

# Tower of Strength

**“The name of the Lord is a strong tower  
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”**

**—Proverbs 18:10**



## Is Perseverance Assured?

The “P” of the Calvinist scheme TULIP refers to “Perseverance of the Saints.” It means that once an elect person is brought into salvation by the irresistible grace of God, he can never fall away. After all, if God is going to force a person to be saved without any reference to that person’s will or choice, He is also going to force Him to remain saved!

They whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end. This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election  
(*Westminster Confession of Faith, XVII:I-II*).

Though the “Once Saved Always Saved” doctrine is popular with many people, the Bible does not teach it. Falling away from God is a very real risk and a sad reality. Several passages indicate the possibility of a saved person falling from grace.

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In Luke 8:4–18, Jesus tells the familiar parable of the sower, and speaks of those who “in a time of temptation fall away.”

In Galatians 5:1–4, Paul addresses Christians whom Christ has “set free” and warns that those who return to Judaism “have been severed from Christ...you have fallen from grace.” It is puzzling to hear Calvinists argue that a Christian “can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace,” when the words “you have fallen from grace” are so plainly present in the Bible.

In 1 Corinthians 8:11, Paul tells Christians to be sensitive to other Christians’ weaknesses, because their faith can be carelessly destroyed, “for through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died.” A brother, a member of the body of Christ, can be ruined.

In 1 Timothy, some made a “shipwreck” of their faith (1:19), “denied the faith” (5:8), and “wandered away from the faith” (6:10).

Now, Calvinists readily admit the fact that members of their churches sometimes stop attending and return to the world of sin. In an effort to cling to their doctrine, Calvinists say that those individuals were not really part of the elect in the first place, only pretenders who were self-deceived or who were deceiving others. Calvinists specifically assert that no true Christian can fall away.

But, let me be clear about this: the Bible doesn’t just address the reality of church-goers returning to the world. The Bible speaks of those who were true Christians falling away!

In 2 Peter 2, Peter describes false teachers. He says that they “will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves” (v. 1). This is as crystal clear as can be—a person once “bought” with Christ’s blood is the very definition of a real Christian. Yet, such an individual can be destroyed by his later denial and wicked behavior.

In Revelation 22:19, Jesus warns, “If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.”

Here, a man once had a part in the tree of life and heaven, but due to his actions, his part has been revoked.

A whole church is depicted this way in Revelation 2:1–7. Jesus says to the saints at Ephesus, “repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand from its place.” To him who does not overcome Satan and the lusts of the world, Jesus suggests He can “erase his name from the book of life” (Revelation 3:5).

This scary process can be seen in Acts 8:13–24, in which “Simon himself believed, and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip...” which is again the very definition of a true Christian. But, “when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money...” Peter said to him, “may your silver perish with you.” Simon had believed and been baptized, indicating salvation (Mark 16:15–16), yet Peter confronted him with the prospect of “perishing” due to his greedy desires.

Even the Apostle Paul—a saved man if there ever was one—did not smugly declare his guaranteed security. Instead, he said, “let him who thinks he stands take heed, lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). He said, “I buffet my body and make it my slave lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified” (1 Cor. 9:24–27).

In James 5:19–20, we are told to seek out the erring brother: “If any among you strays from the truth, and one brings him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death.” Here is a man who accepted the truth, then strayed from the truth, in which condition James defines him as a sinner with a lost soul. Finally, thanks to the admonishing, he returns to Christ.

Furthermore, the Bible promises worse punishment for those who are saved and then fall away. In 2 Peter 2:20–21 we read of those who “escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord” but who are again “entangled in them” are in a worse situation than those simply lost. “For it would be better for them not to have known

the way of righteousness, than having known it, to fall away from the holy commandment delivered to them.”

Hebrews 10:26–31 speaks of the severe punishment due him “who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified...” Note, this person was sanctified by the blood—the very definition of a true Christian. And yet now is in danger of vengeance. Hebrews 6:4–6 speaks of a similar situation.

What a multitude of passages demonstrate the falsehood of the “Once Saved Always Saved” doctrine!

So, is a Christian’s position always teetering on the edge of destruction? Does my position in this bulletin suggest we can never have assurance of our salvation? Not at all. For those who choose to remain in the faith of Jesus Christ, truly “nothing is able to separate us from the love of God” (Romans 8:39). There is most certainly assurance, confidence, and security in being a Christian. We don’t speak of the “chance” of heaven, but the sure “hope” of heaven. But God permits free will. An individual can so act as to leave the fold of God, and forfeit his soul. Nothing can snatch a sheep out of the Lord’s hand, but we can choose to leave His fold. Do not think that because at some point in your distant past you believed and were baptized for the remission of your sins, your ticket is punched for heaven. Salvation is a saint’s present possession, but it is not irrevocable. See Ezek. 33:13–16.

Let us become diligent to grow in our faith and love, maturing as children of God, learning to put off the old man of sin and put on the new man of Christ, doing the best we can every day to “be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble” (2 Peter 1:4–11).

—*John Guzzetta*

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### **Quote of the Week:**

“You can do more than pray after you have prayed. But you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed.”

—*John Bunyan*