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Conducted by  
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**“Can a person be saved today and lost tomorrow? Can you please explain the discrepancy between the statement of Jesus as recorded by John (John 10:28, 29), and the statement of Paul as recorded in 1 Cor: 9:27?”**

The first thing we ought to do is to interpret the question and state it precisely so that we know the basis for our answer.

I understand the questioner to be asking, “Is it possible for a person to be saved and then at some future time to be lost”? To further this question, he cites two statements from the N.T. which seem to be in conflict. The first of these statements is by John, who records the Lord as saying, “And I give unto them eternal life; and they

shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:28, 29). In contrast to this, we have the apostle Paul writing to Corinth, and saying, "But I keep under my body; and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor:9:27). So is Paul teaching something different from his Lord, or is there some other explanation? We shall need to examine the statements quite critically in order to decide, and I feel sure that the first part of the question will be answered after a consideration of the second part.

### Security with Jesus

The theme of security with Jesus is well illustrated in the tenth chapter of John's gospel record, the part referred to as the parable of the Good Shepherd. Jesus had tried to explain to the Jews that with Him they would be safe. He also intimated that He would be Shepherd to 'sheep' which were not of the Jewish 'fold', for example, to the Gentiles also. Much agitated discussion followed among the people, and they finally said to Him: "How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly". Jesus retorted by telling them that they were not of His sheep, and went on to say, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:26-28).

Even though Jesus had come to the lost sheep of the House of Israel, it was quite evident that some of those 'sheep' were not securely held in His hand (V26). The conditions for security in the hands of Jesus were clearly stated by Him:

- (i) His sheep heard His voice.
- (ii) He knew them.
- (iii) They followed Him.

Clearly, if these conditions obtained then no power on earth would be able to remove the 'sheep' from the secure hands of Jesus.

Conversely, it is equally clear that if the 'sheep' stopped listening to the Lord's voice and wandered from His presence, then they would place themselves in acute danger. The verb 'to pluck' conveys the idea of force suddenly applied. On one occasion Jesus said: "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." (Matt. 11:12). The same idea must be true of the sheep that wander away from the shepherd; the marauding animal pounces violently and snatches away by force. This is precisely what Peter means when he says, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith" (1 Pet. 5:8, 9). What is the exhortation of Peter? Resist, stedfast in the faith. In other words, stay close to the object of your faith, the Lord Christ Himself.

On consideration, then, of the passage in John's gospel, I am led to believe, (a) as long as we continue to hear, and do, the things which Jesus teaches, and as long as we are content to follow in His footsteps, then no power will be able to snatch us from His hand. But (b) if we wander away from Him and cease to hear Him, then we must surely be in grave danger of being lost.

### Could I be a 'Castaway'?

Paul evidently thought so. The Greek word rendered 'castaway' means, 'not being able to stand the test'; 'rejected'. So let us look again at the Corinthian passage and put in our new word. "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected" (1 Cor. 9:27).

We shall, perhaps, be able to understand this passage better if we put it into its context. From V24 Paul begins to contrast living the Christian life with competing in a race. The striving in the race is to win the prize, so we run that we may obtain it. The athlete competes to win a corruptible crown (the laurel wreath); the Christian runs the race of life to receive an incorruptible crown (eternal salvation).

Paul obviously envisages the possibility of rejection. Not rejection to *enter* the race, but rejection for the *prize*. Paul recognised his own imperfections as *he* ran the race. He wrote to the Philippians, concerning the resurrection of the dead, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:12). It is the realisation that he may miss the prize which spurs Paul to press on. He buffets his body, literally makes it black and blue, to bring it into subjection. At the end of it all he is able to exclaim with serene confidence, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing?" (2 Tim. 4:7, 8). Surely, it is a humbling thought for us all, to see this great apostle with such a wholesome fear instead of the smug complacency which we sometimes see in some Christians.

### Conclusion

I think it is fairly obvious that the doctrine of 'once saved always saved' is not a tenable one. I feel confident in saying that as long as the Christian walks hand in hand with the Master then no power, satanic or otherwise, will be able to snatch him from the Master's hand. I also believe that if the Christian chooses to ignore the Master's leading, and leaves His side, then that Christian renders himself liable to rejection. The Bible does *not* contradict itself. The contradictions that people think they see are more imagined than real.

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