

Q: Doesn't the Catholic Church teach that a Christian can lose his/her salvation? Doesn't the Bible teach differently?

A common teaching among many Christian denominations is that once you have accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, you are saved (i.e. going to Heaven), and that there is **NOTHING** you can do to lose your salvation. This idea comes from reading passage like **John 3:16** and **Romans 10:9-18** in isolation and out of context, not considering how other parts of Scripture add to and clarify these verses, particularly those verses that teach that the gift of salvation can also be lost.

So how does a Catholic best respond to this view of salvation? The Bible is incredibly clear in it's teaching that a believer certainly can lose his or her salvation. In fact, I would say this is one of the clearest teachings there is in Sacred Scripture when it comes to differences between Catholic and Protestant beliefs.

For starters, St John teaches that there is something called "*mortal*" or deadly sin, sin that separates us from God and kills the life of grace in the soul necessary to enter Heaven (Catholics call this Sanctifying Grace). He writes, "*If any one sees his brother committing what is not a mortal sin, he will ask, and God will give him life for those whose sin is not mortal. There is sin which is mortal; I do not say that one is to pray for that.*" **1 John 5:16.**

Additionally, in **1 Cor 4:3-5**, St. Paul says that he doesn't even judge himself saved – only God knows the heart, and so, this judgment is reserved for Him alone: "*But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. **I do not even judge myself.** I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore **do not pronounce judgment before the time**, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart". And then again, he says, "Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, **if you hold it fast—unless you believed in vain**" (**1 Cor 15:1-2**).*

And in **1 Cor 9:27**, he adds, "*but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified*"(**1 Cor 9:27**). Similarly, in **Phillipians 2:1-2**, he repeats, "*that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. **Not that I have already obtained this** or am already perfect; but I press on to*

make it my own". Without doubt, St Paul teaches that a believer can lose his salvation, even considering his own salvation not assured!

But things become extremely clear as we search the Scriptures further. In **2 Peter 2:20-21**, St Peter writes, *"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."* Wow! St. Peter is saying that it would be better to have not believed at all than to believe and then turn away!

Similarly, in **Heb 6:4-6** it says, *"For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt."*

Even Jesus Himself unquestionably teaches that a believer can lose his salvation. For instance, in the parable of the sower and the seeds in **Luke 8:13**, He says, *"And the ones (seeds) on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy; but these have no root, they believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away."*

In the parable of the Sheep and the Goats (**Matthew 25:31-46**), Jesus again makes it perfectly clear that believers can lose their salvation if they do not do the works of charity that He himself calls them to. Both the sheep and the goats are believers - both call Him, "Lord". But only the sheep go to Heaven. And to the goats, He reserves some of His strongest words in all of Scripture: *"Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.' And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life. "*

Additionally, in **Matt 7:21**, Jesus confirms that *"Not everyone who says 'Lord, Lord' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of my Father."*

Salvation is a gift –let us never take it for granted.

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