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Salvation and Faithfulness as They Apply to Eternal Security

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Frye: Eternal Security

Salvation and Faithfulness
As They Apply to Eternal Security

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Introduction

As Christians, we enjoy many benefits of being children of God. We receive a new life, joy, forgiveness, the ability to forgive others, and everlasting life in Heaven. But among these gifts, do we receive peace? All believers would argue from Scripture that peace is part of the grace that God imparts to those who believe in Him. Many believers, however, would argue that all of these blessings could be revoked, including an eternal destination of Heaven. Does this possibility not undermine the peace of the believer? The Lord gives His gift of salvation, knowing that He will adopt His children forever. This aspect of soteriology, often referred to as eternal security, is important for every believer to understand. If believers fail to embrace the eternality of salvation, they will live in worry and anxiety that God will revoke His gift. Hopefully, the argument and discussion to follow will help solidify the concept of eternal security in the minds of believers.

Salvation as a Path

A phrase that is often used to teach the doctrine of eternal security is, “Once saved, always saved.” The common statement can be backed up biblically; but in order to understand the full nature of security, we must have a clear understanding of what it means to be “saved.” An improper understanding of salvation will easily lead to an improper understanding of eternal security.

Guaranteed Perseverance

Salvation is described in the Bible in three different stages. These three steps are referred to as justification, glorification, and sanctification. Justification is the legal act of being freed from our sin and cleansed unto righteousness. Souls are justified at the moment of salvation. At a specific moment in time, our sins are forever forgiven, and we will never be eternally punished

for our sin. Justification is a one-time event that occurs when sinners repent from their sin and put their faith in Christ. The last stage of salvation is glorification. In the event of glorification, Christians leave their earthly bodies and are glorified with Christ in Heaven. Being released from earthly bodies will purge the souls from sin forever, sealing them in perfect righteousness under Jesus' blood.

If Christians build their theology on only these two aspects of salvation, then conditional security and loss of salvation would be quite plausible. When justification and glorification are overemphasized, salvation can be seen as a religious experience with a hope of a future destination. But the doctrine of salvation is not complete without sanctification. The middle step in the salvation process shows us God's complete plan for the redemption of souls. Yes, justification is the starting point, and glorification is the destination; but sanctification is the road of life that we travel between the two. Our entire lives are spent being rescued and redeemed day by day into a deeper relationship with the Savior. Francis Schaeffer agrees with the concept of salvation as a past, present, and future act as he writes, "Salvation is not simply justification and then a blank until death; God never meant it to be so. Salvation is a unity, a flowing stream, from justification through sanctification to glorification."¹

The three doctrines relate to eternal security through the nature of this path. When God places believers on the path of sanctification, nothing can remove them from it. They will have ups and downs throughout their lives. They even may come to rebellion against God, but they will return through the growing process. The Reformers consolidated these truths into the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. Calvinists have an easy grasp on this doctrine because God saves who He wants and keeps who He saves. However, those who do not consider

1. Francis Schaeffer, *True Spirituality* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1971), 66.

themselves Calvinists can still hold this belief biblically with a proper understanding of justification and sanctification.

Conditional Security

Many Christians believe that the security of a believer is conditional. There are two primary ways that people propose a person can lose his or her salvation by breaking certain conditions. The first is the theory of persisting in sin, which says that if you knowingly sin, and keep sinning, you will eventually lose your salvation. The primary passage used for this theory, John 15, warns believers of a punishment for consistent sin but does not specify what the punishment entails. As believers, we occasionally fool ourselves into thinking that God won't punish our sin when that is not always the case. Christians still face consequences for their sin. The theory creates a constant internal discord for believers, making them always wonder if they have sinned too much for God to forgive them, or thinking that they are abstaining from evil by their own merit to retain salvation. The notion that a believer can out-sin God's forgiveness is not biblical and is rooted in a weak perspective on justification. Once God clears a soul's name of all charges, He forgives past, present, and future sins, sealing him or her in righteousness forever. No sin can separate a believer from his or her perfect standing before God.

The other view is that salvation can only be lost through completely turning your back on God and revoking your faith. This argument has to fight against one major logical flaw: why would anyone who had truly experienced the loving, life changing grace of the Lord ever turn away? 1 John 2:18-19 speaks specifically of these people who seemingly walk away from faith in Christ, reading, "Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained

with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.”² This verse supports the premise of the perseverance of the saints. Gregory Boyd said, “Believers by definition persevere in their relationship with the Lord. When they utterly abandon the faith, they make it plain that they never really had a saving relationship and thus never really belonged to the community of God’s people.”³ Obviously, in specific cases, this is not as easy to grasp. What about the pastor or missionary that had vibrant ministry for many years and then abandoned God? Biblically, they were antichrists like John teaches, or they will return to the faith as prodigals returning to the Father.

The Christian life is a path that goes up and down. Christians constantly fail, sin, and doubt God. But He never wavers. When He saved His children, He forgave their past and future sins. He gave them a love that cannot be abandoned once they truly place their faith and following in Him.

Salvation as a State of Being

The Bible offers three critical descriptions of how salvation works in the lives of believers. These descriptions are vital to the understanding of eternal security. With new birth, justification, and eternal life, salvation becomes understood as a current state of being for believers, not a simple hope of an eternal destination.

Once Born, Always Born

First, in order to be saved, a person must be born again. The concept of regeneration originates in John 3 in Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus. In this conversation, Jesus tells Nicodemus that in order to be saved, he must be born again, which is spiritual birth. Concerning

2. All Bible quotations are from the New American Standard Bible.

3. Gregory Boyd and Paul Eddy, *Across the Spectrum* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2009), 185.

the term ‘born again’, R. T. Kendall comments that “The word translated ‘again’ comes from a Greek word that literally means ‘that which is from above.’ A man must therefore be born ‘from above.’”⁴ Regeneration from above is necessary and directly tied to eternal life and the forgiveness of sins. John 3:18 states, “He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has need judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten son of God.” This verse displays the finality of our forgiveness in the context of new birth. Pastor Charles Stanley expounds this point, writing, “If a man or a woman ends up in hell, who has at some point in life put his or her trust in Christ, doesn’t that make what Jesus said to Nicodemus a lie? Or at best only half true?”⁵ Stanley is insightful to notice the contradiction that would surface if a born again person could be judged and sent to Hell. The theory of conditional security seems to contradict John 3. Those who believe and are born of the Spirit are eternally secure in their new Father’s hand.

New birth, however, is not confined to John 3. Being born again is actually spoken of in the context of perseverance in 1 John 3:9: “No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” If you are truly born of God, you cannot go back to being a sinner. Norman Geisler commented on this passage saying, “The word ‘cannot’ indicates that a true believer has a divine nature that guarantees ultimate salvation. God has planted a ‘seed’ in each believer at conversion that will grow to fruition.”⁶ Christians cannot lose their salvation because once they are born, once God’s seed is in them, they cannot be unborn.

4. R. T. Kendall, *Once Saved, Always Saved* (Glasgow: Paternoster Publishing, 1998), 56.

5. Charles Stanley, *Eternal Security* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990), 66.

6. Norman Geisler, *Four Views on Eternal Security*, ed. Stanley Gundry and Matthew Pinson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 77.

Another verse that refers to regeneration is Philippians 1:6. This verse says, “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.” He began it. That is the act of new birth. He will complete growth and sanctification until glorification comes. The essence of redemption is that the people of God will become more like Christ until they have perfect fellowship with Him.

Once Justified, Always Justified

The second description of salvation is the previously discussed justification. At the moment a person puts their faith in Christ, they are justified. Justification means that all of their sins, past, present, and future, are forgiven, are washed away, covered by Jesus’ blood, and their account is wholly accepted as righteous. Hebrew 10:14 proves that Jesus’ blood even covers our future sins, stating, “For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.” If someone’s account is perfect in God the Father’s sight, how could he or she do anything bad enough for God to overlook Jesus’ blood and judge him or her anyway? That’s not how salvation works. Once the Lord cast our sins away, He sees them no longer. Jesus is the one who presents me blameless before God.

The late theologian H. A. Ironside offered intelligent insight on the topic of justification as a means of security. In his short book *The Eternal Security of the Believer*, he writes, “I am sure my brethren who deny the doctrine of the eternal security of the believer do not realize that in so doing they are putting a slight upon the finished work of Christ, they are reducing the sacrifice of Christ practically to the level of the offerings of bulls and goats in the Old Testament dispensation.”⁷ His approach offers an interesting perspective on the undermining nature of conditional security. Whether they realize it or not, those who hold to conditional security do not

7. H. A. Ironside, *The Eternal Security of the Believer* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1934), 9-10.

fully trust the finished work of Christ. They believe that some human action can un-finish Christ's perfect work as the ultimate spotless Lamb. A proper understanding of justification is vital to an accurate understanding of Christ's gifts of salvation and security.

Another passage that supports eternal security through justification is Jude 24-25: "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen." Jude focuses on Christ's presentation of us to the Father as His purchased servants. Jesus is going to present every believer blameless before the Father. Believers are not guilty of any charge, and all of their debt has been paid. If this is true, how could anyone who had been a believer be cast into Hell for some sin on judgement day? Justified souls will never be blamed or punished for any sin once Jesus' blood has washed it away.

Once Alive, Always Alive

The last and perhaps most common descriptions of salvation in the Bible is the passing from death to life. This aspect of salvation is used all throughout the Bible, but a couple critical passages tie it to the concept of eternal security. John 5:24 states, "Truly, Truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgement, but has passed out of death into life." The defining feature of the life that Christians receive is that it is everlasting. There will be no death for Christ's people. How then could believers under any circumstance receive eternal death and judgement having already received life that never ends? Ephesians 2:4-5 helps portray the transition we experience from death to life, saying, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace

you have been saved).” All men are dead in sin but Christ is the resurrection and the life that revives dead souls back to life. Norman Geisler comments on this passage saying, “Our position in heaven is as secure as that of Christ. We can no more be kicked out of our heavenly position that Christ can.”⁸ God will keep His promise from John 3:16 that those who believe in Him “shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” The theory that someone can lose their salvation goes against all of these essential truths.

Security in the Character of God

The last argument I want to present in favor of eternal security is found in the very character of God Himself. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the Lord displays the true nature of His love toward His people. He never gives up on them, no matter how many times they fall or rebel. That is the true nature of *agape*; He unconditionally cares for all, regardless of their attitudes and actions. God also gives special attention and care to His own people. Jesus expresses the Father’s concern for His own in Matthew 7:11, explaining that the Lord will not give harmful things to His children and only give them good gifts. This truth about prayer displays God’s concern for His own children.

God’s faithfulness to His people permeates the history of Israel from Abraham to today. The Israelites ceased trusting in God, and they worshipped pagan idols; but the Lord always brought them back to Himself. Even after rejecting their promised Messiah, the Lord still protects them today from their many enemies, and has plans to restore them as a great nation. The Lord often punished His people in various ways because of their sin, but they never lost their status as God’s chosen people and He always restored them. Though the locusts ate their land in the book of Joel, the Lord restored the years the locusts wasted. Though the Jews were exiled

8. Norman Geisler, 75.

and enslaved in Babylon, they never ceased to be the people of God. Through their great victories and tragic failures, status with God never changed. Although they lost their good standing and relationship with the Lord, they never ceased to be His people.

God's Faithfulness in the Old Testament

This aspect of God's character is seen in the way God speaks to Israel in Isaiah 54:7-8, saying, "For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In an outburst of anger I hid My face from you for a moment, but with everlasting lovingkindness I will have compassion on you," says the Lord your Redeemer." Even though the Lord brought judgement on Israel, His grace was much more abundant. God promises that His lovingkindness is everlasting. Christians today can also rely on God's eternal love, knowing that He will not revoke salvation from His adopted children.

God treats New Testament characters the same way, like Simon Peter, the disciples when they abandoned Him, and many others that failed Him. Christ always responded with grace. Jesus made Peter the rock of the early church, knowing that he would deny even knowing Christ only a short time later. Christ's plans for Peter as a believer were not thwarted by Peter's personal failure. God consistently is faithful to forgive and do great works through believers, even when they are not faithful to Him. As God's children we can be confident that He will not forsake us, regardless of our failures.

God also displays His perfect faithfulness in Psalm 78 through the words of Asaph. The psalm is one of the lengthiest psalms, reaching 72 verses. The reason Asaph invested so many words into Psalm 78 was to explain an important lesson about the Lord through the history of Israel. He covers the story from Jacob to David, focusing on the Israel's time in the wilderness. Asaph explains how God did amazing works for Israel for little in return. Although the Lord was

often filled with wrath, the Lord usually responded in blessing. Though the Israelites were rebellious and inconsistent, God stayed true to them. As the people continually wandered from the Lord, He would give blessing and judgement according to their needs. Through it all, God never ceased to love and watch over Israel. The psalm is organized in a pattern of action and response. An example of the pattern is seen when the Children of Israel “continued to sin against Him, to rebel against the Most High in the desert,” in verse 17, only to be followed by the Lord’s gracious response in verses 21 through 24: “Therefore the Lord heard and was full of wrath... Yet He commanded the clouds above and opened the doors of heaven; He rained down manna upon them to eat.” These verses teach a principle that can be applied to eternal security. If God refused to abandon and punish Israel when they rebelled and denied Him, He also would not abandon or judge His children that have been reborn into His family.

God’s Faithfulness in the New Testament

Several New Testament passages reinforce the attribute of God’s faithfulness as it applies to the believer’s security. The first of these is Romans 8:37-39. These verses explain that as believers, literally nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” God will never cut off a believer’s loving relationship with the Lord. God relentlessly loves each of His children and will let no enemy, internal or external, keep Him from His own. Stephen Voorwinde’s insight on this passage says, “For Paul, this is no passing whim, but an assured fact that does not even allow even the shadow of a doubt.”⁹ On the basis of Romans 8:37-39, every believer can rest assured that God will never revoke His love for them in the same way that He never revoked His love from Paul or the early church.

Another New Testament passage that brings the argument for eternal security based on

9. Stephen Voorwinde and Kevagh Mattis, eds. *Perspectives on Eternal Security* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009), 73.

the loving faithfulness of God to its zenith is Hebrews 10:23. This passage, in the context of being washed clean in faith, perfectly describes the way God wants every believer to understand their own salvation. The author of Hebrews says, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.” God wants every believer to be convinced that he or she has hope of eternal life and fellowship with God. In order to hold onto the truth firmly, Christians must have some manner of solid ground to support their faith. The author of Hebrews explains that the solid ground they need is none other than the faithfulness of God. Since the Lord has promised life to those who believe and are cleaned, nobody should doubt their salvation or believe that their salvation could be revoked. The doctrine of eternal security is perfectly congruent with the faithful character of God.

Conclusion

Our Lord is not one who will be inconsistent in His love or forgiveness. If He justifies men and sees them as righteous, nothing can defile them because Christ’s blood is sufficient. The Lord works evidently in the lives of believers through sanctification. The sanctifying process is not one that threatens termination but rather requires determination. If He begins a work in a soul, He will bring it to completion in glorification. Jesus gave this promise to Nicodemus and to all who will believe. Whoever will believe in Jesus will have everlasting life. The church is God’s bride, and He will not divorce it, even if it is unfaithful. No good father would cast out his children. Neither will the loving Heavenly Father cast out His own. Salvation is not grounded on human faithfulness or fruitfulness but on the sanctifying work of Christ in the hearts and lives of believers. All who believe in Christ can have peace and security that their salvation is not temporary, but eternal.

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