

Eternal Security, Part 1

May 18, 2008 - Skip MacMillan

The Issue: Eternal Security or Perseverance of the Saints or Assurance of Your Salvation

Colossians 1:23 brings this issue to our attention.

The "if" is difficult, and seems to challenge our security in Christ.

One of the biggest questions of new believers: "Am I really saved, secure in Christ?"

One of the main tools of the devil is causing you to question, to stir doubt in your mind.

Various Views:

"Some believe that at salvation you are completely sanctified (made holy in this life) and any sin after conversion is loss of salvation" -Akin. This is the Holiness Tradition.

The Catholic Church teaches that a person cannot be sure of their salvation -Berkhof.

Reformers say you can be sure and that we are being made into Christ's likeness but will never achieve it in this life.

1 John 5:13 "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."

Possible Scripture on the loss of Salvation

Hebrews 6:4-6

"It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the power of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace."

Points:

1. The writer is saying everything but that this person has been atoned for by Christ. The rest of Hebrews emphasizes the atonement of Christ, Jesus as the High Priest (4:14-15) and Jesus as the Eternal Sacrifice (9:11-28). But here the writer seems to get as close as possible but does not use the word atoned or synonyms of the like.

2. John Calvin argues that God gives some people a taste of His grace and an experience of faith but is not saving grace or faith. "For nothing prevents God from illuminating some with a momentary awareness of His grace, which afterward vanishes" (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, p. 556).

3. Hebrews 6 emphasizes spiritually maturing and "diligence to the very end . . . to make your hope sure." To call for diligence is to bring assurance to the believer. He does not want the believers to become "lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised."

There is an overall concern about their spiritual immaturity, apathy toward Christ and lazy faith.

"If They Fall Away" is an unforgiveable sin but what sin cannot be forgiven?

"If They Fall Away" is not:

1. A bad day or season of life, Jesus' story of the **Prodigal son, Luke 15:11-32.**

2. Not the result of **sinful behavior** (quality or quantity). 1 Cor. 5: 1-5 says, "hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the LORD." Even though steeped in sin, his salvation was sure.

"if anyone does sin, we have one who speaks to the father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One" (1 John 2:2).

"We may, through the temptations of Satan, the world and our own corruption fall into sin; and for a time continue in it; and in doing so we may be disciplined by God, grieve the Holy Spirit and have to deal with the consequences; and yet be assured we can neither totally or finally fall away from the LORD, but will certainly persevere to the end, and be eternally saved" -Westminster Confession of Faith.

Conviction reminds us that we belong to GOD.

". . . even in sin, the believer's assurance may perhaps come from his conscience made more sensitive by his faith in Christ" -FF Bruce.

In sin we wake up to fresh conviction, and conviction means we belong to God. That conviction of sin, that call to repentance and communion with God is an assurance that the Holy Spirit lives within us and makes us more aware of our relationship with God.

Corinthians, Galatians, and Ephesians all having known issues and sins (immorality, drunkenness, legalism, arrogance, slanderous, temper-mental) are called saints nonetheless.

3. **Not questioning, struggling or even doubting God**; see the book of Job.

"If They Fall Away," must mean to blaspheme the Holy Spirit, the only unforgivable sin.

"And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come" (Matthew 12: 30-32/Mark 3: 29).

Meaning of Blaspheming the Holy Spirit:

Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*

"Augustine somewhere defines it as persistent stubbornness (toward God) even to death, with distrust of pardon" (p. 617).

"The apostle is speaking not concerning one particular lapse or another, but concerning the universal rebellion by which the reprobate forsake salvation" (pp. 618-19).

". . . complete turning away from God and, so to speak, apostasy of the whole man" (p. 619).

"rage against God himself with malicious impiety; that is to say, against the doctrine that they well knew came from God," i.e. calling Jesus "Beelzebub" (Matt. 9: 34; 12:24) (p. 618).

Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*

". . . man willfully, maliciously, and intentionally attributes what is clearly recognized as the work of God to the influences and operation of Satan. It is nothing less than a decided slandering of the Holy Spirit, an audacious declaration that the Holy Spirit is the spirit of the abyss, that the truth is the lie, and that Christ is Satan." "The root of this sin is the conscious and deliberate hatred of God and all that is recognized as divine."

This is a willful, long term, intentional, attitude, lifestyle, at the heart and soul level and belief system. There is much more at play than immaturity and stupidity.

"If they fall away" must mean that a person had some experience of grace and taste of faith but not saving faith, and then turned 180 degrees and blasphemed the Holy Spirit.

1 John 2:18-19

"They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us."

Other passages: 1 John 5:16-17, John 15, guys who "shipwrecked their faith" (1 Tim. 1:19-20), "wandered away from the truth" (2 Tim. 2:17-18); "loved this world, has deserted me" (2 Timothy 4:10).

Problems with a lack of assurance

1. **Fear, paranoia, insecurity and worrying** about losing our salvation, fear of sin, moving attention from God onto me and my worry.

"There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18).

"For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry, 'Abba, Father'" (Romans 8:15).

2. What causes the loss of a person's salvation? My attitude, behavior, works or faith?

3. At what point is a person's salvation lost?

4. The bottom line: what sustains our salvation?

"It is strictly speaking, not man but God who perseveres (sustains our salvation). . . . It is because God never forsakes His work that believers continue to stand to the very end." Believers would fall away, if they were left to themselves. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 546.

Questions that lead us to Eternal Security

1. What removes Christ's **atonement** from a person?

2. If "He **chose us** in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will to the praise of His glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding." (Ephesians 1:4-8).

3. If we are **justified** – legally, instantaneously and completely in Jesus Christ. If justification is a judicial act of God, in which he declares, on the basis of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, that all the claims of the law are satisfied with respect to the sinner then how does a person become un-justified? Romans 3:28, Galatians 3:2:16, 3:11; Berkhof.

4. If "he has **reconciled** you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation," (Col. 1:22), removing all enmity between God and you, then what could possibly reverse this? When it required God Himself to accomplish it?

5. If God **redeemed** us, that is, paid the ransom in full to gain our freedom, what can reverse this? How can a freed man become a slave again if an infinitely valued ransom has been paid?

Perseverance of the Saints

"All who are chosen by God, redeemed by Christ and given faith by the Spirit are eternally saved. They are kept in faith **by the power of the Almighty God** and thus persevere to the end" - Synod of Dort.

"They, whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved" -Westminster Confession of Faith.

Assurance in the LORD

Philippians 1:6 - "Being **confident** of this, that **He** who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

God wants you to enjoy His work of salvation for you, to stand firm in the conviction that God will perfect and bring to completion what He has started in you.

1 John 5:13 - "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."