

ETERNAL SECURITY

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ARE BELIEVERS ETERNALLY SECURED?

The doctrine of eternal security has caused as much controversy and confusion as any doctrine Christians believe.

The controversy has been hotly debated. There are two camps. Putting the emphasis on the sovereignty of God and the total depravity of man, Calvinism claims that salvation is of God. Therefore, genuinely born again, people are eternally secure. They will persevere. They may stumble, but they will get up again. Arminianism teaches partial depravity, conditional election, and the possibility of falling from grace. The battle rages between these two camps. Sadly, the controversy has often produced more smoke than fire, and more heat than light.

This confusion has been devastating, especially among young and weak believers. Not long after salvation, most saints hear about the security controversy. With them, it is more than a theoretical issue; it is practical. "Am I secure or aren't I?" they ask. The public controversy becomes personal confusion. In the public controversy, there is a loss of time studying and debating. In the personal confusion, there is a loss of peace studying and debating within oneself!

Are believers eternally secure? Can genuinely regenerated people lose their salvation? This is not about church members. Nor is it about professors who are not possessors; that is, people who say they are Christians, but they are not. This is about people who have faith alone in Christ alone for the gift of eternal life. Can a person who actually possesses eternal life ever lose it?

The Bible teaches that believers are eternally secure. In a word, believers are eternally secure because salvation is of God and depends upon Him. It depends on the work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

God the Father

The Program of God Paul describes God's eternal program. He writes, "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified" (Rom. 8:30). There are five steps in God's program.

First, God foreknew. The word "foreknew" means simply "to know beforehand." Before the world was formed, God knew individuals (see "whom" in Rom. 8:29). Some argue that God knew that these individuals would believe and, therefore, election is based on God's knowing who would believe. Granted, election is based on foreknowledge (1 Pet. 1:2), but the New Testament never specifically says that *what* God foreknew was the

believer's faith. Actually, it says His choices were based on the good pleasure of His will (Eph. 1:5, 9, 11).

Secondly, God predestined those He foreknew to be conformed to the image of His Son. God's ultimate purpose is that believers be like Christ.

Thirdly, God calls those He predestined. God calls through the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14). The ones who are called must, of course, respond by trusting Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 2:13).

Fourthly, God justifies those He calls; that is, those who answer this call are declared righteous.

Finally, God glorifies those He justifies. In the Greek text, "glorified" is in the aorist tense, which describes a completed action. Technically, however, this will take place in the future—in eternity future—but this glorification has been decreed by God and can, therefore, be viewed as already accomplished. All believers will be glorified. They will be set free from sin and have a body fashioned like Christ's.

Notice that sanctification is omitted. The text does not say that God guarantees sanctification; that is, that believers will be sanctified in this life, but He does guarantee glorification.

Therefore, believers are eternally secure because God's eternal program includes glorification. There is no seepage in God's program.

The Power of God Peter says believers are "kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet. 1:5). The Greek word translated "kept" comes from the word for a guard and means "to protect, to keep by guarding." It is a military term used for a garrison.

As a city is guarded by an army, so believers are guarded by God's power. The only thing that could break the protection around the city would be a stronger army. If God is the guard, the inhabitants (believers) are protected because no one is stronger than God is. If necessary, God may use His power to take persistently-sinning believers home to heaven so that they will not be condemned with the world (1 Cor. 11:32), but whatever the case, believers are kept by the power of God.

An old black woman in one of the Southern States, who was very poor and ignorant, was very confident she was going to Heaven. "What?" said one, "nobody knows anything about you, and if you go to hell, the universe will be ignorant of it." "Yes, massa," said she, "it won't make no difference to the universe; but it will make a great difference to the Lawd. His honor would be gone" (A. T. Pierson).

Therefore, believers are eternally secure because of God's power. There is no one stronger than He is (see also Rom. 8:31-34).

God the Son

The Provision of the Son As believers know, "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3). When Christ was on the cross, He cried, "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30). The Greek word translated "finished" is a commercial term, which means "paid in full." Either Christ's death paid for sin in full, or there is something that must be added to what He did. To say that believers can lose their salvation by _____ (you fill in the blank), is to say that what it takes to be saved is Christ's death, plus whatever is put in the blank.

Paul argues, "I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness *comes* through the law, Christ died in vain" (Gal. 2:21). The Greek word translated "set aside" means "to

make void, needless.” If being justified (“declared righteous”) is based on something that people do, like keeping the law, Christ’s death was needless. Is the death of Christ sufficient for salvation, or must something be added to what He did?

If a convicted criminal stood before a judge for sentencing and the judge said, “You must pay a \$10,000 fine and spend 30 days in jail,” it would be logical to conclude that the \$10,000 did not cover the penalty. On the other hand, if the judge said, “Your total punishment is a \$10,000,” it would be logical to conclude that once the fine was paid, it was finished, paid in full. Christ’s death paid the penalty for sin, which is death, in full. Nothing can be added to what He did.

Therefore, believers are eternally secure because of Christ’s provision in paying in full for their sins.

The Prayer of the Son An often-overlooked teaching of the New Testament is that Jesus Christ is praying for believers. The writer to the Hebrews says, “But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:24-25). Jesus Christ is an unchanging and unchangeable High Priest praying for believers. Therefore, He can save them to the uttermost, that is, completely, totally.

For what does Jesus pray? While He was still on the earth, He said to God the Father, “I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one” (Jn. 17:15). Did Jesus ever have an unanswered prayer? If He did not, believers are guaranteed being kept from Satan.

Therefore, believers are eternally secure because of Christ’s prayer for them.

The Promise of the Son Jesus promised that those who trust Him will not perish but will have everlasting life (Jn. 3:16). He said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life” (Jn. 5:24). He emphatically states that those who believe have passed from death to life and “shall not come into judgment.” Having passed from spiritual death to spiritual life, it is no longer possible for believers to come into a judgment that decides eternal life. Believers have eternal life now. Eternal life is settled once and for all! In the words of a professor who wrote a 936-page commentary on the Gospel of John, “To have eternal life now is to be secure throughout eternity” (Leon Morris).

In another passage, Jesus said, “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father’s hand” (Jn. 10:28-29). In the Greek text, “They shall never perish” contains a double negative plus the phrase “forever.” This is one of the most emphatic statements in the New Testament. It means believers “shall certainly not perish forever.” To reinforce the fact that no one will be able to snatch the sheep from His hand, He adds that the Father is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them from His hand.

The point is: believers are secure. It is as if the believer is in Christ and Christ is in the Father’s hand. It is like money being in the safe and the safe being in the building and the army is guarding the building.

Some say it is possible for a believer to jump out of His hand. Solomon says, “Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes” (Prov. 26:2). Here is an answer

to a fool according to his folly: according to the New Testament, believers are part of His body; a finger cannot jump out of the hand.

The issue is not believers holding on; it is that God holds the believer. The issue is not the perseverance of the saints; rather, it is the perseverance of God!

In some parts of the mission field, the natives divide Christians into two classes. Some, they say, believe in “monkey religion.” Monkeys carry their young by having the little ones hold on to the mother’s tail. If the baby monkey is healthy and well, there is little danger, but if the small one, through sickness or weakness, loses his hold when the mother makes a sudden leap from one branch to another, the little creature falls off.

Others believe in “cat religion.” A mother cat takes hold of the baby kitten with her teeth. The babies safely depend on the hold of the mother cat, not upon their own ability. Believers are secure, not because they hold on to God, but because God holds on to them.

Therefore, believers are eternally secure, because of Christ’s promises that they have eternal life, that they will not come into judgment, and that they will never perish.

God the Holy Spirit

The Presence of the Holy Spirit Jesus says, “I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you” (Jn. 14:16-17). The prayer of Christ is for another Helper. The Helper is the Holy Spirit (see “the Spirit of truth” in verse 17). The Holy Spirit will be “with” and “in” believers forever. The Holy Spirit is not present just as long as a believer stands, but *forever*.

The Permanence of the Holy Spirit Paul says, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you are sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30). The Holy Spirit seals believers (Eph. 1:13), and even though they grieve Him, the seal is not broken, for the Holy Spirit sealed them for the day when Christ returns to redeem their bodies.

Summary: Those who truly trust Jesus Christ for the gift of eternal life are eternally secure not because of what they do, but because of the work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

There was once a small rural community—so small, in fact, that the only church in town was a small Baptist church whose pastor had to double as the local barber to make ends meet.

A man living in this small community had invested wisely and was enjoying his newfound comfort. This man got out of bed one day to go through his daily routine. He looked into the mirror as he was about to shave and said to himself, “I make enough money now that I don’t have to shave myself. I’ll go down to the barber and let him shave me from now on.” So he did.

He walked into the barbershop and found the preacher/barber was out calling on shut-ins. The barber’s wife, Grace, said, “I usually do the shaves anyway. Sit down and I’ll shave you.” So he did.

She shaved him and he asked, “How much do I owe you?”

“Twenty-five dollars,” Grace replied. The man thought that was somewhat expensive and that he might have to get a shave every other day. Nonetheless, he paid Grace and went on his way.

The next day, he woke up and found his face to be just as smooth as the day before. No need for a shave today, he thought. Well, it was a \$25 shave.

The next day he awoke to find his face was still as smooth as a baby’s bottom. Wow! he thought. It amazed him, as he normally would need to shave daily to keep his clean-shaven business look.

Day 3, he woke up and his face was still as smooth as the minute after Grace had finished. Now, somewhat perplexed, the man went down to the barbershop to ask some questions. This particular day, the pastor was in, and the man asked him why his face was as smooth as it was the first day it was shaven. The kind old pastor gently explained, “Friend, you were shaved by Grace, and once shaved, always shaved.”

That is a lame joke, but eternal security is no joke.

Harry Ironside stated that salvation was like Noah inviting a pagan in his day to place his trust in God’s Word and come in to the ark. Some view salvation like Noah offering to put a peg on the outside of the ark: “If you just hang on through the storm, you’ll be saved.” Salvation is not dependent on our holding on to God, but on our being securely held by and in Christ.

In his book *Full Assurance*, Ironside tells of an Irishman who was soundly converted. Sometime later the thought occurred to him, “What if I should sin in such a way as to lose all of this and be lost myself after all?” He worried about that question day and night until one evening he heard Colossians 3:1-4 read in a church service. That passage speaks of believers being in Christ and raised with Christ, who is seated at the right hand of God the Father in heaven. Forgetting he was in a public gathering, he shouted out loud, “Glory to God! Whoever heard of a man droundin’ wid his head that high above water!” He realized that he was in Christ and Christ was already in heaven. Therefore, he was eternally secure.

CAN BELIEVERS LOSE THEIR SALVATION?

Many years ago, Dallas Theological Seminary produced a radio broadcast called “Heritage.” One of the features of that broadcast was called “Ask the Faculty.” Listeners were invited to ask professors questions on the Bible or the Christian life. The director of the program said that the question they received more than any other was, “Can Christians lose their salvation?”

That may not be “the” most asked question among Christians today, but if it is not, it is certainly in the top ten. It is not only one of the most asked questions; it is also one of the most argued. The question of eternal security has sparked controversy and inflamed contention for centuries. Godly believers differ on this critical question. What does the Bible say? Can believers lose their salvation?

Some say, “Yes,” an elect, blood-bought, born-again child of God can end up in hell. If that were the case, what would it take for that to happen? The answers vary. Some teach that a lack of works results in a loss of salvation. Others preach that sin is the thief that robs Christians of eternal life. Then there are those who say that unbelief is the disease that brings eternal death.

What does the Bible say? More specifically, what does the Bible say about each of these scenarios?

A Lack of Works

First Corinthians 3 There is a passage in the New Testament that plainly describes a group of believers who end up with no works. Paul says, “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now, if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

Jesus Christ is the foundation (1 Cor. 3:11) on which can be built several types of buildings (1 Cor. 3:12). Whatever is built will be tested (1 Cor. 3:13). If the building passes the test, the believer is rewarded (1 Cor. 3:14). If what is built fails the test, the building goes up in smoke, but the believer “himself will be saved, so as through fire” (1 Cor. 3:15). The people described in this passage are definitely saved (1 Cor. 3:15).

This is a clear case of no works, no reward, yet the person is saved and in heaven. If people trust Christ and end up with no works, they still go to heaven. Salvation cannot be lost by a lack of works.

Second Peter 1 Peter says, “But also in this very thing, bringing in all diligence, filling out your faith with virtue, and with virtue, knowledge; and *with* knowledge self-control, and *with* self-control, patience, and *with* patience, godliness, and *with* godliness, brotherly kindness, and *with* brotherly kindness, love. For if these things are in you and abound, they make *you to be* neither idle nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For

he in whom these things are not present is blind and cannot see afar off and has forgotten that he was purged from his sins in the past” (2 Pet. 1:5-9).

A boy takes a pledge, pays some money, and becomes a Boy Scout. Then he is supposed to earn merit badges, which are given to him at a Court of Honor and proudly displayed on his chest. Some Boy Scouts only have a few badges; others have many. As a Scout earns more badges, he moves up in rank from star, life, and eagle. It is possible, however, for a Boy Scout to have no merit badges. It could mean that he had just become a Scout or that he was lazy. Whatever the explanation, it is possible to be a Boy Scout with no merit badges. Likewise, believers can be without works.

Calvinism teaches that all saved people will produce works and if a person professes to believe and does not produce, that person was never truly saved. That is called the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. What stopped me from believing it was the word the “should” in Titus 3:8 and Ephesians 2:8-10. The New Testament does not teach believers *will* produce works; it teaches they *should* produce good works.

Sin

If sin causes believers to lose their salvation, the questions become how much sin, how big of a sin, and how often must the sin be committed?

Many years ago, I was invited to be the speaker for a spiritual life conference at a Christian high school. The doctrinal debate on campus was over eternal security. Some teachers believed in eternal security; others did not. One of the teachers, who believed that it was possible for Christians to lose their salvation, told the students, “If you were driving your car 80 miles an hour (that is, you were speeding) and were killed in an accident, you would not go to heaven.” For that teacher, the sin of speeding was a sufficient cause for salvation to be terminated. If sin causes believers to lose their salvation, how serious of a sin does it take?

Minor Sins Suppose believers disobeyed a clear-cut command. Imagine that they not only disobeyed one of God’s commandments, but they taught others to do so as well. Would such disobedience cause those believers to lose their salvation?

Jesus taught, “Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 5:19). Here is the case of believers (see “least in the kingdom of heaven”) breaking one of the least of God’s commandments and teaching others to do so. Yet they end up in heaven.

When people trust Christ, they are born into God’s family. They become God’s children. Disobedience is serious, but that does not mean they die spiritually or cease to become children of God. Parents with multiple children know this from their experience. The oldest may disobey, but he does not cease to be a member of the family. The oldest son may teach the younger sisters to disobey, but breaking the rules of the house does not mean that they cease to be members of the family. Children may disobey, desert, and disown their parents, but there are still children of their parents—by blood. Parents may disinherit a child, but that child is still their child.

To say that believers go to hell for breaking a minor commandment is like the government executing pickpockets or jaywalkers.

Serious Sin What about “major” sins? All sin is sin, but some sins are more serious than others are. If believers commit serious sins, does that cause them to lose their salvation?

Paul says to the Corinthians, “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles; that a man has his father’s wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged, as though I were present, concerning him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5:4-5).

This passage is about a believer whose “spirit will be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5:5). This believer was guilty of sexual immorality, a gross sin, incest (1 Cor. 5:1). To make matters worse, this sinner refused to repent (1 Cor. 5:2-3). Paul directed the church to deliver such a one to “Satan for the destruction of the flesh.” The destruction of the flesh is physical death. In other words, this believer would have died in his sin (1 Cor. 11:30). Yet his spirit would be saved; he would go to heaven (1 Cor. 5:5).

This is conclusive proof for eternal security. This believer was living in open sin and he obviously refused to repent. That is why he is being disciplined. Paul contemplates his death *in sin* and yet says he will be saved at the Judgment Seat of Christ (3:15). The fact that he did repent (2 Cor. 2:6) does not alter the point that Paul is teaching here that even if he died in sin without repentance, he would be saved.

Ceasing to Believe

Some argue that since salvation is by faith, if believers cease to believe, they lose their salvation. They point out that in the Gospel of John, the word “believe” is very often in the present tense, indicating that believers must keep on believing. They also claim that faith is the “condition” of salvation and if someone ceases to meet the condition, they are lost again.

The Present Tense Issue Must believers continue to believe to stay saved? Does the fact that “believe” is in the present tense in some passages mean that some believers do continue to believe or that all *must* continue to believe? The word “believe” also appears in the aorist tense (Acts 16:31), which describes a completed act. When people meet the condition, the transaction is settled, sealed, and is irrevocable. It is like dropping a coin off a bridge. Once done, it is done.

Ceasing to Believe What does the Scripture say actually happens when a believer ceases to believe? Paul writes, “*This is a faithful saying: For if we 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. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself*” (2 Tim. 2:11-13). This passage consists of four “if” clauses and a conclusion. Each “if” clause represents a choice. Each conclusion contains the consequences of that choice.

The first statement does not explicitly mention a choice, but one is implied, namely, faith in Christ. Paul is speaking about the death of the “old man” when people trust Christ (Rom. 6:1-6; Gal. 2:20). The consequence is being made spiritually alive with Christ.

The second statement concerns the choice of enduring suffering for Christ's sake. The consequence is reigning with Christ in His future kingdom (Rom. 8:17).

The third statement is about the choice of denying Him. This is the denial of the Lord by *believers* (see "we," Paul includes himself; see Lk. 22:54-62, esp. 22:61). The consequence of believers denying the Lord is the Lord will deny them. He cannot deny believers eternal life, because eternal life is a gift (Rom. 6:23) and God never changes His mind about giving a gift. His gifts are irrevocable (Rom. 11:29). Furthermore, God promised those who believe that they will never be judged (Jn. 5:24) and they will never perish (Jn. 3:16).

So what is denied believers who deny the Lord? The Greek word translated "deny" in 2 Timothy 2:12 is the same one rendered "deny" in Matthew 10:32. Both Paul and Jesus are talking about *believers* (remember "we") denying (disowning) the Lord before men (remember Peter). This means that Jesus will deny believers before the Father (Mt. 10:32-33). When believers disown the Lord, they are denied *reward* before the Father (Mt. 10:41-42). The issue is not faith versus denial of faith. It is public confession of Christ versus public disowning of Christ. The consequence of publicly disowning Christ is denial of reward.

The fourth statement is about the choice of ceasing to believe. The Greek word translated "faithless" means "to disbelieve, be faithless." In *The King James Version*, it is translated "if we believe not." The consequence is that even if believers cease to believe, God remains faithful to His promise. "He cannot deny Himself." The Lord's faithfulness to His own promise is the believer's greatest security (Guthrie).

Summary: Believers cannot lose their salvation by a lack of works, by sinning, or by unbelief.

The great objection to this is, "Believing in eternal security gives people a license to sin." The same thing can be said about the doctrine of falling from grace. Believing you can lose your salvation gives you permission to sin and get saved again.

Eternal security is not a license to sin. According to the New Testament, if believers sin, God disciplines them (1 Cor. 11:30).

Eternal security does not give believers the freedom to sin, but the freedom to serve. Not believing in eternal security runs the risk of people serving the Lord out of fear. Believing in eternal security frees believers to serve out of love.

The San Francisco Bay Bridge cost \$77,000,000 and dozens of lives to build. During the construction of the first section of the bridge, no safety devices were used with the result that twenty-three men fell to their death in the waters below. During the construction of the second great section, the greatest safety net in the world, costing \$100,000, was installed. This gigantic net made of stout manila cordage saved the lives of at least ten men who fell to it without injury. In addition to that, according to *The Readers' Digest*, "The work has gone fifteen to twenty-five per cent faster with the men relieved of the ruinous fear of falling." The knowledge that they were safe left the men free to devote their energies to the particular tasks at hand.

To be assured of eternal life is not a license to sin. Among other things, it frees believers up "to devote their energies to the particular tasks at hand."

ETERNAL SECURITY: PROBLEM PASSAGES

For people who believe in eternal security, there are puzzling passages in the Scriptures. For example, the Bible says those who endure until the end shall be saved. It speaks of falling from grace and that once someone has fallen, it is impossible for that individual to be renewed again. Do these and other passages like them in the New Testament teach that it is possible for genuine believers in Jesus Christ to lose their salvation? If not, what do they mean?

Matthew 24:13

In the Olivet discourse, Jesus said, “But he who endures to the end shall be saved” (Mt. 24:13; see also Mt. 10:22). This verse is often interpreted to mean those who persevere in their spiritual life will be saved spiritually, implying that those who do not persevere will not be saved. Does that mean that believers have to endure in order to make it to heaven?

The Subject To interpret any verse in the Bible, one must first ask the question, “*What is the subject being discussed?*” That is true of any ordinary conversation. Imagine that members of a family were sitting at the kitchen table discussing whether to go to a certain movie. Everyone decides to go. At that point, one of the daughters leaves the room. While she is gone, the conversation changes to what to wear. The mother asks her son, “Are you going to wear your blue shirt?” As he answers, his sister reenters the room just in time to hear him say, “No, I don’t think I will.” She then turns to her brother and says, “Why are you not going with us?” She misunderstood his answer because she was not aware of the subject being discussed.

Matthew 24 What is the subject of Matthew 24? The passage begins, “Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’” (Mt. 24:3). In answering that question, Jesus describes the Tribulation, which takes place just prior to His coming (Mt. 24:21, 29). In other words, *the subject of Matthew 24:4-29 is the Tribulation*. By the way, the sign of the end is the abomination of desolation, which occurs in the middle of the Tribulation (Mt. 24:15).

The Explanation In this passage, the apostles asked about the end of the *age* (Mt. 24:3). In answering their question, Jesus mentions “the end” three times (Mt. 24:6, 13, 14). In each case, the end is not the end of one’s life but the end of the Tribulation.

In this passage, endurance is enduring the persecution of the Tribulation (Mt. 24:9-12). It is enduring arrest, scourging, trials before religious and civic leaders, as well as rejection by one’s own family.

The Greek word translated “saved” means “save, deliver” (Strong says it means “protected”). In this passage, “saved” is not salvation from sin, but deliverance from physical death. That is the way the word “saved” is used here. Jesus says, “And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened” (Mt. 24:22). No flesh being saved means no one escapes physical death.

In the middle of a discussion on the subject of the Tribulation, Jesus says, “He who endures to the end (of the Tribulation) shall be saved” (delivered from physical death) (Mt.

24:22). This passage has nothing to do with the subject of eternal security. That is not the subject being discussed.

John 15:6

In the upper room discourse, Jesus said, “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned” (Jn. 15:6). Some say this verse means that if believers do not abide, they will end up in hell.

The Subject The *subject of this passage is fruit bearing*. Jesus speaks of believers having no fruit (Jn. 15:2), fruit (Jn. 15:2), more fruit (Jn. 15:2), and much fruit (Jn. 15:5). The point is that if believers abide in Christ, they will produce more and more fruit.

The Explanation In the middle of discussing fruit, Jesus says those who do not abide will be cast into a fire. Some say this is not referring to genuine believers, but Jesus says He is talking about “every branch in Me” (Jn. 15:2). He told the disciples, “You are the branches” (Jn. 15:5). Those cast forth are cast forth as branches (Jn. 15:6). This passage is talking about non-abiding, unfruitful believers. The problem is, these believers do not abide in Christ and consequently are thrown into the fire.

The fire of this verse has sparked a bonfire of controversy. The question is, “Where and when is a believer cast forth as a Christian into the fire?” It is important to remember that the fire of hell is not the only fire mentioned in the Bible.

Some say the fire here is uselessness. Derickson and Radmacher say that the fire is an illustration of uselessness, not destruction (as does Haddon Robinson in a sermon on this passage). In fact, vine wood is worthless as wood. Furniture cannot be made from it, nor anything else.

The fire in this verse could be the fire of trials (1 Pet. 1:7; 4:12). Wiersbe says that the fire in this verse “describes divine discipline rather than eternal destiny.”

This fire has also been explained as the fire at the Judgment Seat of Christ (Dillow). The objection to the suggestion that the fire in John 15:6 is the Judgment Seat of Christ is that the *branch* is said to be cast in the fire and not just his works, but believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ are saved “through fire” (1 Cor. 3:15).

In a sense, all three of these are true. Believers who do not abide are useless, will be disciplined, and will suffer loss at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Jesus commands believers to abide in order to produce fruit. Not abiding means loss. It is either fruit or fire.

Galatians 5:4

One of the most often-used verses against the doctrine of eternal security is the one that speaks about falling from grace. In Galatians, Paul says, “You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to be justified by law*; you have fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4). People who use Galatians 5:4 against eternal security contend that when believers fall from grace they fall into sin. That isn’t even close to what Paul is saying.

The Subject Paul plainly says that *those who fall from grace are those who are attempting to be justified by the Mosaic Law*. To fall from grace, believers must fall into the trap of trying to keep the Law. Falling here is not into sin. It is into law-keeping. It is

not falling into badness; it is falling into goodness. This verse is not talking about a lawbreaker; it is talking about a law-keeper!

The Explanation Here is the background. On his first missionary journey, Paul came to Galatia, led people to Christ and established churches (Gal. 3:1-3). After his departure, the Judaizers told these new converts that they had to keep the Law. They began observing Jewish holy days, etc., (Gal. 4:10-11) and were contemplating being circumcised (Gal. 5:3).

Hence, the issue in the book of Galatians is law versus grace. Paul's point is if believers try to be righteous before God by using a law system, they have fallen from a grace system. The phrase translated, "You have become estranged from Christ" means "to make idle or inactive, to render inoperative." Believers trying to live by law to be righteous before God have rendered Christ inactive. They are working to keep the Law without Him.

It would be like a believers today thinking they can obtain righteousness before God by going to church on Sunday, reading their Bible, and giving money. By trying to be acceptable to God by performance, they have fallen from grace. Believers can fall from grace, but they cannot fall from salvation.

Turning from the principle of grace to the principle of legalism to gain favor with God on the basis of human merit is falling from grace, not from salvation. They have fallen from grace in that they are not depending on the grace of God; they are depending on law-keeping.

Galatians 5:19-21

The New Testament speaks of not inheriting the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Eph. 5:5; Gal. 5:19-21). It says the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9). In Galatians 5, Paul gives a long list of sins that disqualify people from inheriting the Kingdom. He says, "Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:19-21). The passages on not inheriting the kingdom are used to conclude that people who commit such sins will lose their salvation.

The Subject The subject is obviously *the works of the flesh*. Again, some say these people were never saved, but Paul says, "Walk and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16). That verse is definitely talking about believers. The subject of this passage is believers either walking in the Spirit or in the lust of the flesh. Then Paul lists the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21).

The Explanation Can believers commit the sins listed in Galatians 5:19-21? Of course. Notice that jealousy, envy, and contentions are listed side by side with idolatry, adultery, and murder.

There is a difference between entering the kingdom and inheriting the kingdom. To enter the kingdom one must be born again (Jn. 3:5). To inherit the Kingdom is to rule and reign with Christ in it. To qualify for that, one must walk in the Spirit now and not fulfill the lust of the flesh so as to produce the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:16, 19-21). There is a huge difference between entering a house and inheriting the house you enter.

Hebrews 6:6

The passage that is the theological battleground in the New Testament over the issue of eternal security is Hebrews 6. The writer to the Hebrews says, “Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary *principles* of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits. For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame” (Heb. 6:1-6). To those who believe Christians can lose their salvation, “falling away” means losing one’s salvation.

The Subject The subject of this passage is *going on to maturity*. Some say these are not believers. They argue that these people “tasted” the heavenly gift (Heb. 6:4), but they did not swallow it. But the Greek word translated “tasted” in the same one used in Hebrews 5:9 of Christ tasting death. Did Jesus taste death, or did He actually die? Besides, the passage is about urging the readers to go on to perfection, that is, maturity (Heb. 6:1-3). There is no question that these people are believers.

The reason (see “for” in verse 4) these believers (Heb. 6:4-5) should go on to maturity is if they fall away (Heb. 6:6), it would be impossible for them to be renewed again to repentance.

The Explanation The Greek verb “fall away” occurs only here in the New Testament, although the noun form of the word occurs several times (e.g., Gal. 6:1). In the context of Hebrews, falling away is falling away from the faith to return to Judaism (Heb. 3:12).

Is it possible for a genuine, regenerate person to deny the faith? Apparently. Consider the fact that John warns believers (1 Jn. 2:12-14) that false teachers were trying to deceive them (1 Jn. 2:26) concerning the doctrine of Christ (1 Jn. 2:21-25). Paul said something similar. (2 Cor. 11:1-4, 13-15; see also 2 Tim. 2:17-18).

What is said to be impossible is for a regenerated person to depart from the faith and be renewed again to repentance. The Greek word rendered “renew” only occurs here in the New Testament and means “to restore.” In the Greek text, it is in the active voice and Westcott argues that “the use of the active voice limits the strict application of the words to human agency” and that the fact that it is also in the present tense “suggests continual effort.” It is impossible for continuous effort on the part of people to restore a believer who has departed from the faith back, not to conversion, but to commitment to go on to maturity (Hodges).

The reason is that those who fall away crucify again for themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. By departing from the faith, believers renounce Christ, which is tantamount to *them* crucifying the Son and putting Him to public shame. They put themselves in the position of those who actually had Christ crucified and had Him exposed to public shame (Bruce).

2 Peter 2:20

Peter wrote, “For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known *it*, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘a dog returns to his own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire,’ that for some their latter end is worse for them than the beginning” (2 Pet. 2:20). This is taken by some to mean that those who return to their old sins are worse off, that is, they go to hell. Does that mean that some believers end up in hell?

The Subject The subject of this passage is *people who have escaped the pollution of the world*. This verse is about believers. They “have escaped the pollution of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Elsewhere in this epistle, this same terminology is used of true, actual knowledge of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:2 and 1 Pet. 3:18). Those who have escaped the pollution of the world through the knowledge of Jesus Christ are genuine regenerate believers.

The Explanation The problem is, they became entangled again and were overcome again by the pollution of the world. Moreover, they ended up worse off than they were. In other words, they began by escaping the pollution of the world, but they not only went back to the pollution of the world, they went deeper into it. The overall context of this chapter is false teachers. By following a false teacher, believers can end up worse off spiritually and morally than they were before they began *with that teacher*.

This passage is not saying anything about the eternal destiny of the believer. The issue in 2 Peter 2 is spiritual bondage here and now. False teachers are themselves “slaves of corruption” (2 Pet. 2:19) and believers who follow them are in danger of becoming once again entangled and overcome by sin and thus being in bondage again to sin. The issue is their past life, *not* their future destiny.

Believers should not be overcome; they should be overcomers. They should not be victims; they should be victors.

Peter explains, “For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them” (2 Pet. 2:21). It was better for them not to have known the way, that is, the road of righteousness, not the Lord Himself.

Peter concludes with a picture of their experience, “But it has happened to them according to the true proverb ‘a dog returns to his own vomit’ and ‘a sow having worked to her wallowing in the mire’” (2 Pet. 2:22). The first of these proverbs is taken from the book of Proverbs (Prov. 26:11), the second is not. The issue in these proverbs is not the individual’s inner nature. The comparison is between the *actions* of these believers and the actions of a dog or pig.

Proverbs 26:11 says, “As a dog returns to his own vomit so a fool repeats his folly.” As Green explains, “The dog which has got rid of the corruption inside it through vomit it up cannot leave well alone; it goes sniffing round the vomit again.” The question is, can Christians act like fools, that is, can they do the same foolish thing again and again? Yes. Such individuals are worse *because they returned* again! As for the pig analogy, many pigs immediately after they are washed outside, wallow in the mud again.

Revelation 3:5

Revelation 3:5 has been used to say that believers can lose their salvation. It says, “He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.” This verse contains a promise that overcomers will *not* be blotted out of the Book of Life, but some insist that this implies that the *reverse* is possible, namely, that it is possible to have one’s name blotted out of the Book, meaning it is possible to lose one’s salvation.

The Subject The subject of this verse is *overcomers*. The overcomer is the faithful believer. The church at Sardis was overcome with spiritual deadness (Rev. 3:1). The individual believer who overcomes spiritual deadness will be rewarded.

The Explanation Not having one’s name blotted out of the book of life is a figure of speech called a litotes. A litotes is an *affirmation* expressed by the negation of its opposite. For example, the statement, “This is no small problem,” sounds negative, but it is an affirmation that indeed there is a problem (see 2:11).

A litotes is not only a negative statement meant to be taken positively, it is also an extreme understatement, which not only promises to do exactly what is stated, but much more. For example, “This is no small problem” actually means, “This is a big problem;” “not a few” means “many,” and “no rare occurrence” means “a frequent occurrence.”

Perhaps much more is expressed in the next statement concerning confession before God the Father and the angels. In other words, not only will the Lord not blot the name of the overcomer out of the Book of Life, the overcomer will receive public honor. Thus, the overcomer will receive both private (Rev. 2:17) and public (Rev. 3:5) recognition. Hodges says that here the point is “your honored name will never be erased,” which suggests, “Your name will be glorious forever” or something similar (Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, p. 119; see also Zane C. Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse*, pp. 107-11).

The possibility of being saved and lost is not in this passage. It has nothing to do with eternal security. It is a statement about faithful believers receiving honor.

Summary: Verses that are used to say that believers can lose their salvation do not teach that.

In most cases, the subject of the passage is not salvation at all. It is the Tribulation, fruit-bearing, law-keeping, spiritual maturity, etc. Other verses could be added to this list; for example, 1 Corinthians 9:27, where the subject is service, not salvation. In passages where the subject is salvation, salvation is eternal and secure. Salvation is a gift from God (Rom 6:23) and “the gifts and the calling of God *are* irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29).

When asked how he knew he was saved Charles Haddon Spurgeon said: “How do I know that I am saved? I read in the Bible where Jesus said that whosoever believes in Him as His Savior, He will save him. I have believed in Jesus as my Savior. A gentleman keeps his word and my Savior is a gentleman.”

WHAT DO I HAVE TO LOSE?

There is no question that the New Testament teaches that believers in Jesus Christ are eternally secure. Nevertheless, there is a practical problem with that theological doctrine. The problem is that it gives the impression that believers can sin with impunity, that is, without consequences.

This problem is not new. When Paul gave his most detailed explanation of the gospel of the grace of God (Rom. 1-5), he was faced with the charge that it promoted sin (Rom. 3:8). He was forced to ask and answer the question, “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” (Rom. 6:1). Paul is emphatic: Salvation is by grace (Rom. 3:20-26). Believers are eternally secure (Rom. 8:31-39), but they should not sin (Rom. 6:2).

It would be tragic for believers to take a light or flippant view toward sin because they are going to heaven no matter what. Granted, a genuine believer in Jesus Christ cannot lose heaven, but there are things that can be lost and the loss is great!

Your Fellowship with God

The Fellowship Believers have the high and holy privilege of fellowship with God. The apostle John says, “fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 Jn. 1:3). The Greek word translated “fellowship” means “to share.” Two people fellowship with each other when they “share” with each other. They share their attitudes and activities, their cares and concerns, and their victories and defeats with each other. Likewise, fellowship with God is sharing one’s life, cares and concerns with Him.

The Loss When believers sin, they lose their fellowship with God. They may attend church and look like they are faithful Christians, but if they are living in sin, they lose their fellowship with God. John says, “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth” (1 Jn. 1:6).

Does that mean that every time believers sin they immediately lose fellowship with God? Do believers have to be perfect to have fellowship with God? No. Believers who are walking in the light of God’s Word (1 Jn. 1:7) become aware of their sin. If they confess their sins, they experience the cleansing of the blood of Christ (1 Jn. 1:9; Prov. 28:13 says “confess and forsake”) and continue in fellowship with God (1 Jn. 1:7). On the other hand, believers who fail to adequately deal with their sin lose their fellowship with the Lord.

Suppose a father tells his young son that his job is to take out the garbage. The father explains that the garbage truck passes their house every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. So, the son is to take out the garbage cans on those days. If the father came home one day and saw that the garbage cans had not been put out, he would probably not immediately punish his son. First, he would have to hear what happened. Suppose the son said, “Father I blew it. I didn’t take out the garbage cans today. Forgive me. I’ll try and not let this happen again.” Even if the son had forgotten or didn’t remember until his father reminded him, if he still recognized his failure and resolved to obey in the future, all would be well.

If, however, the son didn’t recognize or admit his failure or if there was repeated failure and the garbage piled up, it would put a strain on his fellowship with the father. He would still be the father’s son, but it would affect their fellowship. The father would have to take

steps to teach his son to obey. Until the garbage can issue was resolved, every time the son wanted to ask his father for a favor, he would find the father more and more difficult to talk to and the relationship with him less and less enjoyable. The son's persistent disobedience would affect his fellowship with his father.

Your Joy

The Joy One of the results of fellowship with God is joy (1 Jn. 1:4). The Psalmist said, "You will show me the path of life; in Your presence *is* fullness of joy; at Your right hand *are* pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11).

The Loss When believers sin, they lose their spiritual joy. David is an example. He committed adultery with Bathsheba and even had her husband, Uriah, killed. Evidently, David persisted in his sin for a year. A son was born before he dealt with his sin. Finally, when Nathan the prophet confronted David with his sin, he confessed it.

After his confession and restoration, David wrote Psalm 51. In this confession of his sin he wrote, "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me *by Your* generous Spirit" (Ps. 51:12). Notice that David did not ask for the restoration of his salvation. He wanted the *joy* of his salvation restored. Sin, even the sin of adultery, does not result in the loss of salvation, but it does result in the loss of joy.

In 1758, an English pastor named Robert Robinson wrote the hymn "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing":

Come, Thou Fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet,
Sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,
Mount of Thy redeeming love.

But later, Robinson lost his fellowship with the Lord. Becoming deeply troubled, he hoped to relieve his anxiety by traveling. In the course of his journey, Robinson became acquainted with a young lady who was a Christian. As they talked, she realized that he was well-informed on spiritual matters. So she asked him what he thought of a hymn she had just been reading. To his astonishment, it was his own composition! He tried to evade her question, but she pressed him for a response. With tears in his eyes, he confessed, "I am the man who wrote that hymn. I'd give anything to experience again the joy I knew then." She was greatly surprised, but she assured him that the "streams of mercy" mentioned in his song still flowed. As a result of that encounter, he returned to the Lord and once again discovered the joy of his salvation.

Your Health

Sin The believers at Corinth were not only sinning, they were sinning in the church. For one thing, there were divisions among them. Paul says, “For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you” (1 Cor. 11:18-19).

For another, they had an unloving spirit at the Lord’s Table. As Paul pointed out, “Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of *others*; and one is hungry and another is drunk” (1 Cor. 11:20-21). Simply put, their sin was a lack of love manifesting itself in their ill-treatment of one another, not to mention getting drunk at the Lord’s Table.

Sickness Paul informs them, “For this reason, many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep” (1 Cor. 11:30). Because of their sin, some were sick. (This does not mean that all sickness is due to sin.) They lost their health! The sickness could have been a direct result of the judgment of God (1 Cor. 11:31-32) or it could have been that the Lord let “nature take its course.”

Psychologists say that emotional problems can cause physical sickness. Some of what they call emotional is actually spiritual. In other words, sin causes weakness and sickness. That does not mean that all weakness and sickness are due to sin, but this passage indicates that some sickness is the result of sin.

Dr. William Sadler was impressed by the close connection between the sinful nature and many diseases. He wrote, “No one can appreciate so fully as a doctor the amazingly large percentage of human disease and suffering which is directly traceable to worry, fear, conflict, immorality, dissipation, and ignorance—to unwholesome thinking and unclean living. *The sincere acceptance of the principles and teachings of Christ with respect to the life, the life of unselfish thought and living, would at once wipe out more than half the difficulties, diseases, and sorrows of the human race.* In other words, more than one half of the present afflictions of mankind could be prevented by the tremendous prophylactic power of actually living up to the personal and practical spirit of the real teachings of Christ” (William Sadler, *None of These Diseases*, italics his).

Your Life

The Explanation Paul says some believers are not only weak and sick, but “many sleep” (1 Cor. 11:30). In the New Testament, sleep is a metaphor for physical death. As a result of sin, some believers at Corinth died! John says, “There is sin *leading* to death” (1 Jn. 5:16). Paul explains, “If you live according to the flesh, you will die” (Rom. 8:13). Notice Paul speaks of *living* according to the flesh. Physical death because of sin is not the result of a single sin, but of persisting in sin.

Illustration Years ago, a pastor told me about a man at his church who was sinning *in the church*, similar to the situation in Corinth. The pastor exhorted the man, but got no response. After a while, the man got cancer and very shortly after that, he died. But before he died, he acknowledged what had happened and prayed for the Lord’s forgiveness. The fellow was forgiven before he went home, but he went home all the same.

Your Reward

Rewards The New Testament teaches that some believers will be rewarded. Paul wrote, “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now, if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward” (1 Cor. 3:11-14).

Some believers will reign with Christ (2 Tim. 2:12). Some will receive crowns:

- An Incorruptible Crown for self-control (1 Cor. 9:25)
- A Crown of Life for steadfastness in trials (Jas. 1:12)
- A Crown of Righteousness for steadfastness in service (2 Tim. 4:8)
- A Crown of Rejoicing for soul-winning (1 Thess. 2:19).
- A Crown of Glory for shepherding (1 Pet. 5:4)

. The crown of Peter the Great of Russia had more than 800 jewels. The Kiani Crown of Persia has 3900 jewels. The Imperial Crown of Russia has almost 5000 jewels. The Imperial Crown of India, made for King George V of England, has 6000 jewels. How many jewels will your crown have?

Loss While it is possible to receive rewards, it is also possible to lose rewards. Paul adds, “If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Cor. 3:15). The apostle John writes, “Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward” (2 Jn. 8), indicating that it is possible to not receive a full reward.

Sin causes believers to lose rewards. When believers start living for themselves, they cease to live for the Lord. When they get into sin, they get out of service. Hence, there is unfaithfulness instead of faithfulness; no reward instead of reward; no crown instead of a crown; few or no jewels instead of many.

Imagine everyone else receiving a reward, and you receiving nothing. You’re having fun now, but you will have sorrow then. You laugh here; you’ll cry there.

Summary: Believers who sin have plenty to lose. They lose their fellowship with God (not their relationship); their joy (not their salvation); their health and possibly their life (not their eternal life); and their reward (not their redemption).

Don’t treat sin lightly. Be careful. Beware. Sin is serious. Sin is deadly. Someone has said, “Treating sin lightly is like stroking the head of a tiger and saying, ‘Nice kitty.’”

Watchman Nee told about a new convert who came in deep distress to see him and said, “No matter how much I pray, no matter how hard I try, I simply cannot seem to be faithful to my Lord. I think I’m losing my salvation.” Pointing to his dog, Nee replied, “He is house-trained; he never makes a mess; he is obedient; he is a pure delight to me. Out in the kitchen, I have a son, a baby son. He makes a mess, he throws his food around, he fouls his clothes; he is a total mess.” Nee went on to explain that even though the son made a mess, he was still his son; his dog, which was well-behaved, was just a dog.

Children make messes. If they do not learn to obey, they get into trouble, but they are still the children of their parents.