

Falling

Can a Christian fall from grace? Can a Christian fall away?

These two questions were put to me in a recent, brief e-mail note from lady named Anne. Here is what she wrote:

I can't remember, but wondered if you believe that Christians can fall from grace? Or being saved, that they can fall away?

I thanked Anne for her questions and, in this article, I would like to tell you how I replied.

Again, Anne's questions are these: Can a Christian fall from grace? Can a Christian fall away?

Falling From Grace

The bottom line in answering questions such as these is that we must believe what God's holy Word teaches on such subjects.

First of all then, can Christians fall from grace? Yes, they can! Here is what God says on this subject, through His apostle Paul:

Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; *you have fallen from grace*. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. *{i.e.. salvation}*. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love. (Galatians 5:1-6)

This is the only scripture that, in so many words, mentions falling from grace. And what does it say could cause us to fall from grace? Attempting to be justified by the law or by circumcision.

We can have little doubt that there are, in fact, other things that can cause a Christian to fall from grace – things other than attempts to be justified by law or physical circumcision. But here, God, through Paul, points out to His church congregation in Galatia that those among them who sought justification by the law and/or by phys. circumcision had fallen from grace. Please note that Paul wrote this in the past tense.

And why had they fallen from grace? Because justification and salvation come through grace, faith, Jesus Christ, His blood and His Holy Spirit.

However, when reading this, please do not make the mistake that so many people do - erroneously thinking that Paul was here teaching that God's law and the requirement for good works are done away.

Falling Away

Moving on to Anne's second question: Can a person be "saved," then later fall away? Once again, the short answer is "Yes."

For example, the Galatians mentioned above had been truly-converted members of God's church; but had become sidetracked by false doctrine and had fallen from grace. In sort, they fell away!

It is important for us to remember that salvation is both an ongoing process and a one-time event. Let us take a quick look at both of these:

Firstly, salvation is an ongoing process in that it is like a long race – more of a marathon than a hundred yard sprint. And also in our race, we are not competing against our fellow runners. However, in order to receive our crown – our prize of salvation – we must continue to push on and make it to the finish line.

Secondly, salvation is a one-time event in that, once a person has been called, has repented, has been converted, baptized, has had hands laid on him, and has received the gift of the Holy Spirit, he then becomes a true Christian – a begotten child of God – a spiritual sibling of Jesus Christ. At this point, the person is considered to be spiritually saved – in a saved condition. If he then meets an untimely death – even shortly after his baptism – his eternal salvation is assured.

That is the good news. Now here is what we might consider the "bad news."

Once we have taken these necessary initial steps (i.e. repentance, baptism, having hands laid on us), it is almost as if a humanly-invisible target suddenly appears on our backs, and we attract the undesirable attention of Satan and his cohorts. This is not a "maybe." This is a disagreeable certainty!

However, our great, loving and all-powerful God promises us His protection if we will stay close to Him.

In Mark chapter 4 and Luke chapter 8, in the parable of the sower and the seed, Jesus warns us that various types of pressure will be exerted on us by Satan and his demons in order to get us to give up the wonderful calling and the many other spiritual gifts given to us by God. If we give up, we will have fallen away:

But the ones {seeds} on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation {or trial} fall away. (Luke 8:13)

What about the timing? The timing as to who is permanently lost and who is not? God is the all-loving, all-wise and all-merciful Judge. But still, such falling away can have devastating consequences:

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. (Hebrews 6:4-6)

For this reason, it is very important that a person considering baptism should not think it a light thing; but should carefully and prayerfully prepare and think deeply about the magnitude of the huge step he or she is considering.

Once we have been baptized, the onus is on each and every Christian:

- To use the Holy Spirit God has put within us, continually throughout our lives, in loving service to Him and His children,
- To overcome and to endure to the end – whether that end be the end of our physical lives or the return of Jesus Christ,
- To hold on tightly to the crowns God has put aside for us,
- To maintain a regular, ongoing, two-way contact with God – in prayer, Bible study, meditation and fasting,
- To practice what we preach.

If we fail to do these things, we will – not “may” or “might” – we *will* quickly become sidetracked. I am sad to have to say that I have seen this happen too many times.

End-Time Falling Away

God tells us that a day *will* come as we approach the end of this age when there will come a major falling away from God's truth and from His church.:

Let no one deceive you by any means; for that day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition. (II Thessalonians 2:3)

The people who get caught up in this future falling-away will have been truly called and baptized church members. After all, it is impossible for a person to fall away from something that he has never been part of.

It is very important for us not to underestimate Satan. Not only is he the main adversary of God; he is also extremely crafty and powerful. So much so that he will even provoke another major falling away at the end of the Millennium – inciting people who will have seen the glorified Christ with their own eyes, and will have lived and worked with Him (Revelation 20:7-10).

Like David, the man after God's own heart, we must continually pray:

Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. (Psalm 51:11)

We must do all we can to hold on to God, to His truth, to our crowns, and to the faith once delivered to our fellow saints from earlier times (Revelation 3:11; Romans 1:18; Jude 1:3).

If we do these things, we can be sure that we will be blessed never to fall away.

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