

SPRING 2016

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Further Thoughts on Eternal Security

It has been twenty-four years since the topic of eternal security was last addressed in the *Faith Pulpit*. In the February 1992 issue Dr. Myron Houghton presented the four major views on security and then explained how Romans 8:28–30 supports eternal security. In this issue Dr. Alan Cole, professor of Bible and theology at Faith Baptist Bible College, extends the discussion by presenting additional evidence to support the view that genuine believers cannot lose their salvation.

I appreciate the article Dr. Myron Houghton wrote in 1992 about eternal security, and I completely agree with his position. The article provides valuable help to Christians regarding this important issue. Since Dr. Houghton's article examined Romans 8:28–30, I want to explore several other passages that support eternal security.

Psalm 51:12

The context of this psalm is David's repentance for his sin with Bathsheba. He was guilty of a number of sins, including murder and adultery. He confessed in verses 1–4 that he was a sinner. He used several designations for sin such as "transgressions" (v. 1), "iniquity" and "sin" (v. 2), and "evil" (v. 4). In verse 5 David stated that he was a sinner even before birth. In verses 7–12 he requested to be "purged" (v. 7) and to have his sins "blotted out" (v. 9). In verse 12 he asked God to reinstate the joy of salvation that once was his.

It is noteworthy that David requested to have his joy returned but not his salvation. As terrible as David's sins were—and they were terrible—he did not request to be "resaved." In verse 11 David requested that he not lose the special anointing of the Holy Spirit that was given to a king or leader of the theocratic kingdom. This ministry of the Holy Spirit does not refer to salvation but to an empowerment that enables the leader to guide and direct the kingdom of Israel. When David was anointed to be king, the "Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward" (1 Sam. 16:13). David had witnessed Saul lose this anointing (1 Sam. 16:14), and David was afraid of the same thing happening to him. In Psalm 51:12 David pleaded with God that he have his joy restored. He was not asking to be saved once again.

John 6:39, 40

In John 6:39 Christ stated, "This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day." Jesus here affirmed that He will not lose those who have been given to Him by the Father. In other words, He will not lose to condemnation, or hell, those who have received Him as their Savior. If individuals have been given to Christ through salvation, then they will be resurrected. Just as their resurrection is secure, so also is their salvation.

John 10:28, 29

In John 10:28 Jesus declared, "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand." The expression "never perish" is a strong term. The word "never" is a double negative in Greek (*ou ma*), showing the strongest denial. This expression then denies the possibility of an individual ever losing his or her salvation. Christ also illustrated the security of the believer by stating that "neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand." The believer is kept safe in the hand of the Almighty Savior.

In verse 29 Christ further emphasized this point by stating that the believer is in the hand of God the Father Who "is greater than all." There is no one strong enough to steal a believer from the Father. At different times I have heard the argument that although one cannot snatch another from God's hand, we can snatch ourselves from God's hand. The double negative, however, contradicts such a possibility. Furthermore, Christ denies that anyone, including us, can be snatched from God's hand. A finite person cannot overpower the infinite God. Genuine believers are safe in the hands of God the Father and God the Son.

Romans 8:35–39

In Romans 8:35 the Apostle Paul asked the following question: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" For the Christian to be separated from the love of Christ would mean that the genuine believer had lost his or her salvation. In the rest of verse 35 Paul listed several misfortunes that might indicate one has lost his salvation. In verse 37 Paul denied that these events can cause one to be separated from the love of Christ. In verses 38 and 39 Paul further denied possibilities that might cause one to think that he or she is outside the love of Christ. Paul strongly contested that one cannot be separated from the love of Christ. In other words, one cannot lose his or her salvation.

Philippians 1:6

Paul expressed in Philippians 1:6 a strong indication of a believer's security. "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." Christ will continue the work of sanctification which He has begun in Christians at the point of salvation until the Day of Christ, which is the rapture. For this work of sanctification to continue, Christ must keep the believer saved. If a person is genuinely saved (initial sanctification—"begun a good work in you"), he will remain saved throughout his life until he reaches final sanctification at the rapture ("will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ").

1 Peter 1:5

Peter declared in this verse that we are "kept by the power of God." The point is not that a believer must keep himself or herself saved.

The point is that it is God who keeps the individual saved. One must ask if God has enough power to do this work. The obvious answer is "yes." He is all powerful. For a person to be able to lose his or her salvation is to affirm that finite sin can overcome an infinite God. This kind of affirmation is incorrect.

These additional references help support the position that a genuine believer cannot lose his or her salvation. Once an individual truly trusts Christ, he or she is secure in Christ. There is not a sin that can "unjustify" one who has been justified. A person cannot be plucked from God's hand or Christ's hand, and a person cannot be separated from the love of Christ.

Conflicting Situations

When I have discussed this issue with my students, I have been asked about situations in which people claim to be saved but their actions deny what they claim to be true. How do we understand cases like these?

First, we must remember that we cannot see into a person's heart. Only God knows for sure the spiritual condition of the individual.

Second, we should remember that this type of individual is in one of two conditions. He or she is either lost and facing God's eternal condemnation (John 3:18), or the individual is living a fleshly lifestyle and is facing God's discipline (Heb. 12:7–11). Neither of these situations is a place where a Spirit-filled Christian should want to be.

Third, we should treat the individuals where they are at the moment. If a person is acting as if he or she is unsaved, then that is how we should regard them. In dealing with the Pharisees, John the Baptist called on them to "bear fruits worthy of repentance" (Matt. 3:8). Two verses later he warned them that "every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matt. 3:10). Further, Christ stated that we can discern false prophets by their work (Matt. 7:15–19). "Therefore by their fruits you will know them" (Matt. 7:20).

Fourth, we should remember that not everyone who claims to be saved is actually saved. Christ warned that there are individuals who will claim to be saved, but in reality they are not (Matt. 7:21–23). In the judgment of the sheep and goats, Christ made a similar statement (Matt. 25:31–46).

These reminders are not cited in order to set ourselves up as judges of another person's salvation. We should make comments such as these to another individual only after much prayer and with love, grace, and tact. For genuine believers, passages such as the ones discussed here provide great comfort in the confidence that they have eternal security.



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Alan Cole is the chair of the Bible and Theology Division of Faith Baptist Bible College in Ankeny, Iowa. Dr. Cole has degrees from Bob Jones University, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, and Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Prior to joining the Faith faculty in 1999, Dr. Cole taught at Pillsbury Baptist Bible College. Alan and his wife Nancy (a Faith alum) have two sons and are active members of Community Baptist Church in Ankeny.