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**The Security of the Believer**

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**A. Definition of Eternal Security**

The doctrine of eternal security affirms that all those who have been born again by the Spirit of God through faith in Jesus Christ will never lose their salvation but will continue in that state of grace forever.<sup>1</sup> “Once a poor sinner has been regenerated by the Word and the Spirit of God, once he has received a new life and a new nature, has been made partaker of the divine nature, once he has been justified from every charge before the throne of God, it is absolutely impossible that that man should ever again be a lost soul.”<sup>2</sup>

Eternal security applies only to those who have been born again of God’s Spirit. The Bible recognizes that some who profess to be saved never truly have been saved at all (Mt. 7:21). Also, not everyone who seems to be righteous actually has been born again into the family of God (Mt. 7:22-23). It is not the words one professes or the outward appearance of one’s life that makes a person a new creature in Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> “The Scriptures teach that all who are by faith united to Christ, who have been justified by God’s grace and regenerated by his Spirit, will never totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but certainly persevere therein to the end.” Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, ed. Vernon D. Doerksen (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 294.

<sup>2</sup> H. A. Ironside, *The Eternal Security of the Believer* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1934), 6.

Too often a person may be led to make a religious profession because of social or emotional pressure but without a true decision of his heart. These, whom the Lord calls hypocrites, give rise to the anecdotes that seem to disprove the doctrine of a secure salvation. Many people know someone who at one time claimed to be a believer and even may have lived like a Christian for a while, but later he denied his former profession either by his words or by his conduct. Since it is not possible to discern with certainty another person's heart, it cannot be possible to distinguish those who have been born again from those who are merely temporarily interested in religious things. The Bible gives no hope of a secure salvation for anyone other than those who have been born again.

Still, the Bible does teach that every true believer will persevere unto the end. A person is not secure because he himself is strong enough to persevere; indeed, no one is strong enough. The security of salvation comes only because the believer is "in Christ," and the Lord is always strong enough to keep His own. "The concept of eternal security emphasizes God's activity in guaranteeing the eternal possession of the gift of eternal life."<sup>3</sup>

#### **B. Proof for this Doctrine**

It is the consistent teaching of Scripture that those who trust in Christ as Savior will receive eternal life. The plain meaning of those words suggests that salvation is eternal. Just as the wrath of God is an eternal condemnation, so the gift of God is eternal life (Jn. 3:36; Rom. 6:23). For those who are trusting in Christ the threat of condemnation has been removed. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). They have everlasting life and shall never be condemned because they have "passed from death unto life" (Jn. 5:24).

Near the end of Jesus' earthly sojourn, He prayed to His Father for the security of His followers. "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me" (Jn. 17:11). God does hear and answer prayer. One may expect that the Father will certainly hear and answer this prayer from His only-begotten Son. He will safely preserve them unto the end.

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 379.

Furthermore, the Bible affirms that believers are “kept by the power of God” (1 Pet. 1:5). The Almighty God who has the power to create the world and to create new life in those who believe is also more than able to sustain what He has created. He can and He does sustain the physical creation. He will also keep safely those whom He has given to the Son, and they shall never perish (Jn. 10:28). The original text says it quite forcefully: “They shall surely not perish forever.” The Greek grammar uses a double negative in that sentence to emphasize a strong negation. It is simply not possible that one to whom the Lord has given eternal life would ever again be lost. They are held safely in the Father’s hand (Jn. 10:29). Therefore, the Apostle can confidently assert that nothing “shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:35-39), for God is both willing and able to keep all those who come unto Him through His Son.

When the Bible speaks of the believer’s salvation, it refers to it as an act of God, completed and settled. For example, Paul writes, “For by grace are ye saved” (Eph. 2:8-9). The verbal construction in this sentence contains the verb of being (“ye are”) plus a perfect tense participle (“saved”). Grammarians call that a “perfect periphrastic” construction. The perfect periphrastic form denotes a state or condition that results from the completed verbal action. Simply put it means this: that believers have been saved and continue to exist in that new state.<sup>4</sup> The work of salvation is not an on-going process that depends on one’s ability to remain faithful to the end. It is a completed work that has produced an abiding condition (“ye are saved”).<sup>5</sup> Salvation is a good work which God begins and God completes in a believer’s life (Phil. 1:6). “God takes the initiative in perfecting, as well as originating, man’s salvation.”<sup>6</sup> Believers can be confident in their salvation because God always remains faithful to

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<sup>4</sup> It is also important to notice that the verbal action is in the passive voice. People do not save themselves; God saves them. It is “not of works,” as Paul goes on to say.

<sup>5</sup> See also Eph. 4:32 “God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you,” 2 Tim. 1:9 “[God] hath saved us,” and Titus 3:5 “according to his mercy he saved us.” Each of these references presents a salvation that is the finished work of God in a believer’s life.

<sup>6</sup> W. Boyd Hunt, “The Perseverance of the Saints,” in *Basic Christian Doctrines*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), 235.

his promises. “The consistency of God’s character guarantees a secure salvation.”<sup>7</sup>

True believers will continue to persevere in their faith, not because they are always faithful but because God is always faithful to keep his promises.

As Paul faced the end of his earthly life, he wrote an encouraging letter to his young protégé Timothy. Among the many things Paul had to say to Timothy, he included his own statement of personal testimony. “I am not ashamed, for *I know whom I have believed*, and am persuaded that *he is able to keep* that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Tim. 1:12, emphasis added). Paul’s confidence was grounded in the security of the one in whom he had placed his trust, Jesus Christ.

Faith is only as valuable as the object of one’s faith. If the object of one’s faith is the sinless Son of God who died as a substitute for sinners and rose again, then that believer can say with Paul, “I am fully persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him, namely my soul’s eternal destiny.” Salvation is eternally secure because it depends on nothing else than the merits of Jesus Christ and the efficacy of the sacrifice he made on Calvary. When God credits to the believer’s account the merits of Jesus Christ (imputed righteousness), there is no way to discredit that salvation except to devalue the atonement Christ made. That is why it is so very important that Christians make sure they are trusting in Jesus alone for their salvation, and not in anything else. As the words of the well-known Christian hymn affirm, “On Christ the solid rock I stand; all other ground is sinking sand.”<sup>8</sup> As long as Christ’s death is still good enough to pay the debt of sin, as long as Jesus is still qualified to be the Savior of the world, all those trusting in him will remain eternally secure in God’s eternal salvation.

### **C. Objections to this Doctrine**

A common objection raised against the doctrine of eternal security asks: “If one believes he is saved and secure forever no matter what he does, will that not lead to an attitude that does not take

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<sup>7</sup> Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 386.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Mote, *The Solid Rock*.

sin seriously? Even Paul asked something similar. “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? . . . Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?” (Rom. 6:1, 15). People may be tempted to take their secure salvation as an excuse to sin freely, but that is not an appropriate attitude for one who has new life in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) and the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, who guides and convicts and protects God’s children. No matter what pitfalls one may suppose this doctrine introduces, potential abuses cannot nullify the clear teaching of Scripture that God does keep those whom He saves.

Sometimes those who have been saved by God’s grace do not feel the reality of that spiritual condition very much. Human emotions are subject to many controlling and influencing factors. It is not always possible to exercise total control over how one feels. Yet, the eternal work of God in a believer’s heart is not subject to the transitory fluctuations of the human emotions. Salvation depends on Jesus and the merits of His sacrifice, not on one’s individual works, feelings, background, or anything else.

Arminian theology proposes that the believer’s security is limited to the believer’s continuing to believe and obey the gospel. According to that view, a Christian can be secure as long as he continues to believe and to follow the Lord faithfully, but if he does not remain faithful, he will forfeit his salvation. Col. Milton S. Agnew of the Salvation Army writes: “God promises security to the one who continues to believe, to the faithful Christian. . . The simple condition of eternal security is *faithfulness* - obedience and continued love toward God on the part of the Christian. . . . The sheep who cease to hear and cease to follow cease to be secure. They’ve cancelled out the promise.”<sup>9</sup>

If that were true, the believer’s salvation would be only as stable as his own faith and faithfulness. On the contrary, the Bible says that salvation is God’s gift (Eph. 2:8-9), not God’s reward for man’s faithfulness. The price for man’s redemption is Christ’s shed blood, not man’s faith or obedience. To make one’s salvation dependent on human faithfulness would destroy the clear teaching of Scripture that one is saved by God’s grace alone (Rom. 3:24; 2 Tim. 1:9). God’s

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<sup>9</sup> *The Security of the Believer* (Santa Ana, CA: by the author, 1974), 6-7.

promises are not conditioned upon man's consistency; mankind has never been able to follow the Lord consistently without failing, not since the Garden of Eden. God remains faithful in spite of human failure.

The plain statements of Scripture declare that the repentant sinner who trusts in Jesus Christ as his Savior is saved, forgiven, justified, and redeemed, not for a while but forever. That is a work which God does in the believer's heart, not based on the individual's merits but on Christ's merits alone. In Christ the true believer is as safe and secure as it is possible to be. So, yes, it is true: once saved, always saved.

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