



*What must I do to be saved?* While many may presume this question to be the sole province of religion, a reasoned look at the human condition—regardless of spiritual sentience—yields a well-focused lens on its inescapable destiny—death. Specifically, how can we escape death's reality? Some (e.g., Becker, 1973; Porter, 1990) have argued that sentient humankind denies death by its preoccupation with biological denial, reification of cultural manners, and obsession with self-affirmation. Sentience becomes re-defined as insanity—i.e., we deny we die, or at least act as if we do not die.

When religions focus on the issue, the escape being sought is not from death *per se*, but from the consequences of death—extinction, especially *meaningless* extinction. Death may be tolerated, or even reified, *if* it has value for the group as a whole, or *if* the motive is culturally approved. On the other hand, death without meaning is the greatest threat to the corpus of humanity. Overall, suicide is ethically questioned more than murder; heaven and hell compete for pole positions in the race for a meaningful death; and, victory over death becomes the *raison d'être* for many religions.

Of course, humans have never been clear about what they are to be saved from. Our infractions of ethical rules? Moral principles? Consequences of disobedience to Deity's dictates? Social mores? Misdeeds in a previous life? Nor have we achieved consensus on what we are to be saved to. Higher status in the new life form? A state of nirvana? Deity companionship? Cultural legacy? But, regardless of clarified consensus, the human still wants to know—*What must I do to be saved?*

Biblically based Christianity, however, proposes a different perspective. Suicide is still morally questioned. Hell still confirms the reality of death; hell serves to punish the wicked. Heaven still affirms death's authenticity; heaven serves to reward the righteous. And so it behooves the follower of the Christ to avoid hell, and seek heaven, after death. Thus and again, a primordial question bubbles up from the swamps of our innermost being—*What must I do to be saved?*

- ⌘ To be clear, the *raison d'être* of Christianity is not victory over death, although said victory is a source of strength for followers of Christ Jesus (cf., Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the church at Corinth, 1 Corinthians 15:55; note, he's quoting the Hebrew prophet Hosea).
- ⌘ Furthermore, biblically-based Christianity does not support the premise of a past life. Birth is the beginning of our existence, and death is not the end but a transition to being in Deity's absence (hell), or Deity's presence (heaven).
- ⌘ Finally, biblically-based Christianity asserts nirvana comes neither from birth nor from death, but from a second birth, a birth from above as it were (cf., John's record testifies to the reality of a spiritual rebirth, overcoming the limits of physical birth *and* death, John 1:5-8).
- ⌘ Humans believe, remember, and do what they *want* to believe, remember, and do (cf., *Porter's First Law of Human Behavior*; see [TheScoop.DThomasPorter.com/?p=150](http://TheScoop.DThomasPorter.com/?p=150)). Thus, we need an independent body of evidence. Christians use the Scriptures as their independent evidence.

So, how do the *Scriptures* answer—*What must I do to be saved?*



Some Biblical evidence suggests salvation comes from acting and/or thinking in certain Deity-approved ways:

- 🍎 Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. –Mark 13:13
- 🍎 Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. –Acts 2:38
- 🍎 Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. –Luke 6:37
- 🍎 But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety. –1 Timothy 2:15
- 🍎 “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ... “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor...” –Luke 18:18ff
- 🍎 Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. –Romans 10:13 & Joel 2:32
- 🍎 Not everyone who calls me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. –Matthew 7:21
- 🍎 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. –Mark 16:16
- 🍎 The jailer ... asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. –Acts 15:29ff
- 🍎 Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will. –Romans 12:1-2
- 🍎 Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. –Matthew 10:32
- 🍎 To be saved, pray, “Dear Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner, and I ask for your forgiveness. I believe you died for my sins and rose from the dead. I trust and follow you as my Lord and Savior. Guide my life and help me to do your will. In your name, Amen.” –2 Hezekiah 3:15



- 🍎 And the scripture [Genesis 15:6] was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. —James 2:23-24

---

Other Biblical evidence suggests salvation comes not from acting and/or thinking in certain Deity-approved ways, but from Deity alone:

- 🍎 And the scripture [Genesis 15:6] was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. —James 2:23-24
- 🍎 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. —Ephesians 2:8-9
- 🍎 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. —Romans 3:28
- 🍎 Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus [the] Christ. —Romans 5:1
- 🍎 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. —Romans 11:6
- 🍎 I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly. —Galatians 2:21
- 🍎 And may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith. —Philippians 3:9
- 🍎 The righteous shall live by faith. —Habakkuk 2:4
- 🍎 Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith." —Galatians 3:11
- 🍎 The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus [the] Christ our Lord. —Romans 6:23
- 🍎 Pray this prayer, "Lord Jesus, I know I'm a sinner, and I know I can't get to Heaven on my own. I believe that you are the Son of God, that you died for me, and that you rose from the grave. I repent of my sins; please forgive me and save me from Hell. Thank you for taking me to Heaven when I die. Amen." —1 Hezekiah 3:18

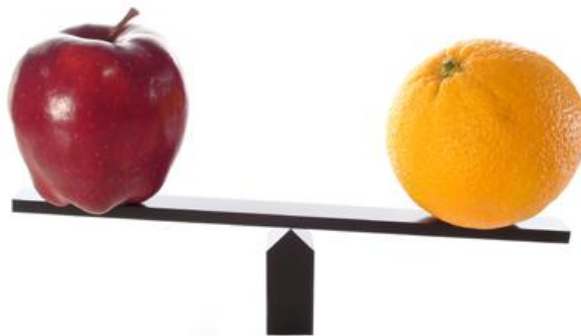


## APPLES AND ORANGES: RESOLVING THE PARADOX

Christians readily divide over this issue; they relish the debate, and castigate the “other side.” Apples believe one must do; whereas, Oranges believe only Deity can do. For example...

- ✓ Apples focus on what they can/must do to be saved by Deity; they recognize they can choose, a sign of sentience; i.e., “free will.” In contrast, Oranges focus upon the Deity alone approach; i.e., they find relief from their behavioral and spiritual inadequacies, ironically, a sign of dependency.
- ✓ Apples think Oranges are spiritually lazy – They complain “Oranges stop following Deity’s dictates because salvation is inevitable.” Oranges counter-claim, “Apples are idolatrous – after all, nothing they can do will satisfy Holy Deity’s sense of justice.” Nonetheless, Apples conclude salvation is not inevitable, nor guaranteed.

WHICH FRUIT ARE YOU? AND...  
ARE WE EVEN ASKING THE CORRECT QUESTION?



When the evidence from an unimpeachable source (in this case the Scriptures) appears contradictory (i.e., a paradox), the better approach is to ask whether we are even asking the right question in the first place. In this case, we may lead ourselves astray by merely asking *What must I do to be saved?* Perhaps a better question to be ascertained from the Scriptures is: *What did Deity do to save me?*

The former question makes us the focus of the thinking, feeling, and behaving. The former question implies it is all about us. Even John 3:16 becomes a mantra of how important we are (i.e., Deity loved us so much...) rather than what Deity did to save us (i.e., Deity became one of us, giving and living a life of sacrifice). The latter question puts the focus on *Who* is Deity. Our salvation becomes, then, a means to an end, instead of the objective of our existence. The former question infers, however subtle, we are Deity. We are not.



## A SOLUTION

---



Consider being a different fruit regarding salvation. Resist the self-aggrandizing Orange (Deity saved me). Defy the equally idolatrous Apple (look what I did for Deity).

Become the Pomegranate.

Pomegranates ask only one thing, a definitively better question:

**What can I do to live a life of thanks, glorifying Deity who gave me salvation?** So now when questioned, "What must I do to be saved?"

We answer "Anything Deity wants."

### REFERENCES

---

Becker, E. *The Denial of Death*. Free Press Paperbacks, Simon & Schuster, 1973.

Porter, D. T. *A Cauffective Model of Interpersonal Sequencing: An Ontologically Based Conception of Communication*, Interpersonal Communication Division, International Communication Association, Dublin, Ireland, 1990.



## Appendix A

ONCE SAVED ALWAYS SAVED? MAYBE NOT.<sup>1</sup>

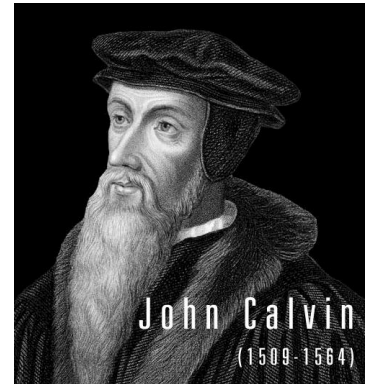
—Professor Craig Keener (Asbury, IVP Bible Background Commentary)

There are different definitions of once-saved-always-saved, and in this post I am challenging only one version. The point is not to make Christians nervous about their salvation; biblical writers assure Christians who have been persevering that they will persevere (Phil 1:5-7; Heb 6:9-10). The point is to recognize that apostasy is possible and that it happens sometimes.

If you have been a Christian very long, you probably know some who started with you in the faith who have since fallen away. I have known many who were zealous colleagues who no longer even claim to be Christians; some, in fact, claim to be something else.



Calvinists and Arminians may disagree on whether a person was provisionally converted or not, but they both agree that only those who persevere to the end will be saved. A Calvinist would say that someone who falls away was not genuinely converted to begin with (cf. John 6:64; 1 John 2:19)—that is, from the standpoint of ultimate salvation, which God already knows. An Arminian would say that, from the standpoint of human experience, which is



what we can know, the person was provisionally converted but fell away and thus was not ultimately saved. But both agree that a person who turns away from faith in Christ and never returns is not ultimately saved. Both of these perspectives have biblical support, one from the standpoint of God's foreknowledge and the other from the standpoint of human experience.

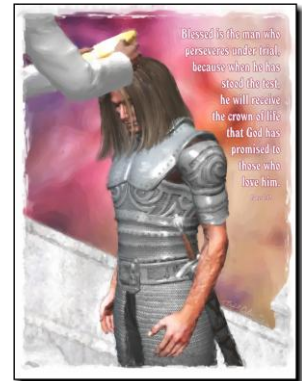
But "once-saved-always-saved" as it is commonly taught in many churches is neither Calvinism nor Arminianism. Many teach a cheap version of "Once-saved-always-saved," wherein anyone who professes conversion remains in Christ no matter what happens. Let us say they become an atheist theologically, an axe-murderer morally, or even simply a spiritual

<sup>1</sup>I've added illustrations and additional references; those Scripture noted in [brackets] were added by me. Thanks to Pete Fair for providing this rather interesting analysis of the debate. Pomegranates unite!



couch potato that hasn't thought about God for years. Are they still counted as believers in Christ? (Because this contorted hope seems to flourish particularly in some Baptist churches, I should note, lest you think I am picking on Baptists, that I'm a Baptist minister myself, albeit a charismatic evangelical one.)

Various texts warn that a person will be saved only if they persevere [e.g., Mark 13:13]. Christ has reconciled you to present you to God, Paul warns, "if you continue in the faith" (Col 1:23). God cut off unbelieving branches and grafted you in, but if you do not continue in his kindness, you too may be cut off (Rom 11:22). (Paul speaks here of individual Gentiles, not of Gentiles as a whole, since in the context he did not believe that every individual Jewish person had been cut off.) The letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2—3 repeatedly offer promises to those who overcome, conditioning the reward on perseverance. One must hold onto what one has, lest someone else take one's crown (Rev 3:11), presumably the crown of life (2:10), [James 1:12]; those believers who overcome will not be blotted out of the book of life (3:5).



Jesus warned some who "believed" in him that they would become his disciples and know the truth if they continued in his teaching (John 8:30-32); they did not do so (8:59). In John's Gospel, saving faith is faith that perseveres, not the faith of a fleeting moment. Jesus warns his own disciples to continue in him; if someone did not do so, they would be cast away and ultimately burned (15:5). (Fire was a familiar Jewish image for Gehenna, used also elsewhere in the Gospels.)



A wide array of texts warn that a person will be lost if they do not persevere. Because Galatian Christians were trying to be made right with God by keeping the law, Paul warned that they had been cut off from Christ and had fallen from grace (Gal 5:4); Paul was laboring again until Christ would be formed in them again (4:19). Paul even disciplined himself to ensure that he did not fail the test (1 Cor 9:27), but warned the Corinthians to check themselves to see whether

they were failing it (2 Cor 13:5). Some of these references could be hyperbolic, dramatic ways of warning his hearers that they were on the verge of losing something they had not yet lost

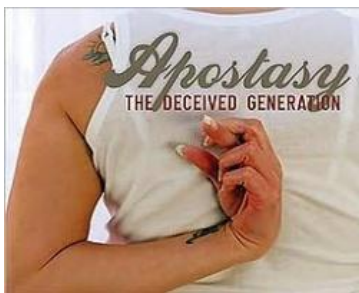


(cf. perhaps 2 Cor 5:20; 6:1, 17-18). Nevertheless, they hold out the terrifying possibility of apostasy.

This is especially emphasized in Hebrews. Punishment for turning from the way of salvation now is harsher than under the law (Heb 2:1-4). Those who turned from God in Moses's time never entered God's rest; how much more would that be true for those now who, hardened by sin, stopped believing Jesus Christ (3:7-15; 4:1, 11)!

Hebrews 6 warns particularly explicitly that those once converted could fall away. Being "enlightened" (6:4) refers to conversion (10:32); "tasting" the heavenly gift and future era (6:4-5) refers to experiencing it (the same Greek term applies to Jesus experiencing death in 2:9); being made "partakers of" or "sharing in" the Spirit (6:4) also refers to genuine believers (cf. the same Greek term in 3:1, 14). But if this person "falls away" (6:6; the language appears in the Greek version of the Old Testament for turning from God, e.g., Ezek 18:24; cf. different wording in Mark 4:17), they cannot be repent anew because they are crucifying Jesus again and publicly shaming him; they will be burned (Heb 6:8).

Because Christ is the only true sacrifice for sins (10:1-21), those who sin by continuing to resist him have nothing left but terrifying judgment (10:26-31). Those who turn back from faith face destruction (10:39). One should not be like Esau, who had no second chance (12:16-17). If those who rejected God's message at Sinai were judged (12:18-21), how much greater is the judgment for rejecting the new covenant (12:22-29).



Some of the warnings in Hebrews sound as if those who fall away cannot be restored; yet many of us know some people who did fall away and yet were restored. This is explained in various possible ways (e.g., that their previous conversion experience was incomplete or that their apostasy was incomplete), but it is also possible that Hebrews is simply warning that there is no other way of salvation. If we leave Christ looking for something beyond him, we will not find it. James 5:19-20 sounds as if turning back to the way of Christ someone who strayed from it brings that person back to salvation and forgiveness.

Hebrews repeatedly exhorts its audience to hold fast our confidence in Christ (Heb 3:6, 14; 4:14; 10:23); we must not abandon our confidence (10:35), which has the reward of eternal life (10:34-39). We have become Christ's house, heirs of the future world, the author declares, if





we continue to be believers in him (3:6, 14; 6:11-12); if we fail to persevere, we face judgment (2:2-3; 4:1; 8:9; 10:26, 38; 12:25).

To persevere in faith, we should continue to trust in Christ (Heb 3:19; 4:2; 10:35—11:1; on the topic of faith in Hebrews, see <http://www.craigkeener.com/faith-the-assurance-of-things-hoped-for-%E2%80%94-hebrews-111/>); support one another in the faith (3:13; 10:23-26); and grow more mature in biblical understanding (5:11—6:12). Similarly, 2 Peter advises various virtues that will keep one growing and prevent falling away and so missing the Lord's eternal kingdom (2 Pet 1:5-11).

Many beliefs today are popular because they appeal to our weakness rather than because they are biblical. Such beliefs include spiritual justifications for materialism, theological exemptions from suffering tribulation, and even justifications for not sharing our faith with others. The idea that someone who professes conversion will share eternal life even if they do not persevere as believers in Christ is another belief that is comforting—and dangerously false.

For some people with less self-confidence (sometimes including myself), such warnings are unnerving. But biblical warnings are qualified for those who have already been demonstrating perseverance and the seriousness of their faith (Phil 1:6-7; Heb 6:9-10). (Still, even this assurance could be accompanied by exhortation to persevere, Heb 6:11-12.) It is important to remember that the keeping does not depend on us having infinite strength; it is God's own power that preserves us through our faith (1 Pet 1:5), and no one can snatch us from his hand (John 10:29).



If overconfidence in ourselves is an error, so is underconfidence in the One who drew us to himself to begin with. Our baptism is meant as a helpful reminder that we passed from one realm to another; we do not pass away from Christ because some bad thought comes to our mind or we fail one spiritual test. The latter misconception is probably a recipe for spiritual obsessive compulsive anxiety! Falling away refers to someone who is no longer following

Christ, not someone who is simply imperfect in our maturity or discipleship.



The warnings are instead for those tempted to fancy that we are saved by a single act of prayer or physical washing rather than by Christ, who treat salvation only as a cheap fire escape instead of rescue from being alienated from God. It is God's act in his Son's death and resurrection that saves us, provided that we accept his gift; i.e., *believe* this good news. His gift is eternal life in his presence, an eternal life that begins when we truly believe—welcoming a new life in Christ.

Source: = <http://www.craigkeener.com/once-saved-always-saved-maybe-not/>