

The Church of the Servant King Soteriology Series

SO_4_Eternal Security & Frequently Misunderstood Passages – Part 2

In our last lesson, we reviewed some passages and arguments for eternal security from the Bible as well as passages that affirm God's desire that the believer be assured of his/her salvation. We concluded by mentioning that there are three major categories of objection to the Biblical teaching regarding the believer's eternally secure status. We shall explore the basis for these objections in this lesson as well as examine an alternative response from Scripture.

Objection #1 – The Practical Effect of Teaching the Eternal Security of the Believer

This objection to the Biblical understanding of the eternal security of the believer is based upon the assumption that if a person believes that their eternal destiny is secure, then they will have no motivation to not indulge in sin or the pleasures of the world. However, this position has obviously overlooked Scriptural evidence to the contrary. Scripture is clear that God is a wise Father of His spiritual children and disciplines wayward children in time and will withhold reward in eternity. For instance:

- Hebrews 12:6 – “For whom the Lord loves He chastens and scourges every son whom He receives.”

This verse is a quotation of Proverbs 3:11-12 and both passages teach the principle that the Lord is actively involved in believer's lives. If the believer is miserable in life, he should check the source of that misery. The believer should ask himself the question – Am I suffering because of what I have done right (undeserved) or because of what I have done wrong (deserved)?

- 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 – “For no other foundation [*Christ*] can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, [*divine good*] wood, hay, straw, [*human good*] each one's work will become clear; for the Day [*Bema Seat judgment – 2 Co 5:10*] will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire [*evaluation of believer's works – Re 2:18, 19; 3:18; 22:12, not the eternal fire for unbelievers – Re 20:10*]; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

There is perhaps no stronger affirmation in Scripture of the eternal security of the believer than this passage. Also, there is no stronger affirmation in Scripture of the fact that some believers will continue in sin and/or lack of orientation to God's plan than this passage. For someone to continue to believe that a Christian can lose their salvation or to believe that unless a Christian manifests a certain lifestyle they were never really a Christian, then this passage must be explained away. The person who does not believe in the eternal security of the believer must arbitrarily decide which sin(s) warrant loss of salvation or evidence of never having been saved. Obviously, to hold a position that is other than the eternal security of the believer reflects a lack of orientation to grace.

- 2 Timothy 2:11-13 – “This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him [*the believer is seen as united with Christ in His death to sin – Ro 6:1-14*], we shall also live with Him [*the believer is united with Christ in His resurrection – Ro 6:1-14*]. If we endure [*persevering in our witness through testing – Ro 8:16-17; Re 3:19-21*], we shall also reign with Him [*the privilege of reigning with Christ during His Messianic reign and eventually during in the New Jerusalem, i.e. heaven – 1 Pe 2:9; Re 1:6; 5:10; 20:6; 22:5*]. If we deny Him [*refers to the believer who abandons the faith through practical agnosticism or*

converting to another religion], He also will deny us [refers to the denial of rewards in our resurrection bodies – 1 Co 3:1-3, 11-15]. If we are faithless, He remains faithful [John 10:27-30]; He cannot deny Himself [the believer has the righteousness of God imputed to him at the point that he places his trust in Christ alone, not his own works – Ro 4:5, 11 cf. Tit 3:5].”

Objection #2 – The Argument from Experience

The basis for this objection is the fact that there are many who once professed to be Christians and who have now fallen away from the faith in their lifestyle and conduct. For instance, many young people became Christians in their youth, yet later in life when they enter college or the workplace, they live a lifestyle that is just like the unbelieving world. Those who use this argument against the eternal security of the believer would contend that such a person was never really saved in the first place. [The basis for their position is rooted in a Calvinistic understanding of the perseverance of the saints, i.e. the ‘P’ in the acronym ‘TULIP’ that is used for the five basic tenets of Calvinism. We’ll discuss more about this later in the series].

Besides Scriptural evidence to the contrary [see above passages], one of the basic problems with this argument is the bottom line is that only God knows who is truly saved, i.e. only God knows those who have truly depended in the work of Christ alone and not their own works of righteousness for salvation. Many times, those who profess to be Christians are just that – professors. There are many false professions in every realm of life. A false professor of Christianity may in fact live a life inconsistent with his calling. In addition, those who are evaluated to have lost their salvation may be in a temporary state of rebellion against their heavenly Father and His Word (see 1 Co 3:1-3; 2 Tim 2:11-13) even though they have at one point in their life placed their trust in Christ alone.

Many times those who advance this argument cite Judas Iscariot as proof of their position. They contend that Judas, as one of the disciples, lost his salvation. However, Scripture is very clear that Judas was never a believer. Satan is said to have entered Judas (John 13:27). This cannot happen to a believer. Christ Himself indicated that Judas was not a believer in John 6:64, 70, & 71.

Argument #3 – Certain Scriptures Disprove the Doctrine of the Eternal Security of the Believer

There are many passages that when read without an understanding of the context or dispensation involved seem to indicate that a person can lose his salvation. We will examine a few of these in this lesson just to illustrate the point. In a future lesson, we will deal with many of the other passages that seem to confuse the simple salvation gospel.

Passages Applying to Another Dispensation

Many Old Testament passages and passages in the Gospels pertain to the physical and legal consequences in time of breaking the Mosaic Law. Israel was a nation of God’s chosen race of people [Jews] who were recipients of God’s covenants with them through Abraham (Ge 12:1-3, 7; 13:14-17; 15:1-21 plus other passages). Of course, the covenant with Abraham was reaffirmed through subsequent covenants (e.g. the Davidic in 2 Sam 7:12-13 and the New Covenant in Jer 31:31-34). As such, theirs was the responsibility to be a light unto the Gentiles. They accepted this responsibility (Ex 19:1-9; Deut 27). However, they failed on many occasions to execute their responsibility faithfully and thus experienced the five cycles of discipline documented in Leviticus 26 (compare with Deut 7:12-24; 28:1-6).

Ezekiel, who lived and wrote during the 6th Century BC Babylonian captivity, provides an example of those passages that document the fact that some of God’s chosen people (Jews, some believers and some unbelievers no doubt) during the Age of Israel did in fact depart from

the Mosaic Law and suffer discipline in the form of a lack of physical deliverance. See Ezekiel 5:8-17; 12:15, 16; 18:19-32. The curse of breaking the Mosaic Law was deportation and even physical death to believer and unbeliever of Israel. For those who were believers, it did not mean that they were no longer spiritually saved for eternity.

Other warnings found in the Gospels regarding punishment in the eternal state are in reference to the Jew of Israel's last days (i.e. Daniel's 70th Week or the Tribulation) who is an unbeliever and who perhaps has even assisted in the persecution and suffering of believers during that period. See Matthew 24:13, 45-51; 25:1-13, 41-46.

These are but a few of the passages that are often taken out of dispensational context to support an erroneous view that the believer can lose his salvation. This represents a great argument for the importance of dispensationally oriented believers to apply their method of interpretation consistently. Failure to do so establishes a precedent of inconsistency that can be used effectively by those of another interpretive persuasion and the dispensationally oriented believer is left without a firm basis for his interpretations.¹

Passages Applying to Unregenerate Teachers of the Last Days

These men were never saved; therefore, to use these examples to attempt to argue against the doctrine of the eternal security of the believer is tantamount to building an argument upon a false premise. See 1 Timothy 4:1, 2; 2 Peter 2:22; Jude 17-19. No doubt, some churches today are pastored and led by unregenerate men. However, this fact does not negate the doctrine.

Passages Applying to Rewards and not to Salvation

Examples of this category include 1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 9:24-27; 2 Corinthians 5:9, 10; and Colossians 3:24, 25.

Those that Warn Believers of Things They May Lose

Colossians 2:18 is an example of this category. Carnal believers (1 Co 3:1-3) are in danger of losing many blessings which the Lord has in store for the believer. The loss of blessing can occur in time (i.e. loss of joy, peace, confidence, etc.) and eternity (i.e. loss of eternal reward, not eternal salvation).

Those that Warn Unbelievers

In Romans 11:21, Paul teaches that God did not spare the natural branches (Israel) by setting them aside temporarily. He also warns Gentiles (i.e. the Gentile world consisting of unbelievers) that they be set aside and not receive God's promise of eternal life if they in like manner do not believe. This passage (as is all of Romans 9-11) is dealing with corporate privilege in terms of dispensation. First, the Jew had a position of privilege in regard to God's revelation to man, but also had responsibility. They failed and the responsibility to be a witness was passed to the Church, consisting of primarily saved Gentiles. In the future, after the great tribulation, God will restore Israel to a position of privilege and responsibility.

¹ This is my basic problem with the writings and positions of some dispensational theologians. While they may be tremendous spiritual men and while they may have contributed greatly to the cause of Christ and thereby command my greatest respect, I need to be objective enough to continue to evaluate their positions (as I should my own) in the light of Scripture.