

Falling Down or Falling Away?

By [Rev. Kevin Labby](#)

The Christian life, if lived long enough, is full of paradox. We are declared righteous in Christ, yet we wrestle daily with sin. We are united to Christ in His death and resurrection, yet live in bodies that often crave what is wrong. Perhaps most jarring is this: the more we grow in Christlikeness, the more aware we become of the depth of our sin. What should we do with these failures—not those before our conversion, but after? How do we reconcile the joy of salvation with the sorrow of ongoing sin?

For many, these struggles raise a deeper and more unsettling question: What if persistent sin means I could lose my salvation? This fear strikes at the heart of our assurance. How can we trust in the permanence of salvation when sin feels so persistent? And how do we understand those who once professed faith but now seem to have walked away?

The Lingering Weight of Sin

John captures the tension perfectly: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves” (1 John 1:8). Yet moments later, he declares, “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning” (1 John 3:9). How can both be true? Scripture consistently teaches that conversion is not the end of the believer’s struggle with sin—it’s the beginning of a lifelong fight.

This fight often feels hopelessly lopsided. Paul’s words in Romans 7 resonate deeply: “I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing” (Romans 7:19). Yet this struggle is a sign of progress. It reveals a new desire for righteousness even as it uncovers the otherwise hidden depths of our sin. It destroys our delusions of self-sufficiency and draws us closer to Christ. What once seemed trivial—an unkind word or selfish thought—now grieves us deeply, not because we fear punishment, but because we love the God we have sinned against.

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Thankfully, Scripture overwhelmingly teaches that true believers are secure in Christ because salvation is entirely God’s work. Paul assures us, “By grace you have been saved through faith... it is the gift of God, not a result of works” (Ephesians 2:8–9). Jesus promises, “No one will snatch [my sheep] out of my

hand” (John 10:28), and Paul reminds us, “Nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ” (Romans 8:39). Yes, believers may stumble and fall down, but their Father will not let them fall completely away.

But what of those who Scripture says do fall away? John explains, “They went out from us, but they were not of us” (1 John 2:19). In short, their departure reveals they never truly belonged to Christ. Hebrews 6:4–6, though one of the most challenging passages of Scripture, supports this. It warns of the impossibility of restoring to repentance those who have been “enlightened” and “tasted the heavenly gift” but then fall away. At first glance, this might seem to threaten the assurance of salvation. However, when read in light of the whole of Scripture, it becomes clear that the passage is not describing true believers losing salvation. Instead, it speaks of those who outwardly participated in the community of faith, experiencing its blessings and truth, yet never truly embraced Christ in their hearts - even going so far as to hold him up to contempt.

Their falling away is not a momentary lapse or season of struggle but a deliberate and hardened rejection of the gospel. Despite seeing its beauty and power, they turn from it, revealing an unrepentant heart hardened against God’s grace (cf. Matthew 13:18-23; Mark 4:1-9; Luke 8:4-8). This warning serves as both a sober reminder of the cost of rejecting Christ and a reassurance: those who truly belong to Him are kept by His grace and cannot fall away.

How Should We Respond to Repeated Failures?

We must take our sin seriously and repent of it. Though Christ has fully borne the condemnation our sins deserve, sin still has consequences in our lives. It can harm others, erode our peace, and interrupt the enjoyment of our communion with God, though it cannot sever our relationship with Him. Because God is so worthy and sin so destructive, repentance is not optional for the believer; it is a vital response to the grace of God at work in us.

Our repentance begins with the recognition that our standing before God rests entirely on Christ’s righteousness, not on our performance. As Paul declares, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). This foundational truth anchors our hope: we are accepted by God not because of anything we do, but because of what Christ has done for us. This assurance frees us to face our sin honestly without fear of rejection.

Repentance, then, is not an attempt to earn God’s favor or atone for our failures. It is a trusting response to His kindness and mercy, a work of His grace in our hearts. True repentance flows from a faith that rests in the gospel and delights in the God who forgives. As David prayed, “Restore to me the joy of your salvation” (Psalm 51:12). Similarly, the prophet Joel urges, “Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love”

(Joel 2:13). Repentance is not what secures forgiveness. Instead, it is the evidence of a heart transformed by God's love and awakened to the seriousness of sin.

Yet even as we repent, we must resist the temptation to despair over our repeated failures. The power of sin may feel overwhelming, but God's grace is greater still. Paul reminds us, "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Romans 5:20). God's strength is made perfect in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). In Christ, even our failures become occasions to lean on His unshakable love and victory.

Finally, repentance is not a solo journey. The Christian life is meant to be lived in community. Isolation leaves us vulnerable to discouragement, but the church is called to embody God's grace. Paul exhorts us to "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2). When we confess our sins and pray for one another, we open ourselves to God's healing power (James 5:16). A church growing in grace will not be marked by perfection, but by a deepening dependence on Christ and a shared commitment to walk together in repentance and faith.

Hope for Struggling Saints

Christian, your failures do not define you—Christ does. The paradox of sanctification is that the closer we grow to God, the more aware we are of our sin, and yet the more deeply we experience His grace. True falling away is a rejection of Christ that reveals a heart that never belonged to Him. But for those who are in Christ, the Spirit will preserve them to the end.

The Christian life is not about our faithfulness, but His. Our hope is not in becoming sinless in this life, but in the One who was sinless for us. One day, we will stand before Him, clothed not in the rags of our failure, but in the righteousness of Christ. Until then, let your failures drive you to the cross, where mercy flows without measure.

As Augustine prayed, "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You." Rest in Him, even in your failure, and press on in the hope of the gospel.

Get up. Keep moving. Onward!

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