

Eternal Security

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Today's topic deals with the teaching of eternal security or the doctrine of once -saved -always-saved. Put another way, eternal security means that when a person accepts Christ as Savior and Lord and experiences the new birth, nothing can take the promise of eternal life away from that person regardless of whether or not he or she is living a holy life or has backslidden. Even if a person who was once saved, later comes to deny Christ, yet he is saved regardless, so say the persons who hold to the doctrine of eternal security.

We want to look at three aspects of salvation: salvation procured; salvation assured; and salvation secured. First let us consider how salvation is procured.

1. SALVATION PROCURED

Some will say that if we deny eternal security, then we believe that works rather than faith saves. I don't think such a conclusion necessarily follows. Faith and works go hand in hand.

Turn to **Ephesians 2:8-10** (the great passage affirming faith as the sole means of salvation). "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

All right, let's affirm the teaching here; we are saved by faith alone. Many people believe that good works alone will win God's favor and the promise of eternal life. This is not so.

There are many people who have kind hearts, many who do all kinds of charitable and worthy deeds. This behavior is obviously praiseworthy and one which every Christian should exemplify. But if a person has not really come to God through faith in the Lord

Jesus as personal Saviour, then no amount of good deeds will help gain God's favor or the promise of eternal life.

Throughout history many have been misled into thinking that good works apart from faith in Christ as sin-bearer will put one right with God, or that works are the most important factor in procuring salvation.

A classic example is that of the Pharisees. The Pharisees were rigid followers of the law; theirs was a works righteousness. The more rigidly they followed the Jewish laws, the more favor they would gain in the eyes of God; the more righteous they would be. For the Pharisees, good works bought God's grace.

Paul struggled with this as a Pharisee, but when he became a Christian he realized that we are not saved by works lest any man should boast, but we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ.

Later in history during the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church began to move in a similar direction implying that good works bring about God's forgiveness and grace. Give so much money to the church; say one hundred "Hail Mary's"; go on a pilgrimage to some holy shrine; do these good deeds and thou shalt gain God's favor.

Martin Luther struggled time and again trying to achieve salvation through works. Luther did all sorts of good works, but his soul found no comfort until he realized that it is not by works but by faith whereby we are saved.

In our own day we witness the heresy which says good works are sufficient for salvation in the thinking of the humanists. While their aims are good (helping to serve our neighbors), yet the rewards are only temporary. Only faith in Christ as our motivation for doing good, will assure us eternal life and a place in the eternal kingdom of God.

On the other side of the coin are those, many of whom adhere to the doctrine of eternal security, who claim that faith saves and your works really don't matter. This is just as heretical as those who believe that works brings about salvation. Remember to affirm **Ephesians 2:10**, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Jesus said many will cry unto me, Lord, Lord, but only those who do the will of my father who is in heaven shall enter the kingdom of heaven. True faith is believing and doing the will of the Father. Faith and works go hand in hand.

In summary then, we are saved through faith in Christ and our faith is made manifest through our works. This is how salvation is procured.

2. SALVATION ASSURED

If we come to God in faith, then we receive the assurance of eternal life. **John 5:4** records these words of Jesus: “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my words and believes in him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment but passes from death to life.”

The Philippian jailor cried out to Paul and Silas: “What must I do to be saved?” The apostles answered, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved.”

Paul writes these words of assurance in his letter to the Roman Christians: “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” And the assuring words of Jesus himself: “And he who comes to me I will not cast out.”

Concerning the assurance of salvation, William Beahm, former dean of Bethany Seminary says: “We can be sure enough to be free from anxiety and to live our lives in joy. Our fellowship with the Holy Spirit brings us comfort and assurance.”

“Salvation is not promised on the basis of any particular type of conversion, it does not rest upon feeling, and it is not achieved by merit; salvation is God’s free gift promised unconditionally to everyone who accepts Christ as Savior and Lord.”

Christians enjoy the forgiveness of sins not through any merit of their own, but alone through the redemptive death of Jesus. God intends to keep every one of his children.

Even when we sin as Christians, God forgives us if we but come to Him asking for forgiveness. There is no need for Christians to doubt for one moment that we are truly born of God and heirs to the promise of life eternal. Neither do we need to fear that we will lose our salvation if we maintain our fellowship with the Lord.

“The person troubled by doubts will need to pray that God’s Spirit might enable him to simply lay hold by faith on the promises of God, being able to walk by faith and not by sight, renouncing feeling as the touchstone of salvation, and seeking to live close to the Lord; for where worldliness and spiritual coldness enter a life, Christian assurance departs.” (J. C. Wenger, *Introduction to Theology*, p. 304).

God has promised to keep us safe from sin and keep our salvation secure. If we walk with the Lord, he will protect us and he will give us strength to overcome any temptation that may come our way. We need not worry about our salvation or falling out of grace. Sin cannot overtake us as Christians unless we want it to.

1 Corinthians 10:13 says “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

3. SALVATION SECURED

Now we come to ask the central question of the sermon today. Can a person fall out of grace and lose his salvation? I believe the answer is yes; a person can lose his salvation and forfeit the assurance of life eternal and forsake God and His ways even though the person had been saved.

The reason that I believe a person can lose his salvation is based upon the belief in man acting as a free moral being, making his or her own decisions; capable of accepting God and His promises, or rejecting God and His promises.

There are two schools of thought in theology on this matter. One school believes in the doctrine of the elect which means some people are chosen even before they are born to be saved, and some to be lost because God foreordained it.

There are Scriptures which seem to validate this. This view of God’s chosen elect is sometimes called “predestination” meaning that one’s life was mapped out before he was born; what you would become and what you would do was all in God’s plan for your life; you can make no decisions apart from God’s plan. In short; you are a puppet, completely directed from God with no room for independent thinking or actions. This viewpoint is classified as Calvinistic theology named after John Calvin who is the father of the Reformed, Presbyterian, and other denominations. This view of election pushed to its logical conclusion states that if you are elect of God and your destiny already planned, then you cannot lose your salvation no matter what happens; no matter how you live your life, God has foreordained you to eternal life, and like it or not, you are going to heaven. That is what eternal security is really saying. Calvin called it “perseverance of the saints.”

There is another school of thought which is called the Arminian School named after the theologian Jacobus Arminius. This school of thought says that man is given free will and is not like a puppet on a string but a free moral agent. Man can either accept Christ or reject Him. God does not decide for us, but we decide for ourselves. In this view, man is responsible for his own decisions and destiny. In line with this thinking then, the elect of which the Scriptures speak, are those who respond in faith and accept God’s call. But all persons have opportunity to accept Christ. God desires that all follow Him, but he has not ordained some to be saved and some to be lost before they are even born.

The Church of the Brethren and other Anabaptist groups as well as Methodists and others accept this view of man's free will.

The reason for all the detail is because one should understand that background, when approaching the subject of eternal security. It is true that the Scriptures state that we will not be tempted beyond our strength; but the same verse states that God will provide the way of escape. You and I can either take the escape and overcome the temptation and have victory over the sin, or we can refuse the way of escape and remain in sin and risk ultimately separation from God. The key is our desire to maintain fellowship with the Lord.

People who support eternal security will then ask; "Are you saying we never know if we are saved or lost?" No not at all. We as Christians, as affirmed earlier, can know from Scripture and from God's promises that we are saved. But a person who once was a Christian and who has backslidden and is no longer receptive to God's voice, stands in danger of the judgment.

Matthew 5:13 says, "Ye are the salt of the earth, but if the salt have lost its savor, with what shall it be salted? It is thereafter good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot by men." If we backslide in faith and fail to come to God in repentance and fail to maintain the walk with God and fail to fellowship with Him, then our salvation means nothing. We have lost our savor and our Saviour, and will be cast out of the kingdom.

God acted the same way with his own angels; He cast Lucifer and his hosts from heaven. Time and again as you read the New Testament there are examples of believers who forsake their faith and are cast out; Judas, Ananias and Sapphira, Demas, Alexander, Hymenaeus. The Book of Revelation is very explicit in describing the fate of those who once named Christ as Savior but have fallen away. Other examples of this are found in **2 Peter 2:20-22, in 1 Timothy 1:19-20, and in Colossians 1:20-23.**

The whole Book of Hebrews undercuts the eternal security teaching. For example, **Hebrews 2:1** says, "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip." **Hebrews 3:12-14** says, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end."

We also need to consider **James 5:19**, "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." Paul admits that there

will be those who fall away from the faith. **I Timothy 4:1** says, “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.” Or consider the implications of **Matthew 18** which deals with the excommunication of unfaithful members.

Those who support eternal security will come back with the argument: “Well those persons like Judas, Demas, etc. were never saved to begin with.” Since when do we as mortal creatures determine who is saved and who is not? God only is judge.

Why am I so opposed to the doctrine of eternal security? Because I believe it is a very dangerous teaching that has invaded the church. The reason I say dangerous is because if eternal security is true, it makes it safe for a believer to live in sin if he desires to do so and still receive the firstfruits of eternal life. This doctrine can give a false security and has done a great deal of harm in the church.

Let me relate a story told by Bro. Carl Zeigler. Brother Zeigler was invited to conduct revival services in a church located in a small town in West Virginia. There were only a few churches in this town and one of the churches was going to have revival services the same week as the church where Carl was to preach. The church in which Carl was to preach, got the idea to combine their efforts with the other churches and have a united revival effort. Soon however, rumors started circulating about the town concerning the other evangelist; rumors about him behaving immorally with some of the young women in town.

Carl thought he would confront the other evangelist and clear the air. This he did, but, instead of denying the charges, the preacher admitted that the charges were true. His reply was; “Yes it’s true, but for me it is not wrong; I’ve been saved and no matter what I do, I cannot lose my salvation. I’ve been born again and my salvation is secure.” True, this is an extreme case, but it nevertheless points up the dangers of believing that our salvation is unconditionally and eternally secure. The townspeople soon dismissed the services of that minister.

Assurance of salvation for the Christian: YES! But eternal security for the believer regardless of belief, actions, or lifestyle? Most decidedly NO!

“Eternal security would emphasize the absolute security of the soul upon the basis that God has given man something that is eternal and unconditional. Christian assurance rests upon the promises of God, but recognizes the conditions of God’s keeping.” (J. L. Stauffer, *The Eternal Security Teaching*, Herald Press, p. 8.) I hope this statement helps us see that difference.

If some people try to push the belief of eternal security upon you, don't argue. Pray about it; be grounded in the Word as you give answer.

I have always said something like this: "All right, maybe we cannot solve our differences concerning this teaching. I still want to accept you as my brother or sister in Christ and if I am wrong in denying the eternal security teaching, no harm is done; no souls led astray. But if you, who hold to eternal security are wrong, think of the persons you may have led astray by giving them a false security while preaching the eternal security doctrine."

Our salvation is *procured* by faith in Christ; *assured* by trust in His Word, and *secured* only by obedience to His teachings. I want to affirm that there is no other way to have fellowship with Jesus than to trust and obey.