



LOVE AND UNITY / THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Eternal Security

What a wonderful salvation we have received! We know *for sure* that we have eternal life in Heaven. But there are many Christians who argue that the Scriptures teach that a born again believer can lose his or her salvation. What do the Scriptures teach on this very important subject? Find out in the following reading by Brent Knox.



Eternal Security

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In Great Commission Churches, we have always taught the biblical truth that all genuine believers in Christ are eternally secure. This doctrine of “eternal security” is also known as the doctrine of the “perseverance of the saints.” This doctrine states that those individuals who are truly born again by the Spirit of God will be kept by God and will, by God’s power, persevere in faith their whole lives. Therefore, we, as believers in Christ, are eternally secure—we have total assurance that we will be in Heaven when we die.

Why is the issue of eternal security such an important doctrine? It relates to our joy in living and our confidence in God. There are so many Christians who suffer needlessly because they lack assurance of their salvation. They lack the confidence that their sins are completely forgiven and their place in Heaven is eternally secure. Their lives are filled with doubt, guilt, fear, anxiety, and intense self-introspection. There is a better way to live. That is why God wants us to know for certain that we have eternal life. In fact, this is one of the reasons why the book of 1st John was written. *“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life”* (1 John 5:13).

If God is loving, then He would want us to know with certainty, before we enter eternity, whether or not we have eternal life! Imagine being on a plane flight from New York City to London. About half way through the flight, the pilot announces over the PA system, “Ladies and gentlemen, I have good news and I have bad news. First the bad news. There was a slight oversight that occurred before we took off. Someone forgot to refuel the airplane. According to our calculations, the plane will run out of fuel and plunge into the ocean shortly before London. There will be no survivors. But the good news is that this is a very fine plane and everything on the plane is now free! You can enjoy in-flight movies for free! Order any beverage for free! Ask the attendants for anything! And they will provide the best comfort for you as they can during the last few hours of your life.” The only person who will really be able to enjoy the next few hours will be the person with a parachute who can bail out before the plane crashes. Why? He knows that his life will continue on! In the same way, knowing with absolute assurance that we have eternal life adds greatly to our joy!

Let’s help our people “know” that they have eternal life and to live free of the anxiety and fear that they might some day do something to lose this wonderful gift.

“In our first paradise in Eden there was a way to go out but no way to go in again. But as for the heavenly paradise, there is a way to go in, but no way to go out.”

- Richard Baxter

Reasons for Believing in Eternal Security

1. The undeserved grace of God.

It is by grace we are saved.

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Eternal life is freely given as a gift—not as a result of any human effort. If we admit that human merit cannot save us, how can we say that human merit can preserve us? We did not earn it by our merit; we cannot lose it by demerit. Maintaining our salvation must not become a matter of works. This is a system of salvation by faith plus works that Paul condemns in Galatians 3:1-2. If this is the case, the believer would have room to boast. No part of salvation is by works.

“I am not what I ought to be. I am not what I want to be. I am not what I hope to be. But still, I am not what I used to be. And by the grace of God, I am what I am.”

- John Newton

2. The inseparable love of God.

There is no power that is able to separate us from the love of God.

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35-39).

No event, no power, no person can destroy the bond of love that God has for us. There is no person or demonic power that can destroy Christ’s love for us. There is no time in which we are ever separated from His love. There is nothing in Heaven or Hell that can pry us from His love—not even we ourselves. As believers, we are not powerful enough to loosen God’s love for us. We cannot sin enough to diminish God’s love for us. Even by our own choice, we cannot break the bond. We aren’t powerful enough. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” The obvious answer is no one—including ourselves.

3. The prevailing forgiveness of Christ.

We are forgiven of all our sins.

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

“Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (Romans 8:33-34).

“Then he adds: ‘Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more’” (Hebrews 10:17).

On the cross, Jesus Christ died and paid for all of our sins—past, present, and future (when Christ died 2000 years ago, all our sins were paid for on the cross, even the sins we will commit tomorrow.

When Christ died, all our sins were yet future. How then can commission of sin(s) cause us to lose our salvation?). All of our sins were blotted out and forgotten. There is no sin that is more costly than the death of Jesus Christ. The death of Christ is more than a sufficient payment for all sin for all time for every person. Rebellion is sin and Christ has paid for it. Doubt is sin and Christ has paid for it. Even the sin a Christian may commit of being ashamed or embarrassed of the Lord has been paid for. Many Christians have denied the Lord during their walk with Him. Peter is an example of this. But Peter was forgiven and restored. The death of Jesus is sufficient for a life of many sins a Christian may temporarily lapse into—including rebellion, doubt, rejection, and denial. Praise God for the prevailing forgiveness of Christ!

In Romans 8:33-34, Paul asks two questions:

1. Who can accuse us and make it stick?
2. Who can condemn us and make us guilty?

The answer is the same: nothing and nobody. In fact, we cannot even do it ourselves. We cannot bring any condemnation on ourselves. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ (Romans 8:1)!

There are problems of logic that arise if a person believes that it is possible to lose salvation. What or how many sins can cause a believer to lose his salvation? How many doubts can cause a believer to lose his salvation? Where do we draw the line? Remember, Jesus taught that sin was not in the act, but in the thought. If loss of salvation is possible, then we would have all lost our salvation long ago, and most likely shortly after we acquired it!

4. The irreversible nature of our salvation.

There is so much that happened to us when we believed, can it be reversed?

NO. Perhaps part of the problem with Christians who struggle with their eternal security is they fail to understand all that happened to them when they got saved. When we believed, we received much more than just a “ticket to Heaven!”

a. When we believed, we gained eternal life.

“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24).

Eternal life is eternal. It lasts forever. And we have it NOW!

b. When we believed, we were “born again.”

“In reply Jesus declared, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again’” (John 3:3).

How many times can a person be born? Can a baby be born, then re-enter his mother’s womb and be born again? No. Just as Christ’s death on the cross was definitive, so the work that the Holy Spirit performs in bringing about a spiritual “birth” to the person who believes is definitive. It is not possible

“Every individual believer is precious in the sight of the Lord; a shepherd would not lose one sheep, nor a jeweler one diamond, nor a mother one child,... nor will the Lord lose one of His people.”

- Charles Spurgeon

for a person who has been spiritually reborn to become “unborn.” We have entered into a new state that cannot be reversed.

c. When we believed, our old sin nature was crucified, and we were given a new nature. We are now a new creature.

“We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection” (Romans 6:4-5).

“For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead” (Colossians 2:9-12).

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Our sinful nature was removed, crucified, cut away. We were given a new nature. We are not the same old people anymore. Something far more dramatic than just gaining a “ticket to Heaven” happened to us when we believed. A dramatic change occurred on the inside. We are different people. Our natures have changed. We were united with Christ. We have experienced a crucifixion of our sinful nature and we have experienced a resurrection of a new nature. Can this ever be reversed? NO. Once circumcision cuts away the flesh, can the flesh ever be reattached? NO. In the same way, once our sinful nature has been cut away, it can never be re-attached.

d. When we believed, we were adopted into God’s family as sons and daughters.

“Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father’” (Romans 8:14-15).

“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir” (Galatians 4:4-7).

Charles Stanley writes, “In the ancient world, the child who was adopted actually had more rights than a child born into a family. A father could give up his natural-born child to adoption, but a child once adopted could never be given up again. It was illegal to do so. A natural-born child could be expelled from the family, disowned, or denied. An adopted child, however, could not be dissociated from the father who had adopted him. Paul was well aware of the legal rights and ramifications of adoption when he wrote that believers in Christ are full partakers of the ‘adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the services of God, and the promises’ once thought to be available only to the Jews

“From that time at age twelve, I’ve sinned, I’ve quit, I’ve failed, I’ve stumbled, I’ve fallen, I’ve landed in the mud puddle and come out drenched with mud. But one thing has been true: God set me apart and there’s no way that I could run away from God. I have tried.”

- Bob Pierce

“Though Christians be not kept altogether from falling, yet they are kept from falling altogether.”

- William Secker

(Romans 9:4). Believers in Christ Jesus are not just second-class members of the family of God but full sons and daughters of the Almighty!” He goes on to write, “The authors of the New Testament left us with detailed explanations of how one becomes a child of God; if that process could be reversed, doesn’t it make sense that at least one of them would have gone into detail explaining that as well?”¹

Can a child adopted by God become “un-adopted?” No. Once a son, always a son. At times, my sons may rebel or dishonor me, but they will always be my sons.

e. When we believed, we were raised up with Christ, glorified, and seated with Christ in Heaven. We have been justified, redeemed and reconciled. In fact, every word used to describe our salvation is used in the past tense.

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4-7).

It is difficult to believe that once we are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms that this could ever be reversed.

5. The continuing and effective prayers of Christ on our behalf.

Jesus is constantly praying for us. His intercessions are part of His great priestly duty. If anyone knows how to pray effectively, with great faith according to the will of God, Jesus does. His prayers will be answered!

“Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them” (Hebrews 7:25).

“Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (Romans 8:34).

“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified... ‘Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world’” (John 17:15-19, 24).

Regarding Jesus’ great prayer in John 17, Charles Stanley writes the following:

“In summary, Jesus is praying that we will be delivered from evil, be victorious witnesses to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and behold the glory of Jesus. What a wonderful prayer is being made on your behalf every moment since you believed on Jesus Christ and received Him as your Savior! Do you think that God the Father will fail to answer the prayer of His Son—even for an instant? Jesus’ prayer for us is about our relationship with Him and with the Father. We certainly can err or sin by our will, but Jesus’ intercession for us will bring about our chastening so that our

eternal relationship with the Father might even become stronger and more intimate. Jesus' prayer attests to the permanence of our relationship 'in God' so that we become 'one' with Him and with Christ. With Jesus praying this about our relationship with God— which He purchased with His blood—how dare we believe that we can in any way negate, abolish, or supersede His prayer."²

God promises to answer prayers. Would He not answer every single prayer of His very own Son?

6. The lasting nature of the Holy Spirit's seal on our lives.

One aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is to assure us of our eternal destiny.

"And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:13-14).

John MacArthur writes: "What does it mean to be 'sealed'? In the ancient world, a seal upon an item meant two things. First, the item was linked to a specific owner. Seals bore markings that indicated to whom the object belonged, from whom it had been sent, or by whom it had been purchased.

To be sealed by the Holy Spirit is an indication that we are now 'owned' by God the Father for His purposes. A seal also meant that an item was authentic. Seals were rarely forged because each seal was handmade, and therefore, variations were easily spotted. When we are sealed by the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit becomes the witness to the fact that we have believed in Jesus. It is as if the Spirit Himself says, 'Yea and amen' to our act of believing in and receiving Christ. Once the Holy Spirit indwells us, the very presence of the Holy Spirit is a 'living seal' that we are God's children, fully authentic as heirs of Christ. Nobody and nothing can undo the seal of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, we are no longer our own. Our bodies are members of Christ's body. The spirit within us is Christ's Spirit. We belong to God (See 1 Corinthians 6:15,17,19-20).

Just like a deposit is made on a purchase agreement when buying a house, so God has made a deposit guaranteeing our eternal destiny. If we have the Spirit, we WILL gain our eternal inheritance! The Holy Spirit is the firm guarantee that this redemption WILL take place! 'We are assured with an absolute certainty only God can provide. The Holy Spirit is the Church's irrevocable pledge, her divine engagement ring, signifying that as Christ's bride, she will never be neglected or forsaken.'"³

7. The enduring faithfulness of God.

God has made many promises regarding the lasting nature of our salvation. And God is faithful. These promises WILL come to pass.

"When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself...Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of

"God's call is founded on His decree, and His decree is immutable. Acts of grace cannot be reversed. God blots out His people's sins, but not their names."

- Thomas Watson

“Today Jesus Christ is being dispatched as the Figurehead of a Religion, a mere example. He is that, but he is infinitely more; He is salvation itself, He is the Gospel of God.”

- Oswald Chambers

his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged” (Hebrews 6:13,16-18).

Again, MacArthur writes:

“It was common in the New Testament times for a person to make an oath on something or someone greater than himself. A Jewish man would swear by the altar of the temple, the high priest, or even God Himself. Once such an oath was made, the argument was over. It was assumed that if someone was willing to make such a serious oath, he was fully determined to keep it. God, of course, doesn’t need to make such an oath, His word is every bit as good without an oath—as ours ought to be (cf. Matthew 5:33-37). But to accommodate the weak faith of mere men and women, God made an oath of His promise to provide His children with a future hope. Since there is nothing or no one greater than God, He swore by

Himself (Hebrews 6:13).”

That pledge did not make God’s promise any more secure; the bare Word of God is guarantee enough, but God gave an oath out of His kind consideration of us to affirm that He meant what He said. His intent was to provide us with “strong encouragement” (v.18).

The Greek phrase so translated refers to a great source of consolation and confidence.”⁴ Assurance of salvation because of our eternal security is not arrogant. It is not presumptuous. It is confidence in God’s promises. The following promises are just a few of the many great promises that God has extended to us to give us great consolation on confidence.

“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:37-40).

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand” (John 10:27-29).

“To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy” (Jude 1:24).

Praise God for His faithfulness! We need no other reason to believe in eternal security than this: God said that He gives eternal life to those who believe in Jesus Christ. What God says, God does.

Common Objections to Eternal Security

There are four common objections to eternal security.

1. “It will lead to license. Those who object to the teaching of eternal security believe if people know they can never lose their salvation they will sin with abandon.”

Answer: “A proper understanding of grace never leads to license. It instead leads to holy living. Our salvation is free to us, but costly to God! The more we understand God’s grace and what it cost Him the more we will hate sin. Paul addresses this issue in Romans 6:1ff: ‘What say we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that Grace may increase? By no means!’ If a person professes to be a Christian, yet is happy in his sin, something is wrong. ‘Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!’ 2 Corinthians 5:17. The bottom line is this: No one, saved or unsaved, should feel secure in sin!”⁵

“If you have eternal life at all, it simply means that you have the Son, Jesus Christ NOW!”

- W. Ian Thomas

“In the first place, a person who is genuinely born again will not want to sin or live “any way he desires.” If a person still has a strong desire to sin and live in a manner that is contrary to the will of God, he very likely has not been genuinely born again. When a person has experienced a spiritual birth, he is a new creature and will not want to sin. Second, “just making Heaven” is a poor excuse for an eternal state of being. At stake is a great loss of eternal reward... Third, the person who pursues sin after being born again is a person who is going to experience God’s chastening on this earth...”⁶

2. “It is just too easy to be true.”

Answer: It is our human nature (in its fallen state) to add ritual and all kinds of religious traditions to the gospel message in order to make it measure up to our expectations of what it should look like. In other words, people just can’t believe that something so wonderful and spectacular; something so great, so precious, and unequalled in human history as Christ’s death and resurrection and the resultant free gift of salvation (the very difference between Heaven and Hell and our eternal destination) can be “treated so loosely” as to think that once you have it, you no longer need to bother with the subject. Those who believe that salvation can be lost, view sin and sinning as an insult to God’s free, but precious gift and thus a rejection of it. But can the purchased thing reject the one who purchased it? Indeed, it cannot. If a sheep, of its own free will, leaves the flock, but then returns after a season, the shepherd gladly receives it back. But while the sheep was out of the fold, did the shepherd lose ownership of the sheep? No. Anyone finding that lost sheep would see the mark of the shepherd showing ownership of that sheep. Likewise, though we may stumble, or backslide, we do not repossess ownership of our soul from God.

3. “If a people are saved by their own free choice, they can lose their salvation by that same free choice.”

Answer: The Bible indicates that true believers will not renounce their faith. If someone does renounce their faith and turn their back on God, it indicates the person was never a real believer in the first place. People who object to the concept of eternal security say it has to be possible to lose eternal salvation or it violates man’s free will. However, those who hold this view believe it cannot happen in Heaven. This is inconsistent. We do not lose free will in Heaven. Also, we are not strong enough to break the promises, the prayers, and the power of God. If Jesus is praying for us, will we not inherit eternal life?

"We serve God because of, not in order to."

- Clarence Sexton

If God's power is protecting us, will we not inherit eternal life? Are we so proud to assume that our choice can negate the promises of God?

4. "There is ample evidence from Scripture to support the fact that believers can lose their salvation."

Answer: There are indeed about 20 passages in the Bible which, taken at face value, could be interpreted to teach that a person could lose their salvation, but there are also many passages and theological concepts that clearly teach the security of the believer. Both cannot be true or we have a logical absurdity! One interpretation must yield to the other. Personally, I believe the weight of Scripture and the points I've already made heavily favor the concept of eternal security and that the verses that seem to teach otherwise should be interpreted in light of this doctrine and not vice versa. Let's look at some of these verses and see if there are not legitimate interpretations that fit with other Scriptures as well.

a. "Am I disqualified for the prize?"

"No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

There are two responses given by Bible commentators. One would say that the context (vs. 23) of this passage is rewards rather than eternal salvation. Paul is concerned about becoming ineffective in the ministry.

Another view is that Paul is simply using a figure of speech in order to get a point across. The overall context of 1 Corinthians 8-10 is Paul's answer to the believers' questions on eating meat sacrificed to idols. In 1 Corinthians 9:27, Paul is simply presenting himself as an example to the Corinthians as one who exercised self-control, to warn them against the dangers of going into idol temples where they will be tempted into idolatry (see 1 Corinthians 10:1-14). The argument, then, is that Paul is presenting a hypothetical situation which could not happen, of him falling away from the faith (*"lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified"* (NASB)). He is using this figure of speech to show that he is serious about exercising self-control on matters that will affect his faith, and that the Corinthian believers should be just as serious in the decisions they make. His goal is not theological (he is not attempting to establish whether or not someone can lose their salvation). Rather, his goal is pastoral in that he desires to see the Corinthians make godly choices.

Whichever is the most accurate explanation of these verses, it is nonetheless true that this passage does not deny that all believers in Christ are eternally secure.

b. "Have I wandered away from the truth?"

"Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some. Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: 'The Lord knows those who are his,' and, 'Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness'" (2 Timothy 2:17-19).

Hymenaeus and Alexander defected from the faith, and were leading others away. Here Paul seems to be saying clearly that they were never saved in the first place. Note his comment in verse 19: “...nevertheless, God’s solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: ‘The Lord knows those who are his,’ and ‘everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.’” There are many who profess who do not possess. See also 2 Peter 2:22 and 1 John 2:19 for similar passages.

“All self-effort is but sinking sand. Christ alone is the Rock of our salvation.”

- H. A. Ironside

We all know of examples of people who seem to be genuinely converted, but then fall away and even deny the faith. Jesus clearly taught in the parable of the sower (Matthew 13) that not all converts are genuine. Judas is an example of this. He was a disciple and probably even led others to Christ. Jesus, however, stated that he was not one of His, but rather the “son of perdition.”

c. “Is it impossible to be brought back to repentance?”

“It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace” (Hebrews 6:4-6).

This is, admittedly, one of the most difficult passages in the Bible. This passage has been interpreted in four ways:

1. This is a passage describing the danger of a Christian losing his salvation, but this view is rejected because of biblical assurances that salvation is a work of God which cannot be reversed.
2. This passage is a warning against a mere profession of faith short of salvation, or tasting, but not really partaking of salvation (*The New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1315).
3. This is presenting a hypothetical situation that cannot happen (similar to 1 Corinthians 13:2 where Paul gives the hypothetical situation of a person having all faith but no love) in order to make a point. The writer is stating that hypothetically if a Christian could leave Christ, there is no provision for repentance, so therefore the Hebrews should be all the more diligent to follow Christ (*The Ryrie Study Bible*, p. 1736).
4. This is a warning given of the danger of a Christian moving from a position of true faith and life to the extent of becoming disqualified for further service (1 Corinthians 9:27).⁷

When deciding which of the above interpretations to believe, we must remember to interpret difficult to understand passages (like this one) in light of other passages which are more clear.

d. “Have I fallen away from grace?”

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope” (Galatians 5:1-5).

A pastor was once asked, “Do you believe in eternal security?” He replied, “Yes, I do believe in eternal security—but be careful.”

“Your doctrine of grace and liberty is dangerous!” Paul’s enemies argued. “Why, if Christians are free from the Law, they will live wicked lives! We need the Law to control them!” So people have argued down through the centuries, little realizing that grace, not law, is the greatest teacher and “controller” in the world (Titus 2:11–12). Paul admonishes us to stand fast in our Christian liberty. If we step back into legalism, we risk entanglement and bondage. How well the Jews of Paul’s day knew what legal bondage meant (Acts 15:10). Circumcision was the seal of the old covenant, so Paul warns the Galatians that to turn back to the old covenant is to rob themselves of the blessings Christ had purchased for them. Christ cannot profit the sinner who rejects grace and trusts law; Christ cannot profit the saint who seeks to live by law instead of grace. “Circumcision” in vv. 2–3 stands for the entire Mosaic system. People who put themselves under the Law become debtors to the whole

system.

“*Fallen from grace*” (v. 4) does not mean “fallen from salvation.” Paul is not writing to people who have “lost their salvation” because such a thing is not possible. He is writing to saints who have moved out of the sphere of grace into the burdensome sphere of law. Watchman Nee says, “Law means I must do something for God; grace means that God does something for me.” How wonderful it is for the Christian to enjoy the liberty of grace! This means moving out of the bondage described in Romans 7 into the glorious liberty of Romans 8! Paul describes the true Christian walk in vv. 5–6: our power is in the Spirit; we receive this power by faith; this faith produces love and works in our lives. In other words, the doctrine of Christian liberty does not encourage a wicked life; instead, it binds us closer to Christ, and Christ lives out His life through the believer (2:20).⁸

“In Galatians 5:4, Paul was not referring to the security of the believer, but to the contrasting ways of grace and law, faith and works, as a means of salvation. He certainly wasn’t teaching that a person who has once been justified can lose his righteous standing before God and become lost again by being legalistic. The Bible knows nothing of becoming unjustified.”⁹

e. “Did I commit the “unforgivable” sin?”

“And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come” (Matthew 12:31-32).

It seems that nearly every week some Christian asks me about this verse. Sometimes they wonder if they have committed the “unforgivable” sin and their security is greatly shaken. This passage is adequately explained by the following commentaries.

“The nation, because of its leaders, was on the brink of making a decision that would bring irreversible consequences. They were about to attribute incorrectly to Satan the power of the Holy Spirit exercised through Jesus and thus to commit the blasphemy against the Spirit. This specific sin cannot be reproduced today, for it required Jesus’ presence on earth with His performing miracles through the Spirit’s power. If, however, the leaders, acting on behalf of the nation, concluded that Jesus was empowered by Satan, they would commit a sin that would never find national or individual forgiveness (in this Age or in the Age to come). The consequences would bring about God’s judgment on the nation and on any individual who persisted in that view.”¹⁰

“To conclude that Christ’s miraculous works—affected by the Holy Spirit to prove Christ’s deity—were actually done by Satan is to be in a hopeless state of rejection. Since the religious leaders had seen and heard all that Jesus had done and said, yet were still convinced it was satanic, they were obviously in a hopeless state before God. They had concluded the opposite of what was clearly true, and they had done so despite full revelation. What does that say to us? What is the application for today? In the first place, this was a unique historical event that occurred when Christ was physically on earth. Since He isn’t now, there is no primary application. Perhaps there will be in “the age to come” (the millennial kingdom), when Christ is again on the earth. Is there a secondary application? Yes, that unregenerate people can be forgiven anything if they are willing to repent and come to Christ. But continual blasphemy against the convincing and convicting work of the Holy Spirit, defined as fully knowing the facts about Jesus but nonetheless attributing His works to the devil, cannot be forgiven.”¹¹

“Men do not fall from grace by sinning, but by putting the Law in place of grace.”

- Williams Evans, commenting on Galatians 5:4

f. “What about the branches thrown away to be burned?”

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned” (John 15:1-2,4,6).

Warren Wiersbe writes, “It is important to remember that not everything in a parable must mean something. A parable teaches one main truth, and to try to make a parable ‘stand on all four legs’ is often the first step toward misinterpretation. The main truth Christ is teaching in this parable is the importance of abiding in Him in order to bear fruit. The word ‘fruit’ is used six times, and ‘abide’ at least fifteen times (but it is not always translated ‘abide’). The main point of the teaching here is fellowship, not sonship.”

To use verse 6 to teach that a Christian loses his salvation and is burned in hell if he fails to bear fruit is to twist the meaning of the parable. In the first place, such a teaching contradicts the plain teaching of other verses—John 6:27; 10:27–29; etc. Furthermore, note that the branch Christ speaks of in v. 6 withers after it is cast forth! If this branch pictures a backslidden Christian who loses his salvation, he should “wither” first, then fail to bear fruit, then be cast out. To abide in Christ does not mean to keep ourselves saved. It means to live in His Word and pray (v. 7), obey His commandments (v. 10), and keep our lives clean through His Word (vv. 3–4). The Christian who fails to abide in Christ becomes like a useless branch, like the salt that loses its taste and is good for nothing. First Corinthians 3:15 teaches that our works will be tested by fire. The Christian who fails to use the gifts and opportunities God gives him will lose them (Luke 8:18 and 2 John 8).

To be a branch in the Vine means we are united to Christ and share His life. As we abide in Him, His life flows through us and produces fruit. It is possible for the carnal Christian to produce ‘works’, but only the spiritual Christian can bear lasting fruit. Note that the fruitful branches are ‘purged’ (v.

“The Law and the Gospel are two keys. The Law is the key that shutteth up all men under condemnation, and the Gospel is the key which opens the door and lets them out.”

- William Tyndale

2—same word as “clean” in v. 3) so that they will bear more fruit. God cleanses us through the Word, chastening us to make us more fruitful, which helps to explain why a dedicated Christian often has to go through suffering. As believers move from producing “fruit” to ‘more fruit’ (v. 2) to ‘much fruit’ (v. 8), they glorify the Father. The evidences of the ‘abiding life’ are: a sense of the Savior’s love (v. 9), obedience to His Word (v. 10), answered prayer (v. 7), and joy (v. 11).¹²

g. “What about the verses where church members are urged to continue in the faith?”

A key passage along this line is Hebrews 3:6-14: *“But Christ is faithful as a son over God’s house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast. So, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.’ So I declared an oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’ See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called To-*

day, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.”

Throughout the centuries, Christians (even those who do not believe in the doctrine of eternal security) have generally agreed on two points:

1. Salvation is totally a work of God by His grace through faith.
2. Those who are saved will have a genuine faith, a faith that lasts until death.

This passage is merely highlighting this truth. Those who are genuinely saved will have a faith that perseveres. Their salvation will be demonstrated by a persevering faith. In fact, as mentioned earlier, the “doctrine of eternal security” is also known as the “doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.” That is, those who are born-again will persevere in faith, firm until the end. Genuine believers may sin, they may have doubts, and they may have rocky moments in their lives. But they will end their lives with a genuine faith in Jesus Christ for their salvation. The writer in Hebrews is simply saying that these believers have become sharers in Christ—and that this will be demonstrated by their holding firmly till the end the confidence they had when they first believed in Christ.

In this regard, as pastors and believers, we have two responsibilities:

1. We must proclaim the truth that salvation is a work of God; that it is God who causes us to be born again; and that it is God who preserves and protects us till the very end.
2. We must exhort each other to be diligent to believe God, to not trust in our own efforts, to obey God’s commands, to forsake sin and anything that would hinder our faith in God (this is what the writer in Hebrews is doing with the believers in this passage in Hebrews 3).

God works to bring about the “*perseverance of the saints*,” at least in part, through encouragements and exhortations like the ones given in Hebrews 3:6-14. But this does not deny in any way the glorious truth that those who are truly born again will have an enduring faith. Just as God has chosen to

use the sharing of the gospel by an evangelist to introduce ones to the faith that is in Christ Jesus, so too God uses the exhortations of pastors (like the writer of Hebrews) to encourage believers to persevere in that same faith.

In summation, passages (such as Hebrews 3:6-14) in which believers are urged to continue in their faith are in harmony with the truth that those who are born of the Spirit will continue in the faith and are eternally secure in their salvation.

“Salvation is a work of God for man, rather than a work of man for God.”

- Lewis Sperry Chafer

Conclusion

I have found the following illustration from Christian Information Ministries to be helpful. “Consider the analogy of a father holding a child’s hand as they walk together: In the opponents view, the safety of the child rests in the strength of the child’s grip on the father’s hand. If the child lets go he will perish. In the view of those who believe in eternal security, the child’s safety rests in the strength of the father’s grip. If the child fails the father’s grip holds firm.”

We are eternally secure because God has a strong grip. He will never let go. The focus is on God’s ability and not our inability. There is an extraordinary amount of comfort realizing that God is responsible for maintaining the grip!

Endnotes:

¹ Stanley, Charles, *Understanding Eternal Security*, (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1998, pg. 47

² Stanley, Charles, *Understanding Eternal Security*, (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1998, pg. 50

³ MacArthur, John Jr. *Saved without a Doubt*, (Colorado Springs, Co.: Chariot Victor Publishing) 1992, pg. 20

⁴ MacArthur, John Jr. *Saved without a Doubt*, (Colorado Springs, Co.: Chariot Victor Publishing) 1992, pg. 17

⁵ Christian Information Ministries

⁶ Stanley, Charles, *Understanding Eternal Security*, (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1998, pg. 75

⁷ Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

⁸ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the New Testament*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books) 1992.

⁹ MacArthur, John Jr. *Saved without a Doubt*, (Colorado Springs, Co.: Chariot Victor Publishing) 1992, pg. 25

¹⁰ Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

¹¹ MacArthur, John Jr. *Saved without a Doubt*, (Colorado Springs, Co.: Chariot Victor Publishing) 1992, pg. 36

¹² Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the New Testament*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books) 1992.



ETERNAL SECURITY

Exercise

1. What was the main lesson you learned from this reading?

2. Why do young believers doubt their salvation? What can you do to help?

3. Which of the “Reasons for Believing in Eternal Security” resonated most with you? Why?



ETERNAL SECURITY

Exercise

4. How would you answer a Christian who says, "I think I have committed the unforgivable sin"?

5. What is your interpretation of Hebrews 6:4-6?
