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**How the Doctrine of Eternal Security  
Affects Our Missiology**

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## **Introduction**

“When two vowels go walking, which one does the talking?” The old grade school rule for phonics could be rephrased, “When two doctrines go walking, which one does the talking?” In the case of the doctrines of salvation and mission, soteriology and missiology, the answer is, “Both do the talking, although one may speak louder.” Our missiology may lead the way, but our soteriology nevertheless speaks through our mission methodology.

In particular, the doctrine of eternal security impacts our missiology. To comprehend its effect, we must first review both the biblical mission of God and the church and the Bible’s teaching on the endurance of genuine believers in Christ. Following such analyses, implications can be noted of how the doctrine of eternal security affects our missiology.

### **A. The Biblical Mission of God and His People**

The mission of the church emerges from a thoroughly grounded divine agenda. Scripture establishes the centrality of the Great Commission in God’s purpose and in its assignment to the Church. The Bible furnishes the impetus for the evangelistic quest of the worldwide body and of each local assembly. The intent of God is revealed consistently throughout Scripture. It stretches from God’s

general call of an Old Testament patriarch to the specific mandate of Jesus Christ to his followers then and to congregations today.

### **1. Old Testament Foundations**

The Old Testament portends the mission inaugurated by Jesus Christ and assigned to the church in the New Testament. The mission originates through God’s covenant with Abraham and is reinforced by the prophets and the psalmist. The authors trace the conveyance of the mission from one man to a favored nation to the Messiah.

#### **a. The Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 17:1-8)**

God introduced his promise to the nations in his covenant renewal with Abraham in Genesis 17:1-8. The New Testament mission to “make disciples of all the nations” (Matt 28:18 NASB) is first expressed in Abraham’s call. God had already hinted that his impact would exceed that of forming “a great nation” (Gen 12:2 NASB). Somehow, through him God would bless “all the families of the earth” (Gen 12:3 NASB). Thus, Abraham would serve as the father of a new spiritual family of people from every nation on earth.

#### **b. The Worldwide Extension of God’s Glory**

God’s covenant with Abraham was continually reinforced in the remainder of the Old Testament. The promise to make him “the father of many nations” unfolded in more detail as the prophets and the psalmist pointed to the universal extension of God’s glory. A foundation was clearly laid for including the Gentiles in God’s eternal plan.

#### **(1) The gathering of all nations (Isa 66:18-23)**

God spoke through Isaiah to trumpet the assembling of every nation on earth to worship him. He assured that the gathering was imminent by stating, “the time is coming” (66:18). Walter Brueggemann depicts it as “a great, inclusive, universal reach of Yahweh to claim sovereignty over all peoples and to include all nations in the protected, blessed, covenanted community.”<sup>2</sup> God’s purpose for gathering the nations into the redeemed community is that “all mankind will come to bow down before Me” (66:23 NASB).

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<sup>2</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66*, Westminster Bible Companion, vol. 2 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 258.

**(2) God’s universal invitation (Joel 2:28-32)**

God’s method of gathering the nations to himself would come by a universal invitation to salvation, announced through the prophet Joel. Thomas J. Finley sees the prophet’s message forecasting “the day when the Lord Himself will establish justice in the earth by judging the unrighteous and setting up a new kingdom for His people.”<sup>3</sup> Joel links Israel’s vindication to a spiritual transformation throughout the nations: “The people will serve God from their hearts and have no fear for the terrifying effects of divine wrath upon the earth.”<sup>4</sup> Joel foretold the “new” outpouring of God’s Spirit “on all flesh” (2:28 NASB).

**(3) The global call to worship God (Ps 67:1-7)**

The psalmist summoned all the earth to worship God in response to his faithfulness to Israel. Gerald H. Wilson sees a reminder of “the covenant of God with Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3), linking the blessing of Abraham (and Israel through him) with God’s ultimate intention to bless ‘all peoples on the earth.’”<sup>5</sup> The psalmist yearns for God’s “way” and “salvation” to be published globally (67:2 NASB) and cries out repeatedly, “Let the peoples praise you, O God” (67:3, 5 NASB).

**2. The Great Commission of Jesus Revealed in the Gospels**

The mission of God in the Old Testament resurfaces as the pursuit of Jesus Christ in the Gospels. Jesus entrusted his mission from the Father to a handful of raw disciples during a series of post-resurrection appearances. On three separate occasions prior to his ascension, He gave direction and insight into the divine assignment for his followers. The four New Testament evangelists chose particular excerpts of Jesus’ words on these occasions to include in their gospel accounts. Taken together, these statements form what the church has come to embrace as the Great Commission.

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<sup>3</sup>Thomas J. Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990), 71.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms*, vol. 1, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 925.

**a. The Johannine Commission (John 20:21)**

John’s record of the Lord’s appearance to the disciples on Sunday evening features two conferrals of “Peace be with you” (20:19, 21 NASB), sandwiched around the display of his wounds to them. They would soon need that peace as they accepted his charge.

Jesus’ first commission to his disciples was brief, lacking the details revealed in his later commands. This was not a time for assignment but for assurance. Their participation in his mission had been part of his promise, now sealed by his appearance before them. As Christ’s mission has been central in John, the theme of divine appointment is now stressed as he hands his mission to the disciples. The success of their mission is assured, since they are not initiating their own work but continuing the work of their Lord.<sup>6</sup>

**b. The Matthean Commission (Matt 28:18-20)**

Matthew supplies the most familiar commission of the four, given by Jesus on the mountain in Galilee. William Hendriksen imagines the setting as “a place of picturesque scenery and subdued quietness,” and “above all, a scene of tender reminiscences, both for Jesus himself and for his followers, reminding them of what had happened earlier; perhaps on this particular elevation.”<sup>7</sup> The mountain setting would provide an appropriate site for Jesus to convey a few peak concepts in the Great Commission.

**(1) The authority for the mission**

Jesus begins his commission here by declaring his new cosmic clout. Bosch brings out, “Now, after his resurrection, Jesus is given *all* authority, not only on earth but also in heaven. What is new is the universal extension of his authority.”<sup>8</sup> The mission will go forth now since Jesus is fully in charge. A.T. Robertson notes, “He spoke as one already in heaven with a world-wide outlook and with the resources

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<sup>6</sup>Andreas J. Kostenberger and Peter T. O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*, New Studies in Biblical Theology no. 11, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 222.

<sup>7</sup>William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 996.

<sup>8</sup>David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 78.

of heaven at his command.”<sup>9</sup> Christ’s claim to supremacy shapes his commission (“Therefore, go” NASB). Robert Garrett suggests that “the words that follow, no matter how difficult, have weight because the Lord of all authority requires it. Thus, fulfilling the Great Commission is not an option for the disciples but a matter of simple obedience.”<sup>10</sup>

## (2) The focus of the mission

Jesus clarifies the mission’s focus with the command, “Make disciples,” the only New Testament occurrence of “μαθητεύσατε.”<sup>11</sup> Garrett views “going,” “baptizing,” and “teaching” each as critical to making disciples:

It is most likely that these represent a process, or a simple *three-step method*, in which disciples are produced: first, by going to those who have had no opportunity; second, by calling them to a relationship with Jesus in which they repent, believe, and are baptized as a symbol of their allegiance to Christ and his kingdom community (the church); and third, by teaching them to hold fast to all that Christ commanded.<sup>12</sup>

The new disciples are baptized in one “name” but in all three persons of the Trinity. Hendriksen views baptism in one’s “name” to mean ““being brought into vital relationship with’ that One” and “proclaiming that he has broken with the world and has been brought into union with the Triune God, to whom he intends to devote his life.”<sup>13</sup>

Jesus specifies that after new converts are baptized, they should be taught “to observe all that I have commanded you.” As Spirit baptism serves as entry into the church (1 Cor 12:13), water baptism implies placing new believers within communities for nurture and teaching. Bosch interprets Jesus’ instructions as to mean that the apostles should diligently teach new disciples “to submit to the will of

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<sup>9</sup>A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 1, *The Gospel According to Matthew, The Gospel According to Mark* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), 244.

<sup>10</sup>Robert Garrett, “The Gospels and Acts: Jesus the Missionary and His Missionary Followers,” in *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions*, ed. John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1998), 71.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>13</sup>Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, 1000-01.

God as revealed in Jesus’ ministry and teaching.”<sup>14</sup> Garrett contends the teaching “speaks of lifestyle and ethical integrity, putting into practice in personal and collective life the mandates that come from Jesus – not the least of which is this last command to make disciples of all the peoples.”

Thus, disciple making is clearly the focus given by Jesus. Garrett analyzes the mission, explaining, “All disciples are to go, baptize, and teach others, who then learn from them to go, baptize and teach others,” showing that Jesus “intended to start a *chain reaction* of ‘disciples making disciples’ that would encompass the entire planet.” The reproduction of disciples becomes essential to the mission. As Avery Willis illustrates, “Anyone can see the number of apples on a tree; only a few can see the number of trees in an apple.”<sup>15</sup> Jesus envisaged the fruit of exponential global discipleship.

### **(3) The scope for the mission**

Now Jesus expounds on the extent of the promise made earlier to his disciples, that he would make them “fishers of men” (Matt 4:19 NASB).<sup>16</sup> Garrett spells out that “the *scope* of the Great Commission’s discipling process is ‘all the nations’ ... embracing all ‘people groups’ of the world and nothing less.”<sup>17</sup> Earlier, Jesus had limited his own mission to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 15:24 NASB), but here he sends the disciples into the Gentile world.<sup>18</sup>

### **(4) The power for the mission**

The risen Lord now stands before his followers and assures them of his continued presence and power with them to the end of the mission. R. C. H. Lenski states it best: “He does not send his disciples out into the world of nations alone. Invisibly he will always be at their side, assuring their success. Here he answers every fear,

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<sup>14</sup>Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 66.

<sup>15</sup>Avery Willis, *The Biblical Basis of Missions* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1979), 85.

<sup>16</sup> Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, Thornapple Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), 429.

<sup>17</sup>Garrett, “The Gospels and Acts,” 72.

<sup>18</sup>Plummer, *Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 429.

doubt, discouragement, weakness.”<sup>19</sup> The “end of the age” signals the culmination of the Church’s missionary task, world evangelization.

### c. The Markan Commission (Mark 16:15-16)

The commission recorded in Mark falls within a passage (16:9-20) which has been the subject of scholarly debate regarding its length and authorship. Regardless, a similar version of Matthew’s charge is given here. Robertson and others concur that “this commission in Mark is probably another report of the missionary *Magna Charta* in Matt. 28:16-20 spoken on the mountain in Galilee.”<sup>20</sup>

Mark’s account deviates from Matthew’s on several points. First, in the general command to “go into all the world” and to evangelize “all creation,” with no mention of “the nations.” Lenski points to “the universality of grace which is expressed,” in that “no human being is shut out from the gospel.”<sup>21</sup> A second departure from Matthew’s account is Jesus’ charge to “preach the gospel” rather than to “make disciples.” The emphasis is on the urgency to *proclaim* the message. The third distinction in Mark’s version is the certainty that “he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.” J. C. Ryle sees Jesus warning “all who will persist in their wickedness and leave this world without faith in Christ. The greater the mercy offered to us in the Gospel, the greater will be the guilt of those who obstinately refuse to believe.”<sup>22</sup> Here, Jesus stresses the urgency to *receive* the message.

### d. The Lukan Commission (Luke 24:46-48)

Jesus’ final commission is best viewed as imparted on the Mount of Olives just prior to his ascension and in conjunction with Luke’s second account in Acts 1:3-8. Now Jesus validates prophecies so that the disciples might be assured of their coming roles. Alluding to his earlier prediction (24:44), he unfolds the divine agenda.

The motifs of repentance and forgiveness are woven throughout Luke-Acts and are thus included in Luke’s commission. The disciples’ witness elicits a response and anticipates a conversion.

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<sup>19</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, *Lenski’s New Testament Commentary Series* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 1180.

<sup>20</sup>Robertson, *Matthew*, Mark, 405.

<sup>21</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Mark’s Gospel*, *Lenski’s New Testament Commentary Series* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 765.

<sup>22</sup>J. C. Ryle, *Mark: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, *The Crossway Classic Commentaries* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 268.



Like Matthew, Luke cites ethno-linguistic groups (“πάντα τὰ ἔθνη”) as the recipients of the worldwide message. Darrell Bock points out that “the disciples initially stumbled over this element in Jesus’ commission, seemingly assuming that Jesus meant the message was to go to Jews in every nation.”<sup>23</sup> The mission would begin in Jerusalem (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4, 8).

#### **e. Summary of the Commissions**

The evangelists collaborate for an integrative account of the Great Commission in four diverse statements from Jesus. Each declaration spotlights certain facets of the gospel gem, from Luke’s affirmation of prophecy in worldwide proclamation to the priority of disciple-making stressed by Matthew, to the urgent call for evangelistic action in Mark.<sup>24</sup> Add to those the divine appointment of the church formulated in John. Jesus persuaded his disciples to exchange a misguided passion to restore Israel for the greater quest of gathering a new people of God from the nations of the world.<sup>25</sup>

### **3. The Mission of the Early Church**

The early church adopted Jesus’ mission to the nations as its own assignment. Local congregations accepted responsibility for the Great Commission as they came to grips with God’s plan to include the Gentiles. As the early church overcame ethnic bias and hostility, they discovered the mission of God and their own part in it. The book of Acts pivots on two decisive events transpiring within two foundational churches.

#### **a. The Admission by the Jerusalem Church (Acts 11:17-18)**

The apostle Peter’s experience of presenting the gospel to Cornelius and others in Caesarea (Acts 10:34-48) triggered a reaction from the church in Jerusalem. The Jewish church leaders confronted him upon hearing that he went to “uncircumcised men” and dined with them (11:2-3 NASB). Peter responded by recounting the story of his vision on the housetop in Joppa, of being summoned by Cornelius, and of the Spirit’s outpouring on the Gentiles. He

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<sup>23</sup>Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, vol. 2, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 1940.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid*, 1941.

<sup>25</sup>Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2006), 506.

concluded by asking them that if God had granted the same gift of the Spirit to the Gentiles that the Jews had received, “Who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” (11:17 NASB). The Jerusalem church leaders were compelled to agree, confessing that “God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life” (11:18 NASB).

The reference to salvation as “the repentance unto life” signals the complete capitulation of the Jewish church leaders in Jerusalem. John MacArthur digests the gospel feat. “That they would come to the admission that God had ‘granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life’ was one of the most shocking admissions in the annals of Jewish history. For until the Hebrew Christians came to that realization, they would never begin the task of evangelizing the Gentiles.”<sup>26</sup>

#### **b. The Mission Modeled by the Antioch Church (Acts 13:1-4)**

Upon hearing of a great harvest of new Gentile believers in Antioch, the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to investigate the report (Acts 11:22). Barnabas rejoiced in the work of God there, encouraged them, and brought Saul to Antioch to join him in teaching the new “Christians” (11:23). The church at Antioch would soon model Godly benevolence (11:29) and the missionary commitment for local assemblies of believers.

The first commissioning of missionaries from a local church erupted as the natural response to God’s call. Bock points out that “the call of Barnabas and Paul takes place in the context of worship,” emphasizing that “everything about the event argues that mission is grounded in God’s command and the response of a church engaged in devotion.”<sup>27</sup> He adds, “This is the end of spontaneous ministry to Gentiles. Now this Gentile outreach is planned and directed by God in a fuller, more intentional manner.”<sup>28</sup> Polhill comments that “the first Christian congregation to witness to the Gentiles in its own city (11:19f.)” was also “the first to send missionaries forth into the larger world.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>John MacArthur, Jr. *Acts 1-12, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 311.

<sup>27</sup>Bock, *Acts*, 438.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup>John B. Polhill, *Acts, The New American Commentary*, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 288-89.

God spoke to the Antioch church as they worshiped and fasted (13:2). The church was listening for God to speak. Luke does not specify just how the Holy Spirit spoke to the church to appropriate the two men. Larkin notes the balance in the call and the commission: “God sends the missionary through two essential and complementary means: the personal, inward call to the individual and the outward confirmation through the church.”<sup>30</sup> Luke relates that “when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away” (13:3 NASB). He later indicates that “they had been commended to the grace of God for the work” (14:26 NASB).

#### **4. Conclusion**

The mission of God to include the nations is revealed in the call of Abraham and repeated by the prophets and the psalmist. Jesus Christ later assumed the Father’s mission in his death and resurrection and imparted the task to his disciples in his Great Commission statements. The disciples adopted Christ’s mission as their own in the book of Acts.

Following Pentecost and the birth of the Jerusalem church, the mission to the Gentiles was renewed through Peter’s experience with Cornelius and the founding of the church at Antioch. Finally, the commissioning of Saul and Barnabas by the Antioch church to evangelize the Gentiles became the example for every church to individually embrace the mission. God’s mission to “make disciples of all the nations” (Matt 28:19 NASB), the Great Commission, remains the primary mission and responsibility of every church.

#### **B. The Biblical Doctrine of Eternal Security**

The evangelical stance on the eternal security of the saved has been anything but a consensus. Wayne Grudem identifies the “significant disagreement” between Arminian and Reformed camps as one boiling down to whether a genuine believer has the potential forfeiting his salvation. He notes that those within, “the Wesleyan/Arminian tradition have held that it is possible for someone who is truly born again to lose his or her salvation, while Reformed

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<sup>30</sup>William J. Larkin, Jr., *Acts*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, ed. Grant R. Osborne (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 191.

Christians have held that that is not possible.”<sup>31</sup> Grudem suggests that most Baptists fall on the Reformed side despite preferring the term “eternity security” over “perseverance of the saints.”<sup>32</sup> This discussion’s focus will be limited to the Baptist and Reformed position and its impact on missiology.

### 1. The Reformed Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints

Reformed theologians credit God for granting eternal security to believers through their descriptions of “the perseverance of the saints.” Grudem understands the teaching to promise exclusively that “all those who are truly born again will be kept by God’s power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives,” adding that “only those who persevere until the end have been truly born again.”<sup>33</sup> Matt Slick explains more fully that the doctrine implies “that the work of God the Holy Spirit will never cease in the Christian, that all who are truly regenerated will never stop believing and trusting in Christ, that they will never lose their salvation, and that they will persevere to the end because God has promised to never leave them or forsake them (Hebrews 13:5).”<sup>34</sup> R. C. Sproul sees the sanctification of the believer described in Philippians 1:6 as “a promise of God,” that “what He starts in our souls, He intends to finish.”<sup>35</sup>

Proponents of the Reformed view are also quick to rule out what the doctrine does not mean. C. Matthew McMahon raises the frequent phrase of “once saved always saved” as a popular “corruption of the doctrine,” claiming that a more accurate term for the diluted doctrine might be “‘Perseverance of the sinner’ instead of ‘the saint.’”<sup>36</sup> McMahon observes that “it teaches that man can be saved by Christ and then sin habitually, doing whatever he wants, and still “persevere to the end.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*, ed. Jeff Purswell (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 336.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Matt Slick, “What is Perseverance of the Saints?” *Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry*, (November 5, 2013), <http://www.carm.org> (accessed January 28, 2017).

<sup>35</sup>R. C. Sproul, “TULIP and Reformed Theology: Perseverance of the Saints,” (December 5, 2012), <http://www.ligonier.org> (accessed January 28, 2017).

<sup>36</sup>C. Matthew McMahon, “Perseverance of the Saints,” <http://www.apuritansmind.com> (accessed January 28, 2017).

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

Other misinterpretations of the doctrine arise from the tension between believers who temporarily backslide and those who abandon the faith altogether. Profession of Christ does not guarantee perseverance. Citing the parable of the sower in Mark 4:3-9, Slick suggests that we have no reason to think that “false converts” who are “not truly regenerated” should persevere based on their momentary prayer and profession.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, he acknowledges that “perseverance of the saints does not mean that those who are truly saved will not backslide or have strong doubts about their faith.”<sup>39</sup> Slick surmises that the doctrine signifies “that ultimately, (backslidden Christians) will remain in the faith because it is God who is keeping them and not themselves.”<sup>40</sup> Sproul agrees, reasoning that since “the whole purpose of God’s election is to bring His people safely to heaven,” he promises to complete what he starts and provides the Holy Spirit as “the sanctifier, the convictor, and the helper to ensure our preservation.”<sup>41</sup>

## 2. An Assurance of Salvation for True Believers

Whether termed a promise of “eternal security” or of “the perseverance of the saints,” the doctrine offers great comfort to genuine believers, granting them an assurance of their salvation. Grudem specifies that “it reminds them that God’s power will keep them as Christians until they die, and they will surely live in heaven forever.”<sup>42</sup> Slick adds that real converts are “held secure by God’s power, despite temptation and sin.”<sup>43</sup>

The doctrine serves as both a promise and a warning. Grudem explains the caution implicit for those backsliding and straying away from the faith:

Such persons must clearly be warned that only those who persevere to the end have been truly born again. If they fall away from their profession of faith in Christ and life of obedience to him, they may not really be saved – in fact, the evidence that they are then giving is that they are not saved, and they never really were saved. Once they stop trusting in Christ and obeying him, they have

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<sup>38</sup>Slick, “Perseverance.”

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Sproul, “TULIP and Reformed Theology.”

<sup>42</sup>Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, 336.

<sup>43</sup>Slick, “Perseverance.”

no genuine assurance of salvation, and they should consider themselves unsaved, and turn to Christ in repentance and ask him for forgiveness of their sins.<sup>44</sup>

Evidence of genuine conversion can be uncovered by a simple process of self-examination. Grudem poses three questions for believers in Christ to test their true standing: beginning with, “Do I have a present trust in Christ for salvation?”, followed by, “Is there evidence of a regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in my heart?”, and “Do I see a long-term pattern of growth in my Christian life?”<sup>45</sup> Through these types of tests, Christians may increase in their assurance of salvation over time as their faith grows.<sup>46</sup>

### 3. Continuation in the Faith as Evidence of Conversion

The third question listed by Grudem may be the most solid evidence and critical test of genuine salvation, a continuation in the faith. He appeals for a more Scriptural approach, “lest false assurance be given to people who were never really believers in the first place.”<sup>47</sup> As Tyler Kresal states it, “Eternal security underlies perseverance. But perseverance is the fruit, and without fruit, we have nothing, because it just exposes there was no root.”<sup>48</sup>

The Scriptural admonition to continue in the faith should be viewed first through the lens of the promises of Jesus to guard his sheep and lose none of those given to him by the Father (John 6:39). Grudem cites John 10:28 as a forceful and emphatic promise that “those who are Jesus’ ‘sheep’...shall never lose their salvation or be separated from Christ – they shall ‘never perish.’”<sup>49</sup> He adds that the Holy Spirit is “further evidence that God keeps those who are born again safe for eternity,” as the “seal,” in fact “God’s ‘guarantee’ that we will receive the inheritance promised to us...(Ephesians 1:13-14).”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, 346.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 343-45.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 345.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 336.

<sup>48</sup>Tyler Kresal, “Eternal Security or Perseverance of the Saints, Which is More Biblical?” (July 23, 2016), *Coram Deo Missions*, <http://www.coramdeomissions.com> (accessed on January 27, 2017).

<sup>49</sup>Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, 337.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 338.

Grudem notes Peter’s recognition of believers as those “‘who *by God’s power are guarded* through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time’ (1 Peter 1:5).” He reasons that “if God’s guarding has as its purpose the preservation of believers until they receive their full, heavenly salvation, then it is safe to conclude that God will accomplish that purpose and they will in fact attain that final salvation. Their attainment of final salvation ultimately depends on God’s power.”<sup>51</sup> Sproul sees the term “perseverance” as “dangerously misleading” and implying that “the perseverance is something that we do, perhaps in and of ourselves.” Thus, he suggests “the term *the preservation of the saints*, because the process by which we are kept in a state of grace is something that is accomplished by God.”<sup>52</sup>

The flip side of God’s sovereignly guarding of true believers is their responsibility to “hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end” (Hebrews 3:14 NASB). Grudem tackles the paradox of assurance and continuation, explaining “that God does not guard us *apart from* our faith, but only by working *through* our faith so that he enables us to continue to believe in him. In this way, those who continue to trust in Christ gain assurance that God is working in them and guarding them.”<sup>53</sup>

It becomes obvious that the church is instrumental in the ultimate revelation of true believers and the exposure of counterfeit Christians. For the one, it serves as the arena for growth in discipleship and for working out one’s salvation. For the other, the church becomes the point of departure for the one who rejects Christ while abandoning his body.

John Piper views the church as highly influential. He warns that “unbelief is such a constant and dangerous temptation that we must help each other fight it off,” claiming that “persevering in faith to the end is a community project.”<sup>54</sup> He confesses that “the Christian life is a life of day by day, hour by hour trust in the promises of God to help us and guide us and take care of us and forgive us and bring us into a

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Sproul, “TULIP and Reformed Theology.”

<sup>53</sup>Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, 338

<sup>54</sup>John Piper, “Be Diligent to Enter God’s Rest!” (September 1, 1996), <http://www.desiringgod.org> (accessed January 28, 2017).

future of holiness and joy that will satisfy our hearts infinitely more than if we forsake him and put our trust in ourselves or in the promises of this world.”<sup>55</sup> Piper assesses “day by day, hour by hour trust in God’s promises” to be “the result of daily diligence and...of proper fear.”<sup>56</sup>

### **C. The Implications of Eternal Security on the Mission**

A proper understanding of the biblical teaching of eternal security will shape the way in which we engage the mission of God in the Bible. M. David Sills observes, “Missiology matters. Ideas have consequences. Your philosophy will drive your missiology. Such phrases are more than mere clichés. The truth is, what you think will drive what you do; that is why it is so important to think clearly and believe rightly.”<sup>57</sup>

The eternal security of true believers implies a particular approach to obeying the mission left by Christ. The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints should influence our missiology in several ways. Not one of the implications is new to missions, but each becomes more imperative with a right understanding of the eternal security of believers.

#### **1. We Must Preach a Gospel of Radical Repentance.**

The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints factors into our missiology from the beginning, impacting our evangelism. Our version of the gospel must call people to follow Christ for the duration of their lives, emphasizing repentance from sin and an immediate break with the practices and lifestyles of their past. David Hesselgrave encourages a gospel presentation that deals directly with “old beliefs and practices”:

Nevertheless, many contemporary pastors, evangelists, and missionaries ‘preach the gospel’ with barely a mention of the necessity of repentance – of the needs for recognizing the old ways of believing and behaving as sinful, of seeking forgiveness for them, and of forsaking them in order to follow Christ! The closest they come to preaching repentance is a general reference to the fact that

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>M. David Sills, *Reaching and Teaching: A Call to Great Commission Obedience* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010), 210.



all are sinners and in need of forgiveness and salvation. But that is not enough.<sup>58</sup>

Glenn Schwartz condemns the “easy believism” he has frequently heard preached in Africa. He reports, “New believers do not have to give up things from their spiritist past that are displeasing to God because ‘conversion’ has been made too easy. Many who come into Christianity were not asked to count the cost and, therefore, they are not likely to joyfully serve the Lord with their whole hearts.”<sup>59</sup> Aylward Shorter adds that “at baptism the African Christian repudiates remarkably little of his former non-Christian outlook.”<sup>60</sup> Although he may be required to stop certain pagan rituals, he is “not asked to recant a religious philosophy” and “consequently he returns to the forbidden practices as occasion arises with remarkable ease.”<sup>61</sup>

Imparting an exclusive loyalty to Christ and his cause can be a challenge in certain cultures. Schwartz observes that “many African Christians have not had the kind of deep spiritual transformation that affects the presuppositions at the center of their worldview.”<sup>62</sup> Rather, many practice “the kind of Christianity that overlays a traditional worldview, allowing them to hold two religious systems simultaneously.”<sup>63</sup> New believers must be taught to adopt a biblical worldview that transcends their cultural beliefs and traditions rather than to adapt their new faith to them. Otherwise, the danger of syncretism is lurking to distort the message of the gospel and create what Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou refer to as “Christopaganism.”<sup>64</sup>

Our mission efforts must incorporate an effort to “teach them to observe all that (Christ) commanded” (Matthew 28:29 NASB). That includes an urgency for lifelong persevering while God preserves. The long-term missional effect is at stake. Kresal predicts that

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<sup>58</sup>David J. Hesselgrave, “Syncretism: Mission and Missionary Induced?” In *Contextualization and Syncretism: Navigating Cultural Currents*, ed. Gailyn Van Rheenen, 71-98. Evangelical Missionary Society Series no. 13. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2006), 91-92.

<sup>59</sup>Glenn J. Schwartz, *When Charity Destroys Dignity: Overcoming Unhealthy Dependency in the Christian Movement* (Lancaster, PA: World Mission Associates, 2007), 184-85.

<sup>60</sup>Aylward Shorter, *African Christian Theology: Adaptation or Incarnation?* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1977), 10.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Schwartz, *Charity*, 182-83.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 183.

<sup>64</sup>Paul G. Hiebert, Daniel R. Shaw and Tite Tienou. *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 378.

“without teaching of the need for persevering enduring faith, as evidence and basis for our security, we will unwillingly create many false converts and in so doing hurt the health of our churches.”<sup>65</sup>

## **2. We Must Aim to Plant Indigenous and Non-Dependent Churches.**

The issue of motivation calls for more attention as we seek to make genuine disciples and plant sustainable churches. Schwartz raises the question of why some are willing to commit to Christianity in desperate circumstances:

Perhaps the motivation for becoming a Christian is unrelated to accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior – for life. Unfortunately, the motivation sometimes relates to those ‘extras’ such as employment, learning English, a place in school, foreign travel, etc. Such shallow motivation for coming into the Christian faith is another way the seeds of the dependency syndrome are sown...Religious conversion deep down inside may not take place at all when the motivation is as simple as acquiring a school, clinic, well or dam for the community!<sup>66</sup>

The solution is not complicated. A goal of indigenous and non-dependent church planting eliminates the temptation to prop up new converts and churches with western support. Consequently, the risk of counterfeit converts is greatly reduced. The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints demands a process for making disciples who will endure time.

## **3. We Must Prioritize Theological Education.**

Theological education lies at the heart of creating disciples who will persevere in following Christ and his Word. Sills points to a faulty mission strategy that leaves church leaders unequipped and converts untrained:

...traditional mission fields are being left in the hands of the nationals regardless of whether they have the biblical training to sustain the furtherance of the gospel. One problem with this approach is failure to fulfill Jesus’ Great Commission instruction, “teaching them to obey.” Some say that they will fulfill this by encouraging new believers to obey all that Jesus commanded. However, they will not be staying around to do the teaching. They further state that the new believers have a Bible and the same Holy Spirit we have; He will

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<sup>65</sup>Kresal, “Eternal Security.”

<sup>66</sup>Schwartz, *Charity*, 185.

guide them into all truth. Yet syncretism, aberrant doctrine, and blatant heresy remain in many churches around the world.<sup>67</sup>

Although Sills acknowledges that national leaders should be included in training their own people, he contends that missionaries must be prepared to “provide the proper parameters in the grammatico-historical interpretation process as well as critical contextualization.”<sup>68</sup>

The absence of an intentional approach to biblical and doctrinal training leaves a vacuum for nominal Christianity to fill. Sills records one report of church members who “may be in church on Sunday but just as easily in the witch doctor’s hut on Tuesday,” of people who “live in a land that has historically embraced 401 Yoruba gods and goddesses.”<sup>69</sup> He calls for “deep discipleship and biblical teaching...to develop a Christian worldview and godly living.”<sup>70</sup>

#### **4. We Must Have Confidence in the Success of the Mission**

The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints assures us that the eternal plan of God in the biblical mission will ultimately be fully executed. We can be certain that disciples will be made in every culture and tribe who will endure to the end. We can also be sure that by the end of time the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord and with true believers worshipping him (Psalm 67:1-7). John Divito offers this reminder:

God’s Word shall not return to Him void, but it shall accomplish what He pleases (Is. 55:11). If we do not see the fruit of our labors among the nations, then we need not despair. It is not he who plants, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:7). At the same time, we know that God is at work drawing people to Himself, so we continue to proclaim the good news trusting in Him...Furthermore, when people around the globe are born again, we recognize that He who has begun a good work in them will complete it (Phil. 1:6).<sup>71</sup>

The doctrine also emboldens us in our mission. Kresal suggests,

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<sup>67</sup>Sills, *Reaching and Teaching*, 19.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>John Divito, “Calvinism Fuels Missions,” (November 2, 2016), <http://wwwFOUNDERS.org>, *Founders Ministries* (accessed January 25, 2017).

If we truly realize that we are secure in him, what else can it do, but create bold warriors for Christ. It will cause people to cross oceans for him to bring the gospel to cannibals. It will cause people to let good and kindred go. It will cause people to devote their whole lives to him and encourage others to do the same, because Jesus is worth it, and nothing can separate us from him.<sup>72</sup>

The doctrine of eternal security provides us with the boldness to confidently obey the Great Commission with the knowledge that we are engaged in a cause that will ultimately be complete.

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<sup>72</sup>Kresal, "Eternal Security."

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