

# What Does God's Word Say About Eternal Security And Falling Away

What Does God's Word Say

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- I. Two Primary Approaches to the Answer of What God's Word says about Eternal Security and Falling Away from the Faith:
  - A. There is no doubt that the Word of God speaks in varied ways and in numerous places about the matter of being eternally secure in our salvation. Yet there are varied and numerous scriptures warning us about the possibility of falling away from the faith. So how do we find truth or God's mind on this issue? It seems to me there are two primary ways to discover what God is saying to us about eternal security and falling away.
  - B. The first way is to treat the scriptures on eternal security and falling away as if they are separate from each other, or as if we can take one group seriously and discount the other, or as if it is up to us to decide which group is right and which group is wrong. The natural result of this approach is to treat eternal security and falling away as if the two are incapable of existing together in the mind and will of God. Upon concluding that God does not support both, the next step for teachers and theologians who take this approach is to build doctrine and theology on half of what God says about them both. The final outcome of this approach is a well-defined theology built on those scriptures that support our position while ignoring or explaining away those scriptures that challenge our position.
  - C. The second way is to set aside Calvinism, Arminianism, and the current teaching on eternal security and approach the scriptures with an openness that seeks to discover all the scriptures related to eternal security and falling away. Upon compiling our list of verses, we can then proceed with much prayer for help from the Holy Spirit, much consideration of the individual verses within their contexts, much effort to discover the consensus understanding of all the scriptures discovered, and much honesty about the fact that we will have to accept some amount of mystery, some portions that are hard to understand, and a few verses that seem to clearly support one view over the other. The final outcome of this approach is a reasonably defined position built on all – or at least most of – the scriptures available while admitting we cannot answer every question or satisfy every concern.

- D. If we are going to take this second way, one more ingredient is essential – and that ingredient is a good dose of humility. It is only too easy and too tempting – with the devil’s encouragement – to think that our approach is spiritually, biblically, and logically superior to any other approach. Such pride is not only dishonoring to God, it is divisive within the Body of Christ. As I have said from the beginning of this study, it is my opinion that this is not an issue to divide over. Let us remember that solid Christians hold differing views on this issue – and we are wise to consider them Christians in good standing with God as much as we think ourselves to be.
- E. Finally, you too may hold or come to the place where you choose to hold a different view from what I am presenting in this study. May we be wise enough and gracious enough to allow for such differences so as to prevent pride or division from entering into our midst over this issue of eternal security and falling away from the faith.

## II. Method of Searching the Scriptures

- A. The starting point for a comprehensive study of the scriptures concerning eternal security and falling away requires a survey of all the scriptures in the Old and New Testament which are directly or indirectly related to either side. For my benefit, I put these scriptures into two columns – one column dealing with eternal security and the other dealing with falling away.
- B. Upon completing that list, I turned my attention to John Cassian’s extensive presentation of scriptures proclaiming God’s part and man’s part. This particular study has already been presented under the heading: “Whose doing is it: God’s or Man’s?”
  - 1. One of the most notable examples of “Whose doing is it” is found in **Philippians 2:12-13** . . . “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; [13] for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”
  - 2. My purpose of giving attention to John Cassian’s presentation was two-fold. First, it provided an excellent example of searching the entire Bible for any and all of God’s statements on the subject of God’s part / man’s part, and using them to discern God’s mind on the matter. Second, it provided an extensive gathering of scriptures showing that we have a responsibility to do our part in response to God’s action toward us and for us.

- C. Following this, I searched for and studied those scriptures that speak of God's covenants with man. I did this believing they would further reveal the mind of God on the matter of eternal security and falling away from the faith since the breaking of Christ's body and the shedding of Christ's blood established a new covenant for the Church age.
- D. Next, I searched the scriptures for those portions that contain a conditional "if." For example, **II Chronicles 7:14** says: "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, **then** I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." This effort was also directed at seeking a clearer understanding of God's mind on the issue at hand.
- E. Finally, I gathered those New Testament verses where the verb "believe" is found in the Greek present tense. According to Greek scholars and commentators, verbs in the Greek present tense speak of continuing action as opposed to a one time act. An example of this is found in **John 3:36** . . . "He who [continues to] believe in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." Here again, my purpose in gathering and studying these scriptures was to gain further understanding of God's mind on this matter of eternal security and falling away from the faith.
- F. Prayer

### III. What Does God's Word Say?

- A. In my study of those scriptures that deal with the covenants God made with man, I found two covenants that were truly one sided. By one sided I mean that God established the covenant with one or more people while requiring nothing in return to keep the covenant in force.
  - 1. The first one sided covenant that appears in the Bible is God's covenant with Noah about never destroying the earth again by water.
    - a. In **Genesis 9:8-13**, we read: "Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying, 'Now behold, I Myself do establish My covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that comes out of the ark, even every beast of the earth. I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth.' God said, 'This

is the sign of the covenant which I am making between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all successive generations; I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth.’ ”

- b. As I pointed out, nothing was required of Noah or any successive human being from Noah’s day to the end of time to keep this covenant in force.
2. The second one sided covenant recorded in the scriptures was between God and Phinehas, the son of Eleazar and the grandson of Aaron.
    - a. At the time God made this covenant with Phinehas, a number of Israelite men were accompanying Moabite women to the worship ceremonies of the Moabite God, Baal of Peor. Baal worship ceremonies included sacrifices to the god, feasting, and a great deal of sexual licentiousness. Beyond that, some of the men were bringing Moabite women back into Israel’s camp for further escapades of immorality. In God’s eyes, these men were defiling themselves by worshiping an idol, participating in gross immorality, and joining themselves to foreign women. Therefore, the Lord’s anger burned against his people.
    - b. So the Lord told Moses to seize all those responsible for this evil and put them to death. So Moses ordered Israel’s judges (leaders over 100 and 1000) to put to death the men under their authority who had joined in worshiping Baal of Peor.
    - c. As Moses and many of the Israelites were weeping at the entrance of the Tabernacle over this grave sin that had entered the camp and the dire consequences it was bringing on the people, one of the Israelite men brought a Midianite woman into his tent – right before the eyes of Moses and those with him.
    - d. When Phinehas saw this, he jumped up and left the assembly. He took a spear and ran after the man into his tent – thrusting the spear through the man’s body and into the woman – killing them both. This act by Phinehas stopped God’s anger and the killing, but not before 24,000 people had died (**Numbers 25:1-9**).
    - e. As a result of what Phinehas did, the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Phinehas has turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel in that he was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy. Therefore say, 'Behold, I give him My covenant of peace; and it shall be for him and his descendants after him, a covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because

he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the sons of Israel' " (**Numbers 25:10-13**).

3. Once again, the point being made here is that of all the covenants established by God between himself and mankind, the rainbow – signifying God will not destroy the earth by water ever again, and the perpetual priesthood for Phinehas' offspring are the only two one sided covenants where God does everything and the recipients of the covenant have no requirements placed on them at all.

B. However, from Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden through Hebrews – which is the last book in the New Testament to directly speak of any covenant between God and man – and on into the book of Revelation, every covenant or agreement spoken of either infers two sides or is clearly two sided. By two sided I mean that God has a part in upholding the covenant agreement and we have a part in upholding the covenant agreement.

1. Now when God speaks of His side in upholding the terms of the covenant, He consistently uses language that makes it clear there is absolutely no chance He will fail in the least way in doing His part. And indeed, He will never fail to fulfill His side of any covenant He makes with us.
2. For example, in making a covenant with Abraham, God said: “I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an **everlasting** covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you” (**Genesis 17:7**).
3. However, God's perfection in fulfilling all His covenants with us does not mean they cannot be broken.

C. A two sided covenant implies both sides have a part in guaranteeing the fulfillment of the agreement.

1. One side may play a greater part than the other, yet even when that is the case – as it is with God and us – the lesser part still has the power to either fulfill or break the agreement.
2. And though God's covenants with us are everlasting from His side because He is good – that is, His lovingkindness is everlasting and His faithfulness continues to all generations (**Psalms 100:5**) – we are not so dependable. In fact, we are weak, fickle, filled with competing desires and emotions, easily distracted, and often tempted by the evil one.
3. And since all the covenants recorded in the scriptures are with people like us, it should come as no surprise that the likelihood of any covenant being broken from our side is great.

- D. Look at Adam and Eve. Though there is no record in the book of Genesis of God making a covenant with them, they clearly broke the agreement God made with them – an agreement whereby Adam and Eve could choose life or death.
1. As long as they chose life – by continued obedience to God’s one command – they preserved the face-to-face relationship God had with them, and they maintained the privilege of living in the Garden of Eden.
  2. But upon choosing death, they lost their face-to-face relationship with God, their heavenly home here on earth, access to the tree of life – which would enable them to live forever, and freedom from physical suffering and death.
  3. Now it is obvious, Adam and Eve could no more create themselves than you or me. Their creation was all God’s doing. And it is obvious they could no more get back into the Garden, once God put them out, than we can find that very same garden today. Yet in spite of their very existence and life in the Garden of Eden being all God’s doing, God still placed in their hands the perpetual responsibility of choosing life over death.
  4. Was Adam and Eve’s choice of death God’s failure? No! His side of the agreement was as certain and as foolproof as the rising of the sun and the changing of the seasons from the dawn of creation down to this very day. The failure to keep the agreement between God and Adam is born solely by Adam and Eve.
- E. Consider the nation of Israel. From one man, Abraham, they became a great nation with God’s visible presence in their midst in the forms of a cloud by day, a pillar of fire by night, and the continuous light of God’s presence radiating in the Holy of Holies.
1. We know from history that God raised up Moses and rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt in order to bring them into the Promised Land.
  2. Though they were primarily shepherds by trade, God gave them the power and ability to defeat and drive out all the inhabitants of the Promised Land, even though the Land was filled with walled cities like Jericho, giants like Goliath, and well-equipped armies.
  3. And though God’s covenant with them was guaranteed by His character, it required something from Israel to remain in force. Yet Israel, over time, began to neglect their part and in doing so, broke the covenant God had with them. We read in **2 Kings 17:18** that the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them from His sight; none was left except the tribe of Judah.

4. In spite of this, Judah, too, failed to keep the commandments of the Lord their God, and instead walked in the ungodly ways Israel – under Jeroboam – had introduced. And so the Lord not only removed Judah, He departed from the Promised Land – destroying His own temple and His city, Jerusalem. The short version of this story is found in **II Chronicles 36:15-21**.

F. Finally, in the book of Revelation, we read about God’s warnings to the seven churches that were in what we now know as Turkey. The warnings were not given to the church building or to some impersonal concept of the church, but to the people who made up each of the seven congregations. And what was the outcome of the people’s response to God’s warnings to repent and return to living as God willed them to live? They failed to obey, so God removed their once vibrant and influential churches so that in Turkey today, Christianity is so small in comparison to Islam that it is as if Christianity hardly exists there at all.

G. What is my point? From Adam and Eve through the book of Revelation, the overwhelming majority of God’s dealings with us include some form of agreement or covenant that requires something from God’s side and something from our side.

1. There is no question as to God fulfilling His side – that has been proven true throughout human history.
2. If there is going to be a problem in any covenant or agreement between God and us remaining in force, we will be the source and cause of the problem.

#### IV. Conclusion

A. My goal today is not to discourage us from putting our faith in God, or to sway us in one direction or another regarding eternal security and falling away. My goal is to show you that God has dealt with us and continues to deal with us in ways that include two-sided covenant type agreements.

B. As for being encouraged to put our faith in God – as fully as humanly possible, hear the words of **II Peter 1:2-4** . . . Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; [3] seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. [4] For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.