

Eternal Security vs. Conditional Salvation
Oakwood Christian Church Position Paper
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How much confidence can a person have in his eternal destination? Once you say you believe in Jesus Christ, is your salvation secure no matter how you behave? What if you change your mind and say you no longer believe? Our position at Oakwood Christian Church is that this is an important issue, but not an essential doctrine foundational to the church. When discussing this issue and other similar issues, we would be wise to remember a popular Christian slogan: “In doctrine unity, in opinion liberty, in all things love.” We believe Christians have the freedom to disagree about this issue. Therefore, Oakwood Christian Church does not take an official church stance on the issue of eternal security.

We believe that a person is saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8). A person who does not have faith in Christ, or is living in rebellion against him, should not expect to be saved, regardless of his past (Heb. 3:8,12; 10:26; 2 Pet. 2:20-22). Some will say that such a person “was never saved in the first place,” because God knew in his Sovereignty that the person would reject Christ in the end. Whether the person was saved then lost, or never saved in the first place, is not clearly addressed in Scripture, and both sides of the debate can point to Scriptures to defend their position. The Bible says God is Sovereign and knows the future. But the Scripture also warns the saved person against falling away (2 Tim. 2:12-13; Heb 2:1; 3:8-12; 2 Pet. 2:20-22; 3:17). The argument may simply be semantic because the end result is the same on both sides: a person who once believed but has become apostate is not saved. Nearly all Christians agree on this point. Some believe that once you are saved you may live an unrighteous life or even reject Christ without losing your salvation; but they are ignoring a vast amount of biblical evidence to the contrary, and such teaching has dangerous consequences.

Because of the Scriptures mentioned above and others warning the saved person against falling away, the primary teaching of the leadership at Oakwood has been that it is possible for a person to lose his or her salvation through rebellion. Salvation is the free gift of God, available to all, and God desires that all be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). Every individual has the choice to accept or reject God’s offer of forgiveness. Once a person is saved, that salvation cannot be lost through one sin, or even a series of sins. But, as Hebrews 10:26 says, “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth,” we may get to a point where our hearts are so hard that we reject Christ and want no part of his salvation any more, at which point, “no sacrifice for sins is left.” Jesus said in John 3:16, “Whoever believes in [God’s Son] shall not perish but have eternal life.” The word “believes” in the original Greek is in the present tense, denoting continual action. Whoever “continues to believe” will have eternal life. Someone who believed as a youngster but rejects that belief in later life should not expect to be granted the promise of eternal life. God is not going to force anyone into heaven against his or her will.

The traditional teaching at Oakwood in this area has been one of conditional salvation: you are saved as long as you continue to believe and unless you become an unbeliever or “apostate” (one who rejects his religion). But a person is not required to agree with the leadership’s position on this doctrine in order to become a member or even to be eligible for a leadership role. However,

we do ask those who hold to eternal security to be respectful of the leadership's position and to seek to honestly present both sides of the issue when teaching on this subject.

We also believe that it is important to remind every Christian that if you have put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, your salvation is secure. If you are a sincere believer, then questioning your salvation is wrong. It is not a sign of humility or showing your awareness of your sins; to question your salvation shows a lack of faith in the promise of God to save you. It is often a sign that you question whether God is big enough or gracious enough to forgive your sin. If you trust in the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross, then you should have assurance of your salvation (1 Jn. 5:13). If you have wandered from the Lord, then you should repent and return to Christ lest you harden your heart, reject him and lose your salvation. Peter warned us to be on guard lest we be carried away by evil men and fall from our "secure position" (2 Pet. 3:17). Rest assured, your salvation is secure, as long as you remain in faith. Your God is big enough to forgive your sins.

Some – even in our own church body – may disagree strongly with our traditional teaching on this issue. We hope that shows our tolerance toward those who disagree, and we hope that those who disagree will show the same tolerance to us. Let us humbly admit that there are mysteries in Scripture which will not be fully understood until the return of Christ, and let's renew our commitment to practice love and tolerance toward fellow believers who do not agree with us on secondary doctrines. Jesus prayed, "May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:23).