

IF YOU CONTINUE

Professing to repent of your sins and believe Jesus is not a free pass to eternity. Actual repentance and believing is demonstrated by what we do. It is true that salvation is a free gift through faith in Christ. But it will also cost you everything you own if you truly know the value of the Kingdom that has been given to you. Our comprehension of the worth of Jesus is revealed when our faith is put to the test through trials and we stand the test through perseverance and faithfulness to Christ.

When Jesus told His disciples about the tribulation to come before His return, He made it explicitly clear that only those who endure to the very end will be saved. He also made clear that the tribulation before His return is going to be so terrible that nobody would be saved if the days were not shortened.

This is an absolute contradiction to the “salvation prayer” and “once saved, always saved” gospel that has been being proclaimed today. The apostles did not believe or proclaim a pre-tribulation rapture. The argument has been made that Jesus said that no one can snatch any of us from His hand. This is true. (See John 10:28.) No one can snatch us out of God’s hand but we do retain our free will to believe and to follow Jesus or to deny and renounce Him.

*2 Timothy 2:11-13, 19: Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. **If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself...** Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, **"Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."***

Our faith will be put to the test. God knows our hearts.

A Real Change of Heart

In the book of John, there are two examples of Jesus putting to the proof those who had already professed faith in Him and were following Him.

After Jesus had fed the five thousand, a large crowd followed Him. But Jesus knew their hearts were not truly with Him. He openly rebuked them for following Him only because He had put food in their bellies. Their following of Jesus was actually service to a different god – their own stomach. Jesus challenged them by teaching that the real bread of life was His own body and real drink was His own blood. This was too disturbing for them. They did not truly grasp who Jesus was or what He was talking about. And so they abandoned Him, stopped following Him, and no longer believed Him to be the Messiah. Only the twelve remained with Him. (See John 6.)

A little later on, Jesus had pardoned the woman caught in adultery. Then, He proclaimed that He did not come to judge anyone and that they would die in their sins if they did not believe Him and so, many believed in Him. Simple enough. But Jesus turned to them and told them that they needed to abide or remain in Him and in His word to truly be His disciples – otherwise they were slaves. They immediately denied ever being enslaved to anyone. But Jesus pointed out that they were enslaved to sin and to lies. Instead of being the seed of the faithful Abraham, they were the offspring of the devil who is the father of lies. At this, their belief in Jesus abruptly ended, they accused Him of being a half-breed Samaritan and tried to stone Him to death. (See John 8.) They liked the message of freedom and forgiveness but were unable to see their own need for it.

Receiving a miracle and following Jesus because it meets our needs is immature belief. A profession of faith without a change of heart is not a real salvation. We must actually repent of our sins and live our lives for God in genuine repentance out of gratitude for Jesus' sacrifice.

The Example of Scripture

The example of Israel being delivered out of Egypt is an allegory for our deliverance from sin through the blood of Jesus. This said, within a few days of the Israelites walking through the Red Sea on dry ground, they grumbled out of hunger and thirst in unbelief that God was able to provide for them in the wilderness. They loathed this halfway state between the slavery of Egypt and the Promised Land and wanted to return to Egypt. It was these same people who had seen God's miracles in Egypt who did not believe that God was able to fulfill ALL of His promises to them. And so, they did not receive what was promised because of their own unbelief. Once we are saved, we have only just begun to walk with God and to have our faith shaped, developed, and tested through various trials and challenges that will come our way. The Israelites serve as our example so that we might be strengthened to stand the test of faith and receive all that Jesus died to give us.

*Hebrews 3:14-19: We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end. As has just been said: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion." **Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.***

*1 Corinthians 10:1-13: For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were **all under the cloud** and that they **all passed through** the sea. They were **all baptized** into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They **all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink**; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. **Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.***

Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.** Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry." We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did--and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test Christ, as some of them did--and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did--and were killed by the destroying angel. **These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come.

*So, **if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!** No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.*

The letter of Hebrews was written to emphasize the supremacy of Christ and the life of true faithfulness. It was written to Jewish believers who had put their faith in Jesus as Messiah. For their faith in Jesus they had been brutally rejected, disowned, and plundered by their families as heretics and blasphemers. (See Hebrews 10.) They had tasted the goodness of God, been indwelt with the Holy Spirit, and had already withstood much hardship for Christ. It's just that they had not anticipated just how long this persecution would continue before Christ's return. According to their own Scriptures, they expected His return at any moment to establish His Kingdom. But after ten years of hardship, they were worn out and considering returning to Judaism just to put an end to their earthly struggles. Therefore, the writer of

Hebrews consistently encouraged these believers to stand firm until the very end. If they turned their backs on Christ they would not be able to return again. Their eternal souls were on the line.

*Hebrews 6:4-8: It is impossible for those **who have once been enlightened**, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age **and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance**. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace. Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.*

Teachers who claim "once saved, always saved" refute this verse by saying that anyone who falls away must not have been saved in the first place. However, knowing the full context of the letter of Hebrews, this argument simply does not stand up.

Moreover, Peter also addressed believers who were vulnerable to falling away due to false teachers. He did not assert that the false teachers were never saved. Rather, he made clear that they had come to salvation but were perverting it to suit their own desires. Peter explains that it would have been better for them not to have been saved at all than to have been saved and then turn away. Clearly, this confirms that it is possible to be saved and fall away from the faith.

*2 Peter 2:20-22: **If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and are overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs** on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed returns to her wallowing in the mud."*

Endure to the End

As tribulation and wickedness increases in the earth, it will become easier and more justifiable to carnal standards to look out for ourselves rather than pour ourselves out in service to God for the benefit of others. The persecution against Christians of the early church will be dwarfed by the persecution believers have yet to face on a global scale.

*Matthew 24:12-13: Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but **the one who stands firm to the end will be saved**.*

*Revelation 13:10: If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity they will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword they will be killed." **This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God's people**.*

Let us not live carelessly in hopes of being divinely airlifted off the earth before these trials come. Let us press on to know Christ and to continue in faithfulness to Him no matter what happens so that we can endure to the end and be saved.

* ALL RIGHTS RESERVED © 2020 Wendy Bowen

Scriptures are New International Translation (NIV) unless otherwise noted, emphasis added by author