

Apostasy Warnings and Security Promises in Scripture

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I. Logical questions many people ask.

- A. If Jesus says he loses none of the ones the Father gives him. Jn. 6:37-40, 44, 65; 10:25-30.
- B. And if Paul says that all the called ones will certainly be glorified. Rom. 8:29-39; Phil. 1:6.
- C. And if Peter says that God is the One who causes people to be born again, that he protects them by his power for the inheritance reserved for them in heaven. I Peter 1:3-5
- D. Then why are there these warnings against apostasy? Heb. 6:4-8; 10:26-39 (and others).
- E. And who are these people that seem to be falling away? Gal. 5:4; 2 Thess. 2:3.
- F. Is there not a conflict between the apostasy warnings and the security promises?

II. Three things to keep in mind:

- A. Always interpret the *less clear* passages in light of the *clearer* ones.
 1. The “security passages” quoted above are direct affirmations of actual security. They are the clearer of the two sets of passages.
 2. The “warning passages” *seem to imply* that a person might be lost to the Lord but *come short of actually affirming that anyone has actually been lost*. They are less clear in their teaching by virtue of the fact that the potential loss of salvation is only an *implication* rather than an actual statement.
 3. Simply put, if the Lord Jesus says, “I will never lose one of my sheep,” then whatever we may glean from the implications of other passages, we must not interpret them in contradiction to His statement. *He is the Lord, and he knows what he’s talking about.*
- B. Always choose the interpretation that makes the best sense of *all the passages*.
 1. If we view the “warning passages” as the primary interpretive tool in understanding this subject, and by implication we make the assumption that real Christians *will* actually be lost, the “security passages” in John’s Gospel and Romans make *no sense at all*.
 2. On the other hand, if we take the “security passages” as primary, the “warning passages” can be explained as the falling away of those who looked like they were saved but were not genuine.
 - a) Jesus spoke of “sproutings” and tares which were not genuine. Matt. 13:18-23; 24-30
 - b) He also warned that there would be those on the last day who had a false form of faith despite the presence of supposed miracles at their hands. He says that he never knew these people (not that he knew them and forgot them) Matt. 7:22-23.
 - c) Paul spoke of vain (empty, useless) faith (I Cor. 15:2) and warned of wolves in sheep’s clothing from within the Christian community. Acts 20:29-30.
 - d) James warned of false professions of faith which were not born out in the holiness of life that a true Christian should have. Jas. 2:14-26
 - e) John explained the defection of certain “Christian” teachers by saying that they left because they were not Christians in the first place. 1 Jn. 2:19.
- C. Remember the difference between what *could* happen and what *does (or will)* happen.
 1. Paul said that if he preached another gospel, he himself would be cursed by God (Gal. 1:8). Does this mean Paul *will* actually preach another gospel?
 2. Jesus said that if he alone bore witness of Himself, his witness would not be true (Jn. 5:31). Does this mean that he *will* actually be alone in bearing witness of himself?
 3. Jesus said that if he glorified himself, his glory would be nothing, and that if he claimed not to know the Father, he would be a liar (Jn. 8:54-55). Does this mean that he *will actually do or say these terrible things*?
 4. Jesus told people not to believe him if he did not do the works of his Father (Jn. 10:37). Does this mean that there was any *real doubt about whether he would actually do the works of his Father*?

5. Simply because something may be stated as a possibility theoretically, doesn't mean that that thing will actually occur. If I am a passenger on a private plane and the sign over the door says, "Do not jump out this door or you will fall to your death", the possibility of jumping is discussed for the purpose of real warning. Yet the Lord has given me enough sense to know that *I do not want to jump*, and therefore *I will not jump*. The result at the end of the flight is the same as if the door had been welded shut. People with "salvation sense" see the true warning and heed it, thus fulfilling God's command. They persevere in their "salvation sense" and land safely at their destination because God has given them the instinct for self-preservation, and they persevere in that instinct. The point is not that there is no real danger outside the plane. There certainly is. If a person were to jump, they would fall to their death. The point is that nobody with "salvation sense" really jumps. Genuine believers keep on believing and are saved by God's grace through on-going faith. Real saints persevere.
6. Saving grace is the work of God whereby the fallen human will is effectively changed and the person is drawn to the Lord, wanting to be cleansed and forgiven and made holy. This is called "regeneration" or being "born again" (Titus 3:3-7; Jn. 3:3). A new nature/will is given to them by the Lord and remains truly theirs (2 Cor. 5:16-17). This new regenerated will, when it hears the warnings about leaving the realm of faith in Christ, immediately responds by clinging ever closer to the Savior. The perseverance of a real saint is because of the seed of God's life, the Spirit. (1 Jn.3:9; 1 Pet.1:23)
7. Does this explanation deal adequately with the warning passages? Yes.
 - a) Gal. 5:2-4 with verse Gal. 5:10
 - b) Heb. 6:4-6 with Heb. 6:9-10
 - c) Heb. 10:26-31 with Heb. 10:39
8. Paul (and the writer to the Hebrews) warns strongly, while assuming that those who are real Spirit People (Rom. 8:9) will take heed and turn from the heresy.
9. The Apostle John concludes that the false teachers who had arisen from within the flock were not really part of the flock after all. I Jn. 2:19

So, the apostasy warnings are truthful warnings that work in every case to effectively keep the true Christian from the precipice of apostasy. Those who do not heed the warnings are showing themselves to be deaf to the voice of the Shepherd and thus, not his sheep (Jn. 10:26-27). Thomas Schreiner, well known Pauline scholar and professor of New Testament Interpretation at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary says that "... God's electing and sustaining grace is such that His sheep will never perish. They never perish precisely because they listen [continue!] to the Good Shepherd's voice which effectively admonishes and warns them lest they fail to follow Him and perish."¹

The use of words like "apostasy" "falling away", and "severed" is logical and appropriate because that is what appears to be happening on the outside—people are turning away from the Lord. How else could the phenomenon be described? How else could the apostles declare a serious warning? Yet upon closer inspection we find that the warnings and the promises make excellent sense if the ones turning away only *appeared* to be believers.

The apostasy warnings and the security promises may all to be taken literally and seriously from this point of view.

¹ Thomas Schreiner, "Perseverance and Assurance: A Survey and Proposal," *SBJT*, Vol. 2, No.1 [1998]: 32-62
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