

"ETERNAL SECURITY"

(Romans 8:35-39)

Charles Ryrie

THE MEANING OF SECURITY

What does eternal security mean? Let me propose a concise definition. *Eternal security is that work of God which guarantees that the gift of salvation, once received, is possessed forever and cannot be lost.* Since security rests on God's guarantee, its truthfulness, then, does not rest on my feelings or experiences. Sometimes the teaching of eternal security is called the doctrine of preservation, which means that God preserves the believer in his salvation.

Some use the word perseverance or final perseverance to describe the concept of security or preservation. Perseverance emphasizes that the believer cannot finally or totally fall away from grace but will persevere to the end and be eternally saved. Perseverance seems to focus on the believer as the one who perseveres through the power of God. Security and preservation seem to focus on God as the One who secures our salvation. All acknowledge that though times of backsliding may come into the believer's life, fruit will be evident. Some who approach this doctrine from the emphasis of perseverance deny the possibility of a believer being carnal.

Although security, preservation, and perseverance essentially label the same doctrine, assurance is another matter, and differs from security. Assurance concerns the realization that a person has eternal life. But security is a true fact whether or not an individual has assurance of that or not.

REASONS FOR BELIEVING IN ETERNAL SECURITY

But back to security. On what is this teaching based? Its basis is the grace of God who gives us the gift of eternal life, and that grace is eternal. Receiving that gift brings us into a relationship with all the Persons of the Godhead, which guarantees and assures us that our salvation is eternally secure. Sometimes we cannot know for sure whether or not an individual is truly born again, but if he or she is, then that person's salvation is secure forever.

What are some of the specific reasons for believing in security? Consider these.

(1) God the Father has purposed to glorify all those whom He predestined and called (Romans 8:30). *Predestined, called, justified, and glorified* are all written in the same tense in this verse, indicating that the glorification of all believers is as certain as their predestination, calling, and justification. And remember, we are justified through faith in Jesus, not faith and commitment of life (Romans 3:26).

(2) While most would agree that God's power is fully able to keep the believer secure (Jude 24), some argue that His power can be cut off if a person renounces his faith. But the Lord said that we are secure in His and the Father's hand, and that guarantees that He will keep safe the one who has received the gift of eternal life (John 10:28-29). No one (including ourselves) is able to snatch us out of God's hand. And remember, eternal life is a gift received through faith, not a reward for being willing to follow Christ.

(3) Our Lord's continual intercession for us keeps us saved completely and eternally (Hebrews 7:25). When we do sin we have our Lord to plead our case before God (1 John 2:1-2). And because He has provided total and eternal satisfaction or propitiation for our sins, we stand forgiven. Satan accuses us (Revelation 12:10), and often we accuse ourselves, but with Christ defending us on the basis of His death for our sins, nothing can undo the great salvation which we have received.

"Who will bring a charge against God's elect?" Paul asks (Romans 8:33). It makes no difference what the answer is. It makes no difference who in all the universe may try to charge us with whatever. It makes no difference as long as it is not God who charges us. And God does not. In fact, He has already announced the verdict in all instances when we are and will be charged. And that verdict is "not guilty." Paul answers his own question about who will charge God's elect by simply saying, "God is the one who justifies" (verse 33). Every single time we sin, a charge can be legitimately leveled at us. But



whenever that happens and whoever brings the accusation finds that the case has already been decided and the verdict rendered, "Not Guilty."

(4) Nothing and no one (including ourselves) can separate us from the everlasting love of God (Romans 8:35-39). In this passage Paul lists a number of candidates which might seem to be able to separate believers from the love of Christ. They include, among others: adverse circumstances like trouble and poverty; all the circumstances of life, present and future, including death; and the powers of angelic beings (and Satan is one of them). Then Paul concludes by saying no other created thing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. Nothing in all creation, including all the creatures (which includes us) can cause a separation from the eternal love of Christ.

(5) If our salvation is not secure, then our new birth would have to be able to die or we would have to be able to destroy it by some act of sin. But never does the New Testament even hint that such could happen. Regeneration is that work of God which gives to the one who believes new life through the new birth. Further, regeneration is instantaneous—either one is dead in sin or alive in Christ. A process may be involved which leads to the new birth, but the birth occurs at a given moment of time.

And how is a person regenerated?

God does it (John 1:13)

according to His will (James 1:18)

through the Holy Spirit (John 3:5)

and the washing of regeneration (Titus 3:5)

when a person believes (John 1:12)

the Gospel revealed in the Word (I Peter 1:23).

And remember, John 1:12 states clearly that receiving Christ—that is, believing on His name—makes one a child of God. To be sure, the new birth will result in a changed lifestyle, but we become children of God through faith.

(6) The abiding presence and residence of the Holy Spirit in the believer is also a gift from God (John 7:37-39; Acts 11:16-17; Romans 5:5; 1 Corinthians 2:12). If salvation can be lost, then God would have to take back His gift of the Spirit.

(7) At conversion the believer is joined to the body of Christ by the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). If salvation can be lost, then one would have to be severed from the body, and the body of Christ would then be dismembered.

(8) When we believed, the Holy Spirit sealed us until the day of redemption (Ephesians 1:13; 4:30). If we are not secure, then the seal has to be broken or the promise would be that we are sealed not until the day of redemption but only until the day we sin (at least some very serious or grievous sin). And remember, God seals all believers, not just those who are or who are willing to be committed believers (2 Corinthians 1:22).

(9) What was apparently part of an early Christian hymn in New Testament times gives strong assurance of the believer's security (2 Timothy 2:11-13). Paul says that "it is a trustworthy statement." Four couplets are recorded, two positive and two negative.

The first is, "If we died with Him, we shall also live with Him"—likely a reference to our co-crucifixion with Christ (as explained in Romans 6:1-10).

The second is, "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him." Here the contrast is between the endurance necessary in this life and the ultimate glorification which all believers will enjoy (Romans 8:17).

The third couplet, "If we deny Him, he also will deny us," reiterates the Lord's word in Matthew 10:33. Judas did this.

The last couplet, however, assures us that "if we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself." This is no warning of certain condemnation to false professors; rather Christ's constancy to His own promises provides the believer with his greatest security. It is unthinkable that any contingency could affect the faithfulness of God, for he cannot deny himself. He will not deny even unprofitable members of His own body. True children of God cannot become something other than children, even when disobedient and weak. Christ's faithfulness to Christians is not contingent on their faithfulness to Him.