

ARE YOU ETERNALLY SECURE?

II Pet 2:20-22

I have periodically been asked whether or not I believe in eternal security, and my answer, as usual, startles some. I reply 'certainly for those who have entered into eternity'. There are a number of ways which this whole belief system is described nowadays. Some call it the perseverance of the saints and others, once in grace always in grace. Irregardless of how one titles it there are still multiple scriptures that present roadblocks: Heb 6:4-6; I Cor 9:27; I Pet 1:5/Eph 2:8.

The Hebrew's text is most interesting because many seek to imply that it refers to a hypothetical situation. However, it is plain to see that the one described has known the Lord and had fallen away. The Corinthian text gives as 'castaway' the Greek word 'adonikos', a thing disqualified after examination and trial. And the Peter and Ephesian texts are evidences that faith is the instrument by which one is kept. If you lose your faith I don't care what others say to you, you are in a bad way.

A large part of the problem devolves from our understanding of what happens when one is born again. Ephesians 1:13, 14 reveal the pathway of salvation: First you hear the Gospel, and having heard it you then believe, afterwards being sealed by the Holy Spirit. All this occurs in less time than it takes you to read two words in a sentence. Then the issue becomes, may a believer backslide? As is obvious from Jeremiah 3 verses 6 and 12 a real possibility exists there. God calls Israel a backslider even when they had a covenant with him, because a covenant is no guarantee that people will live according to His will.

Adherents to the once saved, always saved doctrine usually follow to streams: The first is that of those who teach that you may become a Christian with or without evidencing any fruit in your new Christian life. The problem with this is that all throughout the bible, people who turned to the Lord evidenced some kind of change immediately. Ruth converted to her mother-in-law's religion and it changed her life quickly. Twelve disciples left main stream Judaism for Jesus and their turning was readily seen by all. Peter saw 3000 people saved on the Day of Pentecost and it translated into the selling of property and money distribution to the poor. In Acts 9:35 a whole town turned to the Lord because Peter had healed a man. If your whole town surrendered to the Lord right now, don't you think that you would know it within the hour?

The reality is that people want a faith which requires little or nothing from them by way of obedience. Then, the other extreme of the once saved, always saved pendulum are those who claim that if someone backslides, then they were never converted to begin with. They essentially make it impossible for a person to have a will which allows for constant or consistent perseverance in disobedience. The problem here is that the book of Judges is of a nation that would never do right for long periods of time. They would serve God all the days of the elders, then as soon as the elders died they backslid into idol worship, later becoming oppressed by an enemy raised up by God, who then listened to their groaning and pleas for help only—in His great mercy—to send them a judge to deliver them from trouble. When the judge died the cycle began again and again.

Peter's Epistle is obviously of people who have been born again. They had been delivered from sin through the knowledge of Jesus only to return to the sins of this world a little while later. Peter further explains that this backslidden state is worse than the first. That means that often people who were deep in sin prior to coming to know Jesus often become more sinful after they turn from the Lord because they are driven by a greater drive to do wickedness. So Peter attempts to head us off at the curve by saying that we should pay attention to the fact that these are the end times and we should live upright and walk straight.

Another issue to consider in all this is that in the time in which the Jewish writings were being formed, Jews believed that a covenant child of God could end his life and go to hell. The traditions of the elders make it plain that certain sins may remove your part or inheritance in the world to come: Idolatry being one and adultery—the great sin—being another. So historically Jews did not believe in once saved always saved. The Jewish legend book, the Talmud, has stories of people supposedly in hell and Jesus is one of them. Ancient Jews believed that Jesus has been the disciple of a rabbi that excommunicated him and that Jesus later went to Egypt where he received tattoos that gave him magical powers to do miraculous things. They believed that Jesus was a Jew and had been lost.

Even today Jewish people believe in the human's 'Free Will'. You will not find Jews presently who do not believe in the free will. They believe that God does not force one to become nor remain his follower at any time. So how have we come to believe that free will is no longer possible for people? Well, the is really quite interesting..

By the time of the Renaissance the Roman Church was providing people with more than enough fodder to build a case against their claim as the one true church. So, up comes the reformers who seek to make changes in the Papal church, but to no avail. Eventually they launch out on their own. This being the case we must remember that they were all, for the most part, ex-Catholics who brought much of that teaching into the Protestant movement with them. Now let's remember though, that Catholics do not believe in eternal security either. They posited that salvation was/is only possible by membership in the one true Roman Church. Also, that there is a difference between venial and mortal sins. And some sins will send you to hell.

Therefore it is obvious that the reformers did not get a doctrine of eternal security from them, so where did it come from? It is rooted in the Augustinian thought of the 4th century. Saint Augustine taught what is called double predestination: That God, from eternity past, had predestined some persons of earth to go heaven and others God had predestined to go to hell, all in all bring total glory to God. Augustine also taught that people have enslaved wills to sin without moral choice and that we cannot on our own choose to serve God or receive Him as our savior. The reformers picked this up 1200 hundred years later and developed it into what we now know as Calvinism.

Calvinism is the idea that man is so depraved in his nature that he has no free will to choose God at any time. Thus, God foreseeing all of this, unconditionally elected some to be his followers without any preconditions of any type whatsoever. Furthermore, it is then believed that Jesus' death on the cross was not for all mankind but only for those elected from eternity past to be saved. Since God is the one who elected them, at some point in their life when God's grace comes to them they have no ability to resist Him. In the end, they will all persevere because it is God conducting the whole process; man is passive and has nothing to contribute by way of the redemptive process or its application to his or her own life.

In a nutshell that explains the predestinarian view of those who believe that once saved, always saved. I should add that there was one group of Jews who believed in predestination: The followers of the Dead Sea Scrolls were heavy into this system of thought but as most know, they were the heretics of the BC days and had little influence in and around all of the greater kingdom of Israel.

What you must ask yourself—if you are claiming to be a Christian—is do I believe that I possess a free will? If you do then you can consider the reality that some fall away from God. If you do not then of course you believe that you may live as you please without thought of consequence. Although, I warn you, this belief is historically present, but not scripturally derived.

Suppose that I as a pastor turned and walked away from God, turning to the evils of sin. I ignore the subtle pleadings of God's Spirit to amend my ways. The let's say I go so far as to deny that Jesus ever was God's Son, that the whole blood of Jesus and Cross event is a falsity, that all who come to Him—supposedly—are psychologically deluded. Okay, so having departed from scriptural ways I drift for some years in and out of various new age beliefs, ultimately landing in a satanic cult where the drinking of human blood is practiced. Here I engage in all kinds of ritual that is perverse and abominable in God's eyes, only later to die a sadly estranged death from loved ones. At my funeral, who in their right mind would get up and say that I died as a Christian and guarantee that I entered the pearly gates of heaven? No one for sure! Read Heb 10:29, 30 as an example of what happens when people trample the precious blood of Christ.

If you are a Christian you must be responsible enough to standfast in the liberty where Christ has made you free (Galatians 5:1). It is possible to fall from grace. Paul said in Galatians 5:4 that Christ can become of no effect to you, and when you claim Jesus as your savior and do not live according to the bible you are deceiving yourself and lying to no one. Because God knows you have departed from him, if you ever even came to him in the first place. I am wary of any kind of grace which people claim, that is too weak to change their life here on earth, but supposedly strong enough to take them to a heaven they never wanted to go to while here.

You may say that I am saved by grace and that I was sprinkled as a child with water or that I was catechized by the priest or minister at church. Listen friend, all the water in this world could never cleanse your dirty, filthy, sin blackened heart—it takes Jesus' blood and it alone. You can sit through as many classes as you want on the Westminster catechism or any other introductory church membership classes. If you refuse to take Jesus as your all and all you are lost. And if you claim to be Christian and no fruit develops, then your testimony is false.

If I planted an apple seed out back, in hope that it would one day be a tree, and then put a sign out front that said 'Pear tree' in my backyard, you would know soon whether or not it was a lie or true. You say how? By the fruit! Jesus said in Matthew 7:16 and 20 that "by their fruits shall they be known". And if you tell me that you are a Christian and all I see are the evidences of an unregenerate person, either you have never known Jesus or you are backslidden and need to return to God as soon as possible, because the evidence of the new birth is a new life and when that is no longer the genuine witness, then, everyone will be saved; from the sodomite to the prostitute to the honkey-tonkers and everyone else who claims to know Jesus.

Some people claim that the bible teaches that we are not to judge. Nothing could be further from the truth. The bible says that 'he that is spiritual judgeth all things.' The scripture from the Sermon on the Mount so often referred to says that however you judge others you too will be judged. Simply stated, do not create strictures and conditions for others that you do not want applied to you. People who do not live Christian lives love to interpret the bible to believers because they want to be able to live carefree without the hassle of others saying that their actions are wrong, but their actions are wrong! So by undermining the true meaning of scripture texts they are able to create an environment where they believe no judgment will persist.

But what we fail to realize is that we must make judgment calls every day. Each time you make a decision you are making a judgment. When you DECIDE to get out of bed and go to work you are making a judgment. When a parent says to their child "I do not like you spending so much time with that boy because he sells drugs", you better believe that they are making judgment calls. And families that have chosen to live free of decisions of this nature watch daily as their kids live lives which they do not approve of because they did not want to tell them to do opposite of their present actions at the time.

As a pastor it is my responsibility to admonish our flocks to live for God and to not be hypocrites. There is no need to mention the name of Jesus as your Savior if you have no desire or inclination to follow Him, and to claim that one is saved by grace while persisting in sin is a terrible example to set for people who desire to know what it means to be a Christian. If all else fails you need to read the story of Judas. Here was a man that was right with God and backslid away, committed suicide and in the end, even Jesus said he was lost--in John 17. For God's sake man or woman, give your heart to Jesus properly right now!