

## CAN I LOSE MY SALVATION? THE BIBLE TEACHES ETERNAL SECURITY

The question of “once saved, always saved” is not new. Whether a saved individual can lose their salvation has been a longstanding debate, and this argument still perplexes Christians today. Lewis Chafer stated that “this question is a most important aspect of the doctrine of salvation.”<sup>1</sup> A failure to understand the great truth on this subject has led many persons to false beliefs and practices. In his work *The Gospel under Siege*, Zane Hodges wrote, “Few questions are more fundamental than this one: Can I really be sure of my eternal salvation? Can a true believer lose his salvation? Can I know that I belong to Christ and belong to Him forever?”<sup>2</sup> Can the believer know for sure he is going to Heaven?

The fear of losing one’s salvation can negatively affect the believer. God wants His children to understand their position in Him and to be at peace and rest in their soul. God tells us in His Word that those that have accepted Christ as personal Savior have eternal life: “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God” (1 John 5:12-13).

How do we define eternal security? Eternal security is the biblical doctrine that those who accept Christ are saved forever and cannot lose their salvation. This is the

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<sup>1</sup>Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Major Bible Themes: Fifty-two Vital Doctrines of the Scriptures Simplified and Explained*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), 220.

<sup>2</sup>Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel under Siege: Faith and Works in Tension*, 2d ed. (Dallas: Kerugma, 1992), 9.

promise of the Word of God. Eternal security is not based upon our feelings, good works, or the lack of personal sin in our lives. The true believer in Jesus Christ will not and cannot lose his personal salvation given to him by God. God keeps him secure. H. A. Ironside wrote: “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 and 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>3</sup>

Matt Costella wrote that “the extensive character of the salvation of a believer in Christ is such that it is an irreversible work of God which cannot be changed by human decision or failure. Any human being who comes to Jesus Christ and believes on Him shall be saved and secure because of the work of God.”<sup>4</sup> In the book *So Great Salvation*, Charles Ryrie explained eternal security as “that work of God which guarantees that the gift of salvation, once received, is possessed forever and cannot be lost.”<sup>5</sup>

The best way to demonstrate the believer’s security is to look at the most definitive scriptures regarding the matter and then to accept the clear truth of the Word of God. The Bible states the fact over and over again: the believer is eternally secure. Therefore, this is not an exhaustive study because of all the truths of God’s Word directly related to this subject. We have selected some key passages that clearly state the Bible doctrine of eternal security.

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<sup>3</sup>H. A. Ironside, *Eternal Security* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Bros., 1986), 8.

<sup>4</sup>Matt Costella, “God’s Perfect Work: A Study of the Doctrine of the Eternal Security of the Believer,” *Foundation Magazine* [online], May-June 1998, Accessed 27 Jan. 2007 <<http://www.fundamentalbiblechurch.org/Fbceters.html>>.

<sup>5</sup>Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989), 137.

The believer is saved by grace and kept by that same grace. Eternal security is not through human effort for the Bible says, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). God gives salvation as a gift, and Chafer explains in his work *Major Bible Themes*: “Salvation is the work of God not resting on any merit in the believer and not sustained by any effort of the believer.”<sup>6</sup> “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). Eternal life is a gift of God, and the Bible says it is eternal.

The Bible says, “For by one offering he [Jesus Christ] hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Heb. 10:14). Jesus Christ is the eternal sacrifice who paid in full and forever for the sins of mankind. We are saved eternally because Christ’s work is eternal. Chafer contends that “the ultimate answer to the insecurity or security of the believer rests on the question of who does the work of salvation.”<sup>7</sup> The Word of God declares, “Wherefore, he [Jesus Christ] is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). Chafer correctly concluded that “the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ on the cross is the absolute guarantee of the believer’s security.”<sup>8</sup>

In his book, *A Know-So Salvation*, John R. Rice explained: “When one trusts in Jesus Christ for salvation and the work is done, the transaction finished, and one becomes a child of God. Saving faith settles some matters and brings some changes that can never

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<sup>6</sup>Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, 223-224.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid, 225.

be undone.”<sup>9</sup> In 2 Cor. 5:17, Paul says, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” This verse teaches that man is a new creature, not will be nor may be, but he is a new man in Christ. Titus 3:5-7 says, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” These are unalterable transactions for the believer.

We are saved completely and forever because the Word of God abides forever: “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you” (1 Pet. 1:23-25).

Acts 16:31 is an invitation “to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” We must take the Bible at face value. John 4:14 says, “But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” If you ask for the water, Jesus gives it, and you will never thirst again. *The Gospel under Siege* by Zane Hodges further clarifies this passage: “This fact clearly shows the eternal security of the believer. For if a person could lose eternal life, he would obviously thirst again. But according to the Savior’s words, that experience is an eternal impossibility. [The Samaritan woman’s]

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<sup>9</sup>John R. Rice, *A Know-So Salvation* (Wheaton, Ill.: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1962), 26.

assurance did not rest on what she might later do. It rested instead upon the uncomplicated promise of the Son of God Himself.”<sup>10</sup>

A tremendous eternal security passage is found in John 10:27-30: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one.” Jesus speaks of believers as his own and claims they have eternal life: he clearly says they will never perish and no one can snatch them out of God’s hand. William MacDonald offered this explanation in his book *Once In Christ: In Christ Forever*: “They follow Him. This is *not* a condition. He does not say that they are his sheep *if* they follow Him or *as long as* they follow Him.”<sup>11</sup> Dan Corner, author of *Eternal Security Arguments and Proof Texts*, urges us to “notice a triple promise here [Jn. 10:27-30] concerning the security of God’s sheep. First, Jesus gives them ‘eternal’ life. Second, they shall ‘never’ perish, and third, neither shall any pluck them out of God’s hand.”<sup>12</sup> No power can seize them or take them. Can a person remove themselves from God’s hand? Notice the next part of the scripture which emphasizes the strength of God’s holding grip, “My Father . . . is greater than all.” Then the Bible says, “No man is able.” Ryrie contends that this is an exclusive statement: “The Lord said that we are secure in His hand and the Father’s hand and that no one can seize the believer

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<sup>10</sup>Zane Hodges, *The Gospel under Siege*, 2d ed. (Dallas: Kerugma, 1992), 14.

<sup>11</sup>William MacDonald, *Once in Christ in Christ Forever: One Hundred Biblical Reasons Why a True Believer Cannot Be Lost* (Grand Rapids, MI: Gospel Folio Press, 1997), 15.

<sup>12</sup>Dan Corner, *Rapture Ready* [online]; Accessed 28 Nov. 2006, “Eternal Security Arguments and Proof Texts” <<http://www.raptureready.com/s4.html>>.

from the safe position (John 10:28-29). ‘No one’ means no one, including the individual himself.”<sup>13</sup> The power of God is able to save a person and keep that person eternally.

1 Pet. 1:3-5 promises, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” The Bible concludes that God’s power is able to keep the believer forever (Jude 24).

Christ has promised us that we shall never perish. Dan Corner argues that “if having received eternal life, we could lose it and perish, it would make Christ a liar.”<sup>14</sup> Christ has promised us that we shall never die, “And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (John 11:26). How can we be confident that Christians are eternally secure? We can be sure because of the words that God uses to describe our salvation and also the work He has done in our life. He has forgiven us, saved us, justified us, and glorified us. We are no longer citizens of this world, we are pilgrims, strangers, and citizens of Heaven: “For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven, from which also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil. 3:20).

Christ is perfecting us: “Being confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). God has begun a work and He will perform His work in His children. Once God has begun a work in us, it will continue until our faith is realized in glory. God keeps His word or nothing else He says is of any value. Christ is not condemning us: “There is, therefore,

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<sup>13</sup>Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 382.

<sup>14</sup>Dan Corner, *Rapture Ready*.

now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1). John 3:18 says, “He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” Salvation is eternally secure because of God's work for the believer. He mentions that not only is the believer's salvation secure in the work of Christ, but it is also secure because no force outside of God can separate the believer from the love of the Savior. We cannot be separated from his redeeming love: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:35, 38-39).

Salvation cannot be lost because salvation is eternal: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:14-16). Hodges concluded the following: “The number of people who have found the assurance of salvation in these words defies all computation. And assurance is precisely what one should find in them. There is no mention of works. Faith alone is the one condition upon which a man may acquire everlasting life. Moreover, this secures him from perishing. Indeed, if anyone who ever trusted Jesus for eternal life subsequently perished, John 3:16 would be false.” Hodge continues: “‘Whoever believes’ is as broad as it can possibly be and is wholly unqualified by any

other condition. Those who wish to qualify it, in fact deny it.”<sup>15</sup> Faith alone saves and also gives assurance of salvation.

True faith is nothing more or less than taking God at His Word, that is, receiving ‘the witness of God’ as true: “If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself; he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son” (1 John 5:9-10). Faith is the inner conviction that what God says to us is true. It is “being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform” (Rom. 4:22). God promises eternal life to everyone who believes (John 4:42; 20:30-31; 1 John 5:1). Individuals are saved when they are convinced of that promise and thus are sure they have eternal life.

John 3:36 says, “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” Hodges emphasized that the “issue is faith in Christ for eternal life. Will a man *look* to the Crucified One for eternal life, or will he not? The man who does, *lives!* By this very simplicity, the Gospel confronts and refutes all its contemporary distortions. Yes, I really *can* be sure! Our Lord Himself also declared that He would lose nothing of what the Father gave Him.”<sup>16</sup> The Scriptures teach us: “And this is the Father’s will who hath sent me, that of all that he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that everyone who seeth the Son,

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<sup>15</sup>Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, 18-19.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

and believeth on him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:39-40).

We can also see eternal security in the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. The Bible says that God “hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts” (2 Cor. 1:22). Christ has sealed us until the day of our redemption: “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory. . . And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption” (Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30). The Holy Spirit never leaves a child of God and this is grounds of belief for eternal security. We may grieve the Spirit (Eph. 4:30) and quench the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19), but we are permanently indwelt by the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 2:12; 6:19). All of these verses teach us that the seal of God by the Holy Spirit is upon the believer until his redemption day. Hodges concludes that “thus the sealing guarantees.”<sup>17</sup> The Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation places an individual into the body of Christ. This is called the baptism of the Holy Spirit or Spirit Baptism. 1 Cor. 12:13 says that we “are baptized into one body,” and this body of believers has Christ as its head. This work of the Holy Spirit guarantees our position in Christ (Gal. 3:27). Eternal security is a fact and promise of God and the Bible.

Assurance of salvation is a distinct yet related issue to eternal security. Eternal security can be explained as the work of God, specifically the Holy Spirit, that promises and guarantees that salvation once received by an individual, is forever, eternal, and

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 415.

cannot be lost. Assurance is the personal confidence in the Bible teaching on eternal security.

Assurance of salvation is simply trusting in the promises of the Word of God: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (John 5:24). Assurance of salvation is a Christian’s confidence in regards to his own salvation. When believers struggle with “feeling saved,” it is usually due to sin in their life. However, the issue is not feelings, but Bible facts. The believer must not look at or trust in himself, but in what Jesus Christ accomplished through His death, burial, and resurrection. Man’s salvation is a work of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Man cannot earn, work, or keep his own salvation. Any lack of assurance in salvation is due to false assumptions or beliefs. A believer is secure in Christ and that will never change. That is an immutable Bible fact. Feelings of individuals may change, but God’s Word never changes. Assurance of salvation is the result of exercising faith and resting in His eternal promises. We must trust in His promises in order to overcome doubts regarding our salvation. The Bible clearly teaches eternal security; knowing and believing what the Bible says is the basis for assurance.

God’s truth regarding the eternal security of the believer is as trustworthy as God Himself. We have seen the work of Christ, the sealing of the Holy Spirit, and the promises of the Word of God. The entire Trinity provides the safekeeping of the believer. To deny this is to deny the fundamental aspects of Christianity. Salvation is eternal because the Godhead is eternal. These are the promises and teachings of God. Eternal

security is a fact. Our response is to submit to the truth of Scripture and accept God's eternal provision of our salvation. It is a settled issue!