hebrews 6:4-6** – *“For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit and have*

*tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to an open shame."* Though there has always been controversy over the identity of the apostates here described, one thing is certain: **they could fall away!** As we shall see in our next passage, the writer appears to be describing Christians; those who after being converted return to their former condemned state. Impossible renewal is the result of one rejecting the sacrifice of Christ (*as we shall see from Heb. 10:26, 29*).

**Hebrews 10:26-29** - This passage suggests that the fallen ones of the previous passage were *simply Christians*. As in 3:12, they are identified as "brethren" (10:19). However, they were brethren for whom *"there remains no sacrifice for sins"* because they *"go on sinning willingly after receiving the knowledge of the truth."* By forsaking the assembly, these brethren refused to avail themselves of the God-given means by which they could be stimulated *"to love and good deeds"* (Heb. 10:24, 25). By their willful sin, these saints would eventually experience the *terror* of God's eternal *vengeance* (Heb. 10:10, 31). Their punishment will be severe because they have *"trampled under foot the Son of God, regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which He was sanctified, and insulted the Spirit of Grace"* (Heb. 10:29).

A constant quibble of the proponents of the "once-saved-always-saved" doctrine is that such people "must have never been saved in the first place." However, this argument ignores the plain affirmations of many of these apostasy passages. Let us remember that the Hebrew writer spoke to *"brethren."* These were people who could *"confidently enter the holy place by the blood of Christ"* (Heb. 10:19). In fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy (Jer. 31:34; Heb. 10:18), they had received the *"remission of their sins."* There can be no doubt - they were saved. However, by rejecting the truth and ignoring their duty they would become the objects of God's wrath and vengeance.

**Hebrews 10:39** - *"But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul."* Note that it is possible for one to "shrink back" or "draw back to destruction." As I pointed out in my comments on verses 26-29, these were "brethren," however they were capable of going from a state of salvation to a state of "destruction." According to 2 Thessalonians 1:9, "destruction" is not *salvation*; it is "punishment." It is eternal existence away from the presence of God.

**Hebrews 12:5-17** - Christians are "sons of God," but the child of God who sins against God and refuses to be corrected is classified as an "illegitimate son" (KJV, "bastard"). The writer said, *"If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then are you illegitimate, and not sons"* (Heb. 12:7, 8). Lest one attempt to argue that being classified as "illegitimate" does not amount to falling from grace, let us consider the example that is immediately cited by the Hebrew writer: Esau was the firstborn son of Isaac, and



per the law of progeneriture, he was to receive the birthright. However, failing to respect the value of his birthright, he sold it to Jacob *“for a morsel of food”* (Gen. 25:33; Heb. 12:16). This resulted in the subsequent loss also of the blessing [by God’s design, Rom. 9:11-13, for nor *“profane person”* was fit to be the progenitor of the Abrahamic blessing]. Thus, Esau, though Isaac’s son, lost the blessings and privileges of son ship by his own godless behavior. This is exactly what happens to the child of God today when he turns from God and engages in godless behavior. He loses the blessings of son ship. He loses his salvation.

**James 5:19, 20** – *“Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.”* Again, Bible teaching on this subject could not be clearer or easier to understand. James addressed the possibility and consequence of *“brethren”* erring from the truth, resulting in the *“death”* of their souls. Even if one were to use the larger meaning of *“soul,”* as *“life,”* he could not escape the spiritual application of this passage. The Hebrew writer tells us that *physical “death”* comes upon *“all”* as a result of being *“men”* [human], not upon the basis of spiritual condition (Hebrews 9:27). The *“death”* of James 5:20 must be *spiritual death*, which means that this passage teaches that apostasy is indeed possible.

**2 Peter 1:10** – *“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things, you shall never fall.”* Peter had just instructed saints to *“add”* various things to their faith (virtue, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, love). *If* we do this, we make our calling and election sure. *If* we refuse, we *“fall.”* Apostasy is possible.

**2 Peter 2 and Jude** – Both chapters teach the possibility of apostasy. As did Paul in 1 Corinthians 10, Peter and Jude cite Old Testament examples of apostasy in order to prove their point. Peter tells us that false teachers and their followers will receive *“damnation”* (2 Peter 2:3). He cites fallen angels (vs. 4), wicked antediluvians (vs. 5) and Sodom and Gomorrah as examples of God’s punishment of the wicked. He then gives one of the plainest affirmations of the possibility of apostasy that can be found in Scripture. He said, *“For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed to them. It has happened to them according to the true Proverb, ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’ and ‘A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire’”* (2 Peter 2:20-22). This passage makes no sense at all if apostasy is *“impossible.”* Peter describes two *“states”* – the *first state* is one’s condition prior to being saved from his sins, and the *last state* is one’s condition after *“turning from”* God’s law. This last condition is said to be *“worse”* than the first [not *the same or better than*]. In other words, the spiritual condition of the *apostate* is actually worse than his unsaved condition. Peter’s comments may seem strange at first glance, but let us

remember that a person's conscience is damaged by his rejection of God's word (cp. 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:26-29). A *fallen* condition is much worse than an *unsaved* condition if the unsaved person is teachable and the fallen person is not!

In making his point about the consequences of false teaching, Jude cited God's destruction of Jews "*who believed not*" (Jud. 5), the casting out of "*angels who sinned*" (Jud. 6), the incineration of *Sodom and Gomorrah* because of their sexual perversity (Jud. 7), the *way of Cain*, the *error of Balaam* and the *gainsaying of Korah* (Jud. 11). For them is "*reserved the blackness of darkness forever*" (vs. 13). Lest one surmise that the expression "the blackness of darkness forever" is descriptive of "salvation," remember that Jesus described the place of "outer darkness" as an everlasting place where there will be "*gnashing of teeth*" (Matt. 25:30, 46; 13:41, 42). I suggest to the reader that "*black darkness*" equates to "*outer darkness*" and "*forever*" equates to "*everlasting*," and that both passages are describing hell, not Heaven.

**2 Peter 3:17** – "*You therefore, beloved, see you know these things before, beware lest you also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.*" When Peter used the word "beloved," he meant *Christians* (see 1 Peter 4:12 & 16). Thus, "Christians" can fall from grace. Failure to "*grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*" (v. 18) will result in one's being deceived, and consequently, his being *lost*.

**Revelation 2, 3** – The Asian churches of Ephesus, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis and Laodicea contained people that practiced various sins or held to various errors. Using figurative expressions of judgment, God issued warnings of what would happen to each church if it failed to address its sins. Ephesus would have its lamp stand removed (2:5), which means it would lose its identity as a God-approved church. The unfaithful at Pergamos would be "fought against" with the sword of Christ's mouth (2:16). The "children" of Thyatira's "Jezebel" would be "killed with death" (2:23). Christ would come against the unfaithful at Sardis "as a thief." That is, they would be condemned (3:3). The Laodiceans would be "spewed out" of Christ's mouth (3:16). All warnings imply absolute rejection by God, and all passages demonstrate the possibility of apostasy.

The letters to the seven churches are only a part of the book of Revelation. It should be noted that one of the major themes of the book is *endurance* in the face of persecution. The saved are those who overcome the devil, faithfully hold to the testimony of Christ and keep His commandments (1:9; 2:7, 10, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21; 7:14; 12:11, 17; 20:4). Continued faithfulness is a requisite of salvation. Compromisers will be cast into hell (21:8).

### Conclusion

God's grace is His unmerited favor towards mankind. We are saved by God's grace (Eph. 2:8), but grace contains conditions of salvation (Tit. 2:11, 12). It is possible for a child of God to fall from grace, for it is possible for a child of God

to fall out of God's favor. According to John, this is done by sinning. "...*God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin*" (1 John 1:5-7). The next 3 verses define "walking in darkness" as walking in "sin." John teaches that sin must be confessed in order for it to be forgiven, and it must be forgiven in order for the child of God to stand in the light of God's fellowship and favor.

I will end this study on a good note: Though apostasy is possible, through repentance and prayer the fallen child of God can be restored to fellowship with God by the blood of Christ (1 Jn. 1:8-2:2).

Tim Haile

[timhaile@biblebanner.com](mailto:timhaile@biblebanner.com)