

The Eternal Security of the Believer

by David E. Moss

Preface

The doctrine of eternal security is very important to the history of the North Hills Bible Church. The following excerpt from our records shows why. "In July of 1939, a group of Christians, including the pastor, O.M. Kraybill, left the West Poplar Street Church of God and shortly thereafter, formed the Bible Church. The new church came into being because Pastor Kraybill believed in the eternal security of the believer, and preached it openly. The Church of God (the non-charismatic denomination) hierarchy was of the persuasion that a person could lose their salvation, and was putting much pressure on Pastor Kraybill to cease and desist from preaching eternal security. Rather than continue in a system whereby he could not teach what he considered to be the truth of the Scriptures, Pastor Kraybill chose to leave the denomination." (The Bible Church was located on North George Street in North York until 1969 at which time it moved to our present location and became the North Hills Bible Church.)

Since the doctrine of eternal security is so significant to the heritage of our church, it is extremely important that we continue today to stand on this foundation with strong conviction, lest the sacrifices of those who laid it be in vain. It is for this reason that I dedicate this article to the memory of Pastor Kraybill who faithfully preached the truth without compromise and to all those who faithfully stood with him in 1939.

Some of the text that follows has appeared in previous articles published in this paper. Some of the thoughts have been preached in sermons at the North Hills Bible Church. It is my hope that the compilation of these things together will give some clarity to biblical teaching on this subject.

Eternal Security

David said in Psalm 23:6, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." He did not say, "I hope so, I think so, or I might." He said, "I **will** dwell in the house of the Lord forever." David had tremendous confidence that He would live forever in the presence of God. He was secure in his faith and was sure that his security was eternal in nature. This was because he had placed all his confidence in the Shepherd who guarded his life.

But there are those who would disagree with David. They believe that salvation is conditional in nature and requires something from man to insure that it will endure. They view salvation like a contract that contains options for both sides. Some of them believe that when a person receives Christ as his Savior, he is given a temporary license to live that is valid as long as he performs satisfactorily. If he does so to the end of his earthly life, then, and only then, will he receive a permanent license to live eternally. Others believe that saved people maintain an option to relinquish their salvation if they ever decide to disbelieve the gospel. The one believes that God will terminate salvation if He becomes unhappy with man. The other believes that man can terminate salvation if he becomes unhappy with God.

The teaching of the Bible is very clear on this subject. In saving us, God promises to preserve our lives forever (John 3:16; Romans 6:23). This promise is effective immediately upon the salvation of our soul, and the life He produces in us is consistently and emphatically said by Scripture to be **eternal!** In fact, the Bible is saturated with truths that teach that once a person is saved, he is saved for eternity and will never be lost again either by an act of God or by an act of man. The following is representative of the profound nature of this doctrine as it is taught by God in His Holy Word.

1. The Meaning Of Eternal

The Bible says that everyone who has believed in Christ and is saved **has** (present tense) eternal, or everlasting life (John 3:15,16; John 5:24; I John 5:13). Something that is eternal has no end. It goes on and on with no conclusion, no ending point, no possibility of termination. So when God says a believer possesses life that has no ending point, he cannot be saying at the same time that a saved person possesses a life that can be terminated if the right conditions occur.

God uses the word “eternal” to describe part of His own nature (Deuteronomy 33:27). In doing so, He describes two very important dimensions to His deity. One is that he lives completely outside of the context of time (Psalm 90:1-4). He cannot be defined in terms of past, present, and future because in all those time elements He simply **is** (Exodus 3:14). The other is that there is a definite correspondence between the nature of His existence and the concept of unchangeableness. Psalm 102:25-27 says of God,

*Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure...they shall be changed: but **thou are the same, and thy years shall have no end.***

When God applies the word eternal to the kind of life He gives to those who believe the Gospel of Christ, He does not change the definition of the word from its application to His own nature. As the eternal God lives outside of the context of time, the eternal life He gives to believers is a life that also exists outside of the context of time. And, as the eternal nature of God implies that He is perpetually the same throughout eternity, the eternal life He gives to those who are in Christ will never change throughout all the limitless span of eternity.

To believe that eternal life can be terminated or changed is to require that one also believe that God can be terminated or changed. If this be so, then God is not God after all and salvation is meaningless. If the **eternal** God is limitless and unchangeable as He claims to be, then the **eternal** salvation He gives to us is equally limitless and unchangeable. And since it is, everyone who is in Christ can be eternally confident that they are secure in Christ.

2. The Earnest Of Our Inheritance And The Seal Of God

The Bible also says that after a person is saved by believing the Gospel he is sealed with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-4). To understand what it means to be sealed with the Holy Spirit, it is important to look first at the word “*earnest*.” The word earnest means “down payment.” The earnest of the Holy Spirit means that the entrance of the Holy Spirit into the body of a believer serves as a down payment for the inheritance he has been promised in Christ. This indwelling of the Spirit is God’s pledge that He will also give us everything else He has promised us in Christ. It is the same concept as making a down payment on a mortgage at a bank. The down payment is the earnest, or the promise, to pay all the rest of the mortgage. We can only imagine all that is part of our inheritance in Christ, but we know that we will receive it because of the down payment He has made with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

When the Holy Spirit is given to us as a down payment of our inheritance, God uses this to place His seal upon our lives.

a. What the Seal Is. A seal in Biblical times served the same purpose as a signature does today. Special rings were made with raised insignias attached that served as identifying emblems. Each insignia was unique so that whenever a particular emblem was seen, it would immediately be known to whom it belonged.

To place a “signature” on an item, they would use a lit candle to drop a little wet wax onto the item and then press the insignia of the ring into the soft wax, leaving an impression. In Bible times, it was often true that once a document was sealed or signed by a King’s insignia, the matter addressed in the document could not be reversed or changed.

b. The Effect of the Seal. An example of this is found in the Book of Esther, chapter three. Haman convinced King Ahasuerus to place his seal upon a death warrant for all the Jews in his kingdom. When the King discovered that the Queen was a Jew and that Haman had tricked him into signing a death warrant for his own wife, there was nothing he could do to cancel the order. The only way he could compensate was to issue a second order giving the Jewish people the right to defend themselves.

A similar incident occurred in Daniel chapter six when the King issued a decree that no prayers were to be offered to anyone but himself for thirty days. Daniel violated the rule, but the King did not want to punish him. However, since the King’s signature authenticated the decree it could not be altered and Daniel had to be thrown into the Lion’s den.

This is the concept of the sealing ministry of the Holy Spirit. With the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God places His signature upon our lives. This authenticates our membership in the Body of Christ which cannot be reversed or changed in any way. When Scripture says we are sealed with the Holy Spirit unto the day of redemption, it is a fact that can never be erased. We are God’s forever because He has sealed us with His signature. Isn’t this wonderful? This is security -- the security of the signature of God authenticating our salvation and sealing it forever.

3. Christ Living In Me

The only reason a believer can claim to be alive is because of the living Christ who dwells within him. As Galatians 2:20 says, “*nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me...*”

The unsaved are dead. They might be walking around on the earth, but they are dead nonetheless (Ephesians 2:1). And because unbelievers are dead, physical death acts as a wall which prevents them from entering the realm of eternal bliss. Instead, upon impact with physical death unbelievers crash down into the pit of everlasting death and eternal condemnation. While they are walking around on earth as living dead people, this is all the unsaved have to look forward to.

But there is a law that works in the believer called *the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus* (Romans 8:2). This is a law established by God that cannot be broken. As a result, nothing can separate those who possess eternal life from the love of God. Romans 8:35-39 lists a number of things that might try to sever this relationship such as tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword, etc. In spite of every attempt to separate a person from the love of God, the believer remains eternally secure because the law of the Spirit of life prevails. For those who are alive in Christ, physical death serves only as a doorway for them to enter into the presence of God in fulfillment of that wonderful promise: to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (II Corinthians 5:8). Thus in every believer’s life, God’s law of the Spirit of life in Christ is faithfully enforced.

4. The Intercession Of Christ

Even though a person has been saved from sin, it is still possible for him to sin while he continues to live on earth. Until the last trumpet sounds, the believer’s body is referred to as corrupt and mortal (I Corinthians 15:53). In that corruption and immortality is the full capacity to commit sin. Obviously, God’s desire is for His children to learn how to leave sin alone altogether, but because the sin nature continues to dwell within a believer’s flesh for the duration of his earthly experience, God understands the possibility of sin occurring (I John 2:1).

The question is whether or not sin can cause a believer to lose his salvation. Scripture is clear. When a saved person sins, God is not limited in His ability to save his children for eternity. Hebrews 7:25 says Christ is able to save them to the uttermost. That means He is fully capable of saving believers to the full extent, the furthest extreme, the entire duration of eternity.

Why is He able to do this? The same verse explains that it is because throughout eternity Christ lives and makes intercession for all those who have trusted in Him. Because of Christ's personal and perpetual work of intercession, no one can condemn a believer. Romans 8:34 asks the question, "*Who is he that condemneth?*" It then answers the question by explaining that Christ is the one who died and He also has risen from the dead and is presently at the right hand of God. Because He successfully represented us on the cross, He qualifies to represent us before the Sovereign judge to verify that our sins have been eternally adjudicated under His shed blood. The most that can happen to a saved person is that he can be **accused** (Revelation 12:10). But in every instance in which a saved person is accused (by any source including his own flesh, I John 3:20), he is immediately excused because of Christ's intercession for him.

If a Christian does sin, his advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous, makes a plea before the Father which is always accepted because Jesus totally propitiated or satisfied God concerning man's sin in His redemptive work (I John 2:1-2). This satisfaction is so complete that it covers the sins of the whole world and for all time. As the mediator between God and man, Christ's perpetual intercession eliminates any possibility that sin can ruin a believer's relationship with God. We are secure in our possession of eternal life because in every instance in which we sin, Jesus Christ stands as our advocate before the Father and the Father always accepts the intercessory word of His Son.

5. The Concept Of Biblical Hope

Salvation includes many dynamics. There is confession and faith, mercy and forgiveness, grace, redemption, propitiation, reconciliation, justification, sanctification, peace, righteousness, eternal life, etc. But what kind of salvation would we have if God did not include hope?

Hope implies not just a fulfilling life now but a sustaining of life for eternity. Biblical hope is not a maybe if everything turns out okay; it is an absolute certainty based on the trustworthiness of God. God cannot lie (II Thessalonians 2:1), and He said when a believer dies he does not perish but lives forever. That is our hope, our confidence, our security in Christ.

6. The Integrity Of God's Promises

Salvation, therefore, and the security of salvation, rests solely on the ability of God to keep His promises. What are the promises He has made to those who have been saved by grace through faith?

This is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.

I John 2:25

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.

John 6:47

I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever....

John 6:51

The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Romans 6:23

In hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the world began.

Titus 1:2

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life.

John 10:27,28

Jesus said, I am the resurrection, and the life: whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.

John 11:25,26

God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. That ye may know that ye have eternal life.

I John 5:11,13

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 3:16

What is God's opinion of making a promise? In Deuteronomy 23:21-23, God explains that if a person makes a vow he is required to keep it. To fail to keep a vow is to sin and every sin must be penalized. If this is God's standard for people, it is certainly His standard for Himself. And since we know that God never sins, we know that He always keeps His Word. When He promises **eternal** life, He gives exactly that -- **eternal life** -- and not some cheap tenuous life that depends on human behavior or human choices to endure.

To question the eternal security of believers in Christ is to question the very integrity of God. Has God made empty promises? Do the words of God not mean what they say? Such thoughts are ludicrous. It is impossible for God to lie (Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18). But for someone to say that God's promises are not true, it is the same thing as calling God a liar (I John 5:10). "*God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar...*" (Romans 3:4). God has promised **eternal life** and that is exactly what He gives.

7. Kept By The Power Of God

Peter discusses our wonderful salvation in the first chapter of his first letter by saying, "*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* (verses 3-4). This statement affirms the security of the believer with several words: saying we have a **lively** hope and an **incorruptible** inheritance which is **undefiled**, that **fadeth not away**, and is **reserved** in heaven for all of us who are saved. Then, to add even more emphasis to how secure we are in Christ, Peter says, we are "*kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time* (verse 5).

Our hope is a living hope and our inheritance cannot be corrupted or damaged in any way. It is reserved for us on the basis of God's promises and we can have the utmost confidence that we will receive what God has promised in its entirety because God Himself preserves us unto our inheritance by His own almighty, irresistible power. Our life is hid with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3) and no one is able to pluck us out of that grip which is fortified by the same power that created the universe out of nothing and that raised Jesus Christ from the

dead (John 10:29)!

As the hymn writer, Lina Sandell, proclaimed, "More secure is no one ever than the loved ones of the Savior". The fourth verse of her hymn reads,

Little flock, to joy then yield thee! Jacob's God will ever shield thee;
rest secure with this Defender, at His will all foes surrender.

It does not matter what foe that may be: sin that wars against our flesh, the fickle will of the human soul, or the great accuser who challenges our right standing before God. The power of God prevails against every attempt to pluck us from the grip of His Hand. When a person is in Christ because he has believed the Gospel and by grace through faith alone has received the gift of eternal life, it is impossible for the gift to be removed from his life -- if for no other reason than the power of the almighty God which is able to keep us.

A Word About The Belief That It Is Possible To Lose Eternal Life

There are two basic schools of thought among those who believe that it is possible to lose one's salvation. One school of thought is that in order for man to have a free will, he must maintain the freedom to turn away from Christ even after he is saved. The other is the thought that sinning to one degree or another after the point of salvation nullifies the application of redemption to a believer's life.

Man's will actually becomes freer after he is saved than it was before. Romans 3:11 describes a natural man that does not seek after God. Yet Hebrews 11:6 says that God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. How does one change from being a non-seeker to a seeker? Faith is the answer. Before faith comes to a man's heart, he is incapable of doing good or even seeking after God. But when the Word of God initiates faith (Romans 10:17) a man's heart is free to choose that which he had always resisted before. When a person then chooses to believe in Christ through faith and is given the gift of eternal life by grace, God provides protection to his will by making him eternally secure in Christ. Hence, instead of being a violation of man's will, eternal security is a means by which believers are guaranteed the opportunity to make the right choices for the rest of their lives (II Corinthians 3:5; Titus 2:11-12).

Unfortunately, a saved person does not always make the right choices and sometimes we who have the freedom to follow the will of God do not always do so. Never does Scripture suggest, however, that an irresponsible believer is in danger of losing his salvation. Those who believe it does make the mistake of not distinguishing between the contexts of salvation and sanctification. Consider how I Corinthians 3:12-17 explains that a man gets to heaven even if his entire life counts for nothing. It describes all the behavior of believers as being equal in value to either hay, wood, and stubble, or gold, silver, and precious stones. When the believer stands before the judgement seat of Christ, his irresponsible deeds are burned up like hay, wood and stubble while his acts of faithfulness endures the test of fire like gold, silver and precious stones. In the event that all the work of a particular believer is burned up, verse 15 of this passage says, "*he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved.*" This tells us that even if a believer's entire Christian life is worthless, nothing prevents him from being saved because he is secure in Christ. This in no way encourages irresponsibility among the saved; it only explains that works have no part in salvation -- either in securing it for us, or in maintaining it after we are in possession of it.

Knowing that we are saved and cannot be lost is not a license to sin. Instead, eternal security provides motivation to please the One who has so richly blessed us. The sin nature, that still contaminates our flesh as long as we live on earth, persists in resisting the will of God and sometimes we lose the struggle and do those things which we really do not want to do (Romans 7:15-17). Nevertheless we are delivered from the body of this death through Jesus

Christ so that while our flesh desires to serve the law of sin, we can still decide with our transformed minds to serve the law of God (Romans 7:24-25). If we get too far out of line, God chastens us and turns us back to the path of righteousness (Hebrews 12:5-10). If we persist in resisting the chastening of God and in pursuing irresponsible behavior, there is the ultimate penalty of sin unto death. This is the physical removal of a saved person from earth. He suffers the loss of opportunity to live for God on earth, but he himself shall be saved (I John 5:16-17).

But the heart of a truly saved person does not want to sin even though his flesh does. This is because loving God and obeying His Word are one and the same (I John 5:3). I heard of a person who said he did not want to get saved because then he would not be able to do the worldly things he enjoyed. The Christian who was witnessing to this person responded by saying that he could do all of those worldly things as a saved person. The unbeliever was surprised and was not sure of what to say. Then the Christian added that while he could do those things if he chose to do so, he would not want to do those things as a saved person because God would change the desires of his heart when He saved him (Philippians 2:13).

When God saves us, He does far more than give us a ticket to Heaven. Titus 2:11-12 says that the same grace of God that saves us also teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. God not only rescues us from the consequences of sin, but gives us the capacity to walk away from the temptations to sin that we face every day of our lives. It is in the context of our Christian walk that many warnings are given to believers -- not because we are in any danger of losing our salvation, but because we are in danger of not experiencing the blessings that God has designed to accompany salvation. Thus He says in Hebrews 4:1, "*Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.*" The word "seem" refers to a subjective judgment that does not match up with reality. Sin can cause a believer to lose the joy of his salvation (Psalm 51:12), which might make him feel unsaved but cannot make him become unsaved. This is why God admonishes us in Ephesians 4:1 to "*walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.*" He does not want us just to walk, but to walk worthily, not just to live, but to live soberly, righteously, and godly so that in the process we can enjoy both the hope of eternal life and all of the spiritual blessings that accompany it. Thus biblical warnings to believers are the rod of the Shepherd intended to keep us sheep walking joyfully on the right path until we reach the still waters. They are not a threat of retaliation by which we might lose the opportunity ever to arrive.

Conclusion

Eternal security is essential to the very nature of eternal life. Just as it is not within man's power to obtain his own salvation, it is not within his power to retain it. Instead of a man needing to keep himself in the grace of God, it is the grace of God that keeps a man secure in Christ. Of course, man is given the freedom to believe the gospel or reject it. But once he willingly receives the grace of God and is saved, he is sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise and kept by the power of God forever.

At the heart of the matter is what a person is really trusting in. In every case where someone believes it is possible to lose his salvation, it is because he believes he must do something himself to satisfy God or else suffer the consequence of eternal death. There are only two possibilities. Salvation is entirely an act of God, or it is at least partially an act of man. Scripture settles the matter in very simple terms. Salvation is not of ourselves, lest any one of us should boast that we are in the grace of God by our own merit. Salvation is the gift, the free gift, and nothing but the gracious gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9). And, as God is the one who gives us life, God is the one who keeps us alive for eternity. I am so glad I do not have to find something within myself that is adequate to the task of keeping me saved. I rejoice with thanksgiving that all I have to do is trust in God who alone saves me by His grace and keeps me

by His power.

He tells me words whereby I'm saved,
He points to something done,
Accomplished on Mount Calvary
By His beloved Son;
In which no works of mine have place,
Else grace with works were no more grace.

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Not saved are we by trying;  
From self can come no aid;  
'Tis on the blood relying,  
Once for our ransom paid.  
'Tis looking unto Jesus,  
The Holy One and Just;  
'Tis His great work that saves us --  
It is not 'try' but 'trust'!

No deeds of ours are needed  
To make Christ's merit more:  
No frames of mind or feelings  
Can add to His great store;  
'Tis simply to receive Him,  
The Holy One and Just;  
'Tis only to believe Him --  
It is not 'try' but 'trust'!

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My sin -- oh, the bliss of this glorious thought --
My sin -- not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to His cross and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, oh, my soul!

[Poems from "Full Assurance" by H.A. Ironside. For additional reading also consider "Shall Never Perish" by J. F. Strombeck. A copy of the latter may be found in our church library.] 