

DOCTRINES OF GRACE 7

ETERNAL SECURITY

INTRODUCTION

This doctrine is also known as the Final Perseverance (or preservation) of the Saints. Like the other distinctives of the five points, this follows naturally from election. If God has chosen a select group of people for salvation, paid for their iniquities, and given them grace to respond to his call, it is only to be expected that these people will endure to the end. Why? Because salvation is all of God. If he has inspired it, empowered it and engineered it, he will also fulfil it. How could God do all that we have seen so far in redemption, and then let those he loved from eternity fall away?

DEFINITION:

Those whom God has chosen from eternity to be the bride of Christ, whom he has called by his grace and saved with by the atonement of Christ, will assuredly be kept by his power to the end, and will stand redeemed to be presented to Christ at his return.

WHAT THIS DOCTRINE DOES NOT TEACH

Eternal security does not teach that:

- all who profess to be Christians will be saved (Matt 7:21)
- all who can prophesy or work signs and wonders in Jesus' name will be saved (Matt 7:22-23)
- all who are baptised will be saved
- all who attend a Christian church will be saved
- all who prayed the sinner's prayer will be saved

[In view of this, this popular phrase: *'once saved always saved'* is unhelpful. It is misleading, since many who profess faith and appear to be steadfast actually fall, and in some cases, fall throughout their lives never to regain the first position. Secondly, it gives the appearance that a Christian need not worry about his conduct since his eternal safety is assured. This is far from the truth.]

WHAT IS THE BASIS OF THIS SECURITY

- **The unchangeable purpose of God.** He elected those who would be saved.
- **The provision of God.** He did not choose on the basis of works or foreseen faith. In fact, he did foresee all our disobedience and yet chose us. So God is not surprised by our failures and continues to give us grace to continue in faith. Jesus purchased the means as well as the end of our redemption. He obtained not only eternal life, but sufficient grace to help

his people in time of need (Heb 4:16, 10:14; Eph 5:25-27; Titus 2:14).

- **The covenant of redemption.** Jesus chose to die for a specific people. Our names are written on the palms of his hands. He will not fail to deliver up his people to his Father.
- **The covenant of grace.** God has covenanted to do good to his people, to give them a new heart so that they will not depart from him. (Isa 55:3, 61:8; Jer 32:40; Ezek 37:26-7; Heb 8:10)
- **The death of Christ.** We were reconciled whilst enemies to God, how much more shall we be protected now that we are in Christ (Rm 5:8-10).
- **The ascension of Christ.** Jesus is at the Father's right hand interceding for us always. Will his prayer for our protection (Jn 17:20) fail to be answered? Of course not.
- **The sealing of the Holy Spirit.** Eph 1:14, Christians are regenerated by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (1 Jn 3:9). God's life is in us. This is also called a sealing or an earnest (2 Cor 1:22, 5:5). The presence of the Holy Spirit is a guarantee of our final salvation. We are sealed unto the day of redemption (Eph 4:30).
'God's seal (has been) affixed to his covenant of grace. This, then, is the blessed assurance of hope which the true believer is privileged to attain.' (Dabney)
- **God promises to complete that which he begins.** Phil 1:6; Heb 6:16-18
- **The word of God.** (see scriptures below)
- **We are now new creatures** with eternal life which is incorruptible. 2 Cor 5:17; Jn 11:25-26; 1 Pt 1:23

SCRIPTURES

- *Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.* (See all verses) Isa 43:1-3
- *My steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you.* Isa 54:10
- *It is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that any of these little ones should perish.* (Lost Sheep parable) Matt 18:12-14
- *He who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.* Jn 5:24
- *Him who comes to me I will not cast out ... this is the will of him who sent me; that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day.* (See all) Jn 6:35-40
- *I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one is able to snatch them out of my hand, ... no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.* (See all) Jn 10:27-30
- *Holy Father, keep them in thy name ... I have guarded them, and none of*

them is lost ... keep them from the evil one. (See all) Jn 17:11-15

- *If while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. (See all) Rm 5:8-10*
- *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Rm 8:1*
- *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (See all) Rm 8:35-39*
- *Who (Jesus) will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (See all) 1 Cor 1:7-9*
- *Your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Col 3:3-4*
- *May your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. 1 Thess 5:23-24*
- *Who (ie we) by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (See all) 1 Pt 1:3-5*

See also: Jn 4:14; 2 Cor 4:14,17; Eph 1:5,13,14, 4:30; Heb 7:25, 9:12-15, 10:14; 1 Jn 5:4,11-13,20; Jude 1,24,25; Jer 32:40; Ps 37:28.

ILLUSTRATIONS

- A father walks along some cliffs with his son. He holds his son's hand very tight yet he says to him, 'Hold my hand tightly son, for if you loose and slip you will fall off the cliff and die.' Does this statement mean that he will let his son go? Does the child's safety rely upon his own holding of his father's hand? Of course not. The warning is necessary for the son's training, but the father will not loose the son that he loves.
- A mother is busy in the kitchen with her young daughter playing nearby. She tells the girl not to go near the fire or she will get burned. Does this mean that the mother will let the child burn herself unless she is careful to stay away from the flames? It is right to warn the child of the dangers of fire. It is part of her training. If she ignores her mother and touches the flames she will be burned. But will her mother leave her to this fate? If the daughter ventures too near the fire, the mother would drop everything, run to the girl and prevent her from being harmed. The warning does not imply the lack of love and protection from the parent.

DIFFICULT TEXTS

Matt 10:22, 24:13; Mk 13:13

[Various passages teach that only the one that endures to the end will be saved.]

There is no problem here. This is a true statement. The only way to be sure that one is a genuine Christian is to endure to the end and remain faithful. However, the power that keeps a Christian to the end is the power that God gives; it is not our own strength and effort. God will ensure, for he has promised, that all his people will, indeed, endure to the end, because his Spirit is with them to preserve them as Jesus prayed (Jn 17)

Heb 6:1-8

There are two ways to explain this passage. The first is to identify the persons mentioned as not born again people. Judas Iscariot is a good example of this. He experienced all the things mentioned here and yet was not saved. They are people who have come close to the Gospel and experienced the power of God in church life but are not born again.

The second is to show that this passage is a hypothetical argument used to make a point. The passage is not about salvation but progress. The logical conclusion of continually going over the foundational issues is to repent and be converted each time you fell aside. This is impossible. You cannot resurrect your old nature and die again. To do so is to re-crucify Christ. If a true Christian fell from grace, he could not be renewed again (the writer does not say that this is possible but in fact, implies the opposite). Since there is no point in continually digging up the foundations of the Christian life, the writer insists that these people must move on to better things.

(For further explanation of this, please refer to my study on Hebrews 6.)

Heb 10:26-29

The writer does not say that anyone has committed this sin. The general context of this letter is about not going on in Christianity but returning to Judaism. If someone renounces Christ and returns to a false religion, there is not hope for salvation since there is no salvation anywhere else. This is a simple fact. If we reject Christ and spurn the Son of God, we are lost; however, a true Christian will never do this.

Ezek 18:24

This passage is not concerning perseverance, apostasy or even salvation. It concerns the vindication of God's justice when the Jews claimed that they were being unfairly punished for the sins of their fathers'. The word righteous here is used to denominate the man as an Israelite in the land. It is an outward or legal righteousness, not the result of justification. The whole chapter shows Ezekiel calling Israel to repentance. Although God does visit the father's sin on the children (usually the sin affects the family detrimentally),

Ezekiel explains that God does not impute the guilt of it to righteous children. Nationally, prosperity comes to the obedient nation, even if it succeeded a rebellious generation.

'There is an essential difference in the very nature of the righteousness of those who persevere and those who fall away. The one is a lasting sort, the other is not.' (Edwards)

THEOLOGICAL TENSION

At this point we have to be faithful to scripture and not hold arbitrarily to preferred theological sheepfolds. Honesty declares that we must consider the fact that there are many passages which imply that the consummation of salvation is the responsibility of the convert. They do not so much state that salvation can be lost as exhort to endurance. Passages like:

'We are his house if we hold fast our confidence and pride in our hope' (Heb 2:6)

'Take care brethren lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart leading you to fall away from the living God' (Heb 2:12)

'For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end' (Heb 2:14)

These passages are clearly addressed to believers (Heb 3:1) and cannot be fobbed off. What does all this mean?

The issue of Divine Sovereignty versus Human Responsibility has taxed Bible students for centuries. It is not good enough to stress one and ignore the other. The Bible emphasises both at once. Calvinists who fail to teach the urgency of good works following salvation are failing God and their flocks. Arminians who teach that Christians can lose their salvation totally dishonour God and ignore the strength of many texts which state the opposite.

What we have to teach is a theological tension which God has designed for character building and faith. This is seen in the doctrine of conversion as well as eternal security.

1. Conversion

- God originates and empowers (Jn 6:44,65; Eph 2:8)
- Man is responsible for repentance and accountable for rejection of the Gospel (Acts 2:38, 17:30)

2. Perseverance

- God empowers and completes (Phil 1:6)
- Man is responsible for actions and accountable for conduct (settlement is by rewards at the day of judgment). (Heb 3:14)

These two aspects of salvation must be held in balance together. In doing so we uphold the sovereignty of God in our salvation and insist upon ongoing sanctification in believers.

FINAL WARNING

We cannot be sure of our salvation by looking inwardly. Nothing we do, however spiritual, is the ground of our security. Only by looking to Jesus and trusting and obeying him can we make our calling certain (2 Pt 1:10).

Judas Iscariot is an example of someone who moved with Jesus and the disciples, preached the good news, and performed signs and wonders (Lk 10:17) and yet was a son of perdition (Jn 17:12).

FINAL ENCOURAGEMENT

The thief on the cross had no time to develop any practical sanctification but was assured by Jesus of his salvation. The thief had genuinely believed in Jesus' lordship and Messiahship and had trusted him for a place in his kingdom.

PRACTICAL

God preserves his people through their perseverance. He does not magically spare them suffering or persecution, his people are to use the means that God has provided for their own good and avoid those things which scripture warns about.

There are two sides to this security, God's provision and our obedience. This is best summed up in Phil 1:6. God works in the believer the desire and will to do his good pleasure. The source is God. However, the believer must still work out this salvation with fear and trembling. Some scriptures emphasise the one side (eg Jude 21) while others emphasise the other (e.g. Jude 24). Without God giving us grace, we could do nothing to keep ourselves secure. Although we have a responsibility, all the glory goes to God.

We are kept through faith (1 Pt 1:3-5). God's power shields us as we believe. God continues to supply the necessary faith so that we endure. He keeps us believing. Faith must be exercised by us (Heb 10:35). 'There is no such thing in scripture as perseverance without faith ... but those who have faith will persevere.' (Sinclair Ferguson)

God's purposes always achieve their end; in salvation, someone who is justified **will** continue on to be sanctified and ultimately glorified. This means that justification leads to holiness. Growth in holiness is the only means by which we can ascertain that a genuine work of God has taken place in a person's life. There is no such thing as someone being converted and then feeling free to do as they please and habitually sin. Someone who continues to sin without grief has not been saved.

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