

Eternal Security

A Valley Bible Church Position Paper
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The doctrine of eternal security is the belief that once a person becomes a Christian, they cannot lose their salvation. It is sometimes referred to as “once saved, always saved.” Mankind naturally believes that we have free will to decide our eternal fate. But the issue at hand is the teaching of God’s Word, not the popular opinion of man. We recognize the difficulty that some may have accepting the teaching of eternal security, but believe that the Scripture should be taken as the authority over this matter.

Eternal security is ultimately based on the principle that salvation is the work of God. If man does the saving, salvation is insecure. If it is a work of God, then salvation is secure. Therefore the doctrine of eternal security is built upon the doctrine of election, which we have addressed in a different paper. It is interesting to observe advocates of eternal security that deny this necessary connection. Some will deny the teaching of God’s Word, that God elects those whom He chooses for salvation, but continue to teach that once a person believes in Jesus Christ and receives salvation they will always remain saved. Yet, this is theologically inconsistent. The Bible teaches that the same God who draws us to Himself by grace through faith is the One who keeps us eternally secure in our faith.

Christians are eternally secure because of the plan of God the Father

The Lord in eternity past determined that certain people would be saved and saved eternally. He determined that certain people would occupy a place in heaven with Him forever. And that plan which was begun in eternity past and which reaches into eternity future will not be thwarted.

In Romans 8:28-30, Paul writes, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

During the course of our lives we will have many different plans. Some of those plans may actually work out and other plans will not work out. But this is not the way it is with God. Being infinitely elevated above the highest creature, He is the Most High, Lord of heaven and earth. Subject to none, influenced by none, absolutely independent; God does as He pleases. None can thwart Him, none can hinder Him. His purposes will be accomplished (Isaiah 46:10; Daniel 4:35).

When we think of the Lord we need to think of Him on a throne over all of His creation, directing all things, working all things “after the counsel of His own will” as Ephesians 1:11 tells us. And this includes our choice to embrace His Son as our Lord and Savior.

Some people believe that God is over everything except our choice of Him. But this is not so. Even our choice of Him is His work and not ours. In John 6:29 Jesus says, “this is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.” If through God’s work we have come to believe then we can be assured that God will continue to work in and through our lives until His plan for us has been completed. We know that a person once saved is always saved because the sovereign God of the universe purposed it.

Christians are eternally secure because of the provision of God the Son

If someone could lose their salvation it would be because of sin, since “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). When a person places their faith in Christ, all the sins that were committed in the past are forgiven (Acts 2:36-38). In addition, all the sins that are committed after receiving Christ will be forgiven (Hebrews 10:4-12). When Christ died for sin on the cross, He was not dying only for the sins that we committed before embracing Him as our Lord and Savior, He was dying for all our sin. All sins past, present, and future were carried to the cross with Christ and it was there He paid the price for us which God required.

Hebrews 10:11-12 explicitly states the sacrifice of Christ was for future sin, “*And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God.*” Christ’s death atoned for sins that have yet to be committed.

The reason it is impossible for any sin to separate us from God is because there is no sin in our past, present or future that has not been paid for by Christ. In this way, Christ’s provision for our sin is complete.

Christians are eternally secure because of the protection of God the Holy Spirit

Ephesians 1:13-14 says “*In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation —having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.*” The seal was used to signify ownership. The seal was affixed to property that was to be transported to other places. After the attaching of the seal, only delivery of the property remained. In this way the apostle looks at the believer. He is a son, sealed with the Spirit. The transaction is complete; only delivery to the presence of the Father remains.

No one can break that seal of the Holy Spirit that secures our salvation until we enter into the presence of God. Ephesians 4:30 states that this seal is for the day of our redemption. He has sealed us awaiting our delivery into the presence of Christ.

Christians are eternally secure because of the promises of the Word of God

Because of the plan of God the Father, the provision of God the Son, and the protection of God the Spirit, there are key passages in the Bible that speak to the security that Christians have in Christ:

1. John 6:37-39

Jesus said in John 6:37-39, *“All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.”* Jesus promises to never cast out the one who comes to Him in faith. They will not be lost but are assured of salvation, being resurrected to life according to the will of God. It is God’s will, not man’s will that is determinative in our salvation.

2. John 10:27-29

The words of Jesus in John 10:27-29 speak directly to the assurance that those who are His sheep will always be His, *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”* No one has the ability to take us out of the hand of God.

Jesus’s words here are particularly emphatic. He not only repeats Himself to make a point, the Greek clause for “they shall never perish” includes a double negative with an aorist subjunctive, signifying a very strong declaration. The implication here is that not even we ourselves can escape God’s loving hand. His sheep will never perish.

3. Romans 8:38-39

Paul’s conviction regarding eternal security is scripturally expressed in Romans 8:38-39, *“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* Nothing can separate us from the love of God, not even our ourselves. No created thing can cause God to end His relationship with us.

4. John 3:36

The Gospel of John quotes John the Baptist, saying, “*He who believes in the Son has eternal life*” at the end of the third chapter. This is consistent with other passages such as John 5:24; John 6:4-7 and 1 John 5:13. The life that those who believe have is described as “eternal.” The obvious conclusion to such a simple statement is that the life that is given is permanent and forever.

Christians are eternally secure because of the perseverance of the people of God

1 Peter 1:4-5 teaches that Christians will “obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” The word “guarded” can mean to guard from escape and to guard from attack. God’s guarding protects and preserves us until He delivers us completely (cf. Philippians 1:6). The work of God in protecting us is active in assuring that God’s children will persevere in faith.

This explains the biblical texts that describe the qualification of perseverance in order to attain salvation. Those who are true believers in Christ will endure and those who fall away give testimony that they never possessed genuine faith. Jesus’s words “*he who endures to the end will be saved*” (Matthew 10:22) and similar biblical texts (John 8:31; Colossians 1:22-23; Hebrews 3:14; Hebrews 6:4-6) speak of the necessity of continual faith and those who continue in the faith demonstrate their genuine faith. Those who do not continue show their lack of genuine faith. The examination of “so-called” faith to see if it is living and saving is not to determine whether or not we have been removed from God’s family it is rather to determine whether we have ever been in God’s family at all.

Importantly, the purpose of passages that reference continuing faith as an indication of true conversion is not to cause those with faith in Christ to become concerned about their eternal security and that they might fall away. Using these texts in this manner corrupts God’s Word and harms His people. These texts are a warning to those professing believers that if they fall away, they demonstrate the emptiness of their confession. Indeed, many who fall away give external signs of conversion (Matthew 7:21-23; 2 Corinthians 11:15), the classic case being Judas Iscariot. In the end, those who depart give evidence that their profession of faith was not genuine (1 John 2:19).

While the Scripture teaches that all true Christians are eternally secure and will persevere in their faith, it also expects us to apply this teaching by being assured of our salvation.

The need for assurance of salvation

The teaching of the Bible is that we can be assured of our salvation. Indeed, the book of 1 John was written to assure us of our salvation, when it says in 5:13 “these things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.” We can know we have eternal life and the primary basis for this confidence rests in the character of God and His promises (1 John 2:25). When Jesus says that those who believe have eternal life (John 6:47), we can completely trust Him, for God’s word is trustworthy (Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2).

Furthermore, God clearly considers it important for us to be assured of our salvation. This is why the Scripture repeats the promise of our eternal security so often. We must conclude it is important to have a settled faith in our future deliverance, as opposed to a continual concern regarding our eternal destiny. Churches that teach we can lose our salvation are undermining the confidence that God intends Christians to have. Even churches that do not take a stand on this important doctrine are poorly serving their members in not teaching the full counsel of God.

The nature of assurance of salvation

While salvation cannot be lost, the assurance of our salvation can be lost. The primary basis for the assurance of our salvation comes from the promises of God. Yet there is a secondary basis for our assurance, since the promises of God include a condition of belief. We can determine whether we have truly believed or not by how we respond in obedience.

When 1 John 5:13 refers to “*these things I have written*” so that we may know we have eternal life, it is speaking of the attitude and actions of the reader. For example, we can have confidence we truly believe if we confess our sins (1 John 1:9); if we keep His Word (1 John 2:5); if we love our brother (1 John 2:10; 3:14; 4:7-8); if we do not love the world (1 John 2:15); if we remain in fellowship (1 John 2:19); if we confess the Son (1 John 2:23); if we abide in Christ (1 John 2:24-28); if we do not practice sin (1 John 3:9); if we listen to the apostles (1 John 4:6), etc. While all Christians sin and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:10), when we practice a sinful lifestyle we cannot have confidence that we have true faith. We may be deceiving ourselves by only hearing the word and not responding to it (James 2:10).

There is an additional element that brings assurance of salvation to our life, the ministry of the Holy Spirit. “*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*” (Romans 8:16; cf. 1 John 4:13). There is a subjective sense that we are God’s child that comes from the ministry of God’s Spirit. This, like other tests of true faith in 1 John or in James, are to be taken collectively and none are decisive in themselves. In other words, these are negative qualifiers in that any one of these tests of faith can undermine our assurance of salvation.

All a person has to do in order to lose the assurance of their salvation is to “*stray from the truth*” (James 5:19-20) or no longer “*apply all diligence*” in pursuing Christlikeness (2 Peter 2:1-11). Assurance of salvation is not necessarily a permanent possession for a professing believer. Rather the assurance of salvation depends on the conduct of our lives.

Assurance can be regained through repentance. Repentance is the hallmark characteristic of a Christian. Christians sin and may sin greatly. But Christians can be restored to obedience and assurance of salvation, and the first step is a repentant heart (Matthew 18:15-17). We will then “*bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance*” (Matthew 3:8; cf. 2 Corinthians 7:9-11).

Conclusion

The Bible teaches us that although assurance of salvation may come and go depending on how we are living our lives at a particular point in time, the gift of salvation is a permanent possession. This is true no matter how intense our battles with the world, the flesh or devil might become. If we believe, we can and should be assured of our salvation. This assurance is important for living the Christian life.

While the security of our salvation rests in the hands of God our assurance of salvation rests in both God’s promise and our response. While God promises eternal life to those who believe, if we shrink away from following the Lord, we cannot enjoy the assurance that we truly believe. However, this lack of assurance does not necessarily mean we are not a Christian. Those who are truly a child of God may falter but they will persevere in faith to the end. Yet a lack of assurance should be met with a repentant heart.

When we are repentant, we will bear the fruit of our humble heart in faith, including a confidence in God’s promise of our eternal security with the Lord.

Completed: April 2003