

IS SALVATION SECURE?

–MESSY (BUT BEAUTIFUL) CHRISTIANITY, WEEK 20–

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 (NIV)

I. WARNING PASSAGES: WE MUST WRESTLE WITH THE SECURITY OF OUR SALVATION

1 Corinthians 6:9-12: ⁹ Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

II. DEFINING THE OPTIONS: WE MUST UNDERSTAND DIFFERENT CHRISTIAN POSITIONS

1. Position One: Conditional Security

This view understands that a believer's ultimate salvation depends on remaining in the faith. A true believer can fall away from Christ by abandoning faith and lose the salvation they once had.

2. Position Two: Unconditional Security (“Once Saved Always Saved” or “Eternal Security”)

This is the extreme opposite of Position One above. Position Two holds that if a person has a response of faith toward Jesus, they are eternally saved no matter what. No continuation in the faith is necessary, and a person can deny Christ and abandon faith in Christ completely and still be saved. Only rewards in heaven can be forfeited according to this view.

3. Position Three: Perseverance of the Saints (but also sometimes called “Once Saved Always Saved” or “Eternal Security”)

This view is a mediating position between Position One and Two. This view holds that all true believers will experience final salvation and cannot lose their salvation; at the same time this view holds that all true believers will persevere in faith (and in some measure of faithfulness) because of the power of God.

4. So What is Grace Bible Chapel's View?

Our Doctrinal Statement: (9) *We believe* that all who receive by faith the Lord Jesus Christ, who died and rose from the dead, become children of God, being born again by the Holy Spirit; and that such have eternal life and shall never perish.

This rules out Position One above, but does not clearly distinguish between Position Two and Position Three. We probably have members who hold both views. I (Greg) hold to Position Three, “Perseverance of the Saints,” and will argue for this view today.

III. BALANCING THE BIBLICAL EVIDENCE: WE MUST CONSIDER ALL SIDES

1. **Theological Method Suggestion:** When faced with tensions in Scripture, we should avoid extremes and try to find a mediating position that best accounts for most of the evidence in the Bible.

2. **Many Passages Seem to Teach that A Believer's Eternal Salvation is Secure**

E.g., John 6:37-40; 10:27-29; Rom 8:1-2, 28-30; Eph 1:13-14; Phil 1:6; 1 Pet 1:3-5

3. **Many Passages Seem to Teach that A Believer Must Continue in Faith, or Else be in Danger of Losing Their Salvation**

E.g., John 8:31-32; 15:1-2, 5-6; Matt 10:21-22; Col 1:21-23; Heb 6:4-8; Matt 10:32-33

4. **Some Key Passages Seem to Teach that A Failure to Persevere in Faith Shows That the Person's Relationship with God Was Illegitimate from the Beginning**

E.g., Heb 3:6, 14; 1 John 2:19

5. **Some Passages Warn that Unrepentant Disobedience or a Consistent Failure to Live Christianly Indicates that a Person Will not be Saved**

E.g., 1 Cor 6:9-11; Matt 7:21-23; 1 John 2:3-6; James 2:14-26 (see Rom 1:5)

6. Conclusion: The View that Best Explains Most of This Evidence is “Perseverance of the Saints.”

“The perseverance of the saints means that all those who are truly born again will be kept by God’s power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives, and that only those who persevere until the end have been truly born again” (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 788).

The strength of this view is that it helps us to understand all four categories of biblical evidence: (1) the assurance passages which teach that salvation is secure because of God’s power; (2) the warning passages which teach that those who fall away from faith do not receive salvation; (3) the passages which teach that departure from the faith evidences as illegitimate any prior faith commitments; and (4) the passages that warn that a pattern of unfaithful disobedience is inconsistent with a sincere response to Christ.

This view is also spiritually effective, because on one hand it assures of salvation: “I do not need to worry, because my salvation depends not on me, but on God’s power.” On the other hand, it also encourages our commitment to Jesus by warning us against the danger of abandoning faith in Jesus: “If I abandon faith in Jesus and do not repent, I will be lost.”

(Bear in mind as well, that one reason we have both a mix of assurance and warning in the New Testament is because these letters were written to churches where it was not immediately obvious who were true believers and who were not. There were likely unsaved people within the church, so both assurance and warning were necessary. The same is surely true in our church today.)

IV. ASSURANCE OF SALVATION: WE CAN KNOW FOR SURE WE ARE SAVED

1. Perseverance in Faith is *One* Evidence of Salvation; it is not the *Only* Evidence of Salvation

This means that we can have a real assurance of salvation, even though we realize that one of the final evidences of our relationship with God will indeed be remaining in the faith (and some measure of faithfulness) until the end of our lives.

2. Other Evidences of Salvation that Provide Us with Assurance

- A Present faith and trust in Jesus for Salvation (e.g., John 3:16; 5:24; 1 John 5:11-13; 1 Pet 1:3-5)
- Evidence of the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives (e.g., Rom 8:14-17; Gal: 1 John 4:13)
- The Long-Term Pattern of a Christian Life (Rom 6:1-4; Phil 2:12-13; 2 Pet 1:5-11)
- The *presence of struggle* against sin, with confession and repentance (Gal 5:16-26; 1 John 1:5-2:2)

3. In This Matter of Assurance, Once Again, Balance Must be Maintained.

On one hand, we want our confidence to be in God’s power for our salvation, and we do not want to be obsessed and worried about “losing our salvation.” We need to recognize that salvation is God’s doing, and not ours! Yet at the same time we do not want to swing so far to the other extreme that we are lazy about our spirituality and do not have any sense of danger.

So does our church believe in “eternal security”? Absolutely. But we also need to be careful to understand what we do and do not mean by that phrase, since it means so many things to different people. This quote is a fitting last word:

“Here we see why the phrase *eternal security* can be quite misleading. In some evangelical churches, instead of teaching the full and balanced presentation of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, pastors have sometimes taught a watered-down version, which in effect tells people that all who have once made a profession of faith and been baptized are ‘eternally secure.’ The result is that some people who are not genuinely converted at all may ‘come forward’ at the end of an evangelistic sermon to profess faith in Christ, and may be baptized shortly after that, but then they leave the fellowship of the church and live a life no different from the one they lived before they gained this ‘eternal security.’ In this way people are given false assurance and are being cruelly deceived into thinking they are going to heaven when in fact they are not” (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 806).

THE BOTTOM LINE

****Hold a balanced view of eternal security, trusting Christ for salvation,
but remembering we must continue in faith
and in faithfulness,
all by the help of God’s Spirit.****