

Eternal Security

Will Every True Christian Really Go to Heaven—For Sure?

One of the most important questions a Christian can ask is whether his salvation is permanent. Can one who genuinely trusts Christ—and therefore inherits eternal life and a place in heaven—can that person lose this salvation? Please note that we are talking about a real believer here, not simply one who *thinks* he is a Christian. While Paul and other NT writers address this question, none address it as entirely as John (though others are also dealt with below).

Another introductory clarification concerns the difference between eternal security and assurance of salvation. Security refers to one's position before God forever, whereas assurance indicates whether the believer *knows* this security. Believers can be secure without knowing it (i.e., without having assurance). As a little girl, my wife once saw the water in her bathtub flow down the drain. She reasoned that since the water occupied more space than she did, if the water could all pass through the drain, then she could too. In reality, she was secure from this potential tragedy, but for some time, she lacked assurance of salvation from the drain. Security and assurance are different matters.

Conversely, a person can *think* he or she is eternally secure (i.e., feel assurance of salvation) but be an unbeliever with no security. Although assurance is worth research, this study concerns itself with eternal security.

There are many reasons that every Christian is eternally secure:

I. Theological Support for Eternal Security

A. The Work of the Triune God

1. The Work of God the Father

- a) The Father is the One who elects people for salvation. One who says that God's choice is ever wrong or inadequate to save is on a shaky foundation.
- b) But if God chooses one for salvation, is this permanent? Christ answered this critical question in John 6:37, "All that the Father gives me *will come to me...*" (emphasis mine).

2. The Work of the Christ the Son

- a) Jesus protects the salvation of true believers. He declared, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:27-29).
- b) Christ claimed that salvation is permanent. He promised, "Whoever comes to me *I will never drive away*" (John 6:37, emphasis mine).

3. The Sealing Work of the Spirit

- a) The seal of salvation is God's Spirit—not our works or continued faith or anything else. This seal shows our ownership and that God guarantees our protection.

(1) Eph. 1:13-14 "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit *guaranteeing our inheritance* until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory." Paul's point is that if God gives us his Spirit, he will surely give us our *entire* inheritance in heaven!

(2) The only way this seal could be broken is through the fault of the Spirit!

- b) This assurance of salvation in the sealing is why we should never grieve the Spirit. Eph. 4:30 promises, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." All who are sealed are also the same ones who will receive full and final redemption of their bodies.

B. The Nature of Salvation

1. Salvation is God's gift and is not earned by good deeds (Eph. 2:8-9). Since it is received by grace *without* works, it cannot be undone by *lack* of works. Since security depends upon what *God* has done for you, this work of God would have to be *undone* for your security to be lost!
2. All believers are promised eternal life (1 John 5:11-12; Tit. 3:5-6). The term "*eternal* life" indicates that this life cannot be lost. If believers had the potential of possessing only "temporal life" spiritually, it would be a lie to say this life is eternal.

C. The Believer's Standing Before God

1. God sees each believer as eternally perfect before Him. Hebrews 10:14 says, "By one sacrifice he has made perfect *forever* those who are being made holy."
2. No Christian can experience God's condemnation by going to hell. "Therefore, there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).
3. A believer cannot be separated from God's love. Romans 8:35-39 affirms this: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake, we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."
4. Someone may ask, "God may not reject me, but can I disqualify *myself*?" The "nor anything else in all creation" noted above includes our lack of good works or our committing of a sin that would "undo" God's gift on our behalf. If we needed to add anything to the work of Christ on the cross, his work would be incomplete.

II. Biblical Support for Eternal Life Leading to Eternal Security

Many explicit statements in the New Testament say that our salvation is simply through belief and results in **eternal life** (all verses from the English Standard Version of 2002):

John 3:15-16 Whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have **eternal life**.

John 5:24 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has **eternal life**. He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life.

John 6:40 For this is the will of my Father that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have **eternal life**, and I will raise him on the last day.

John 6:47 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has **eternal life**.

John 10:28 I give them **eternal life**, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

John 17:3 And this is **eternal life**, that they know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is **eternal life** in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1 Timothy 1:16 But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for **eternal life**.

Titus 3:7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of **eternal life**.

1 John 2:25 And this is the promise he made to us— **eternal life**.

1 John 5:11-13 ¹¹And this is the testimony that God gave us **eternal life**, and this life is in his Son. ¹²Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. ¹³I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have **eternal life**.

III. Sources for Further Study on Eternal Security

- A. Chafer, Lewis Sperry. *Grace*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1922. 373 pp.
- B. Dillow, Joseph C. *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*. 4th ed. Houston, TX: Grace Theology Press, 2019. 1124 pp.
- C. Hodges, Zane C. *Absolutely Free!! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989. 238 pp.
- D. Swindoll, Charles R. *The Grace Awakening*. Dallas, Word, 1990, 1996. 315 pp.
- E. Stanley, Charles. *Eternal Security*. Nashville: Nelson, 1990. 194 pp.

- F. Griffith, Rick. See the following studies elsewhere in the New Testament Survey course under the book supplements below:
- “The Three Tenses of Salvation” (155a, Romans)
 - “Theological Words in Romans” (155h, Romans)
 - “Justification, Sanctification, and Death to Sin” (155k, Romans)
 - “The Sealing of the Spirit” (155r, Romans)
 - “Eternal Security in Corinth” (161dd, 1 Corinthians)
 - “The Scriptural View of Justification” (174c, Galatians)
 - “Our Position in Christ” (180e, Ephesians)
 - “Eternal Security in Ephesians” (180h, Ephesians)
 - “Eternal Security in Hebrews” (266a, Hebrews)
 - “Views on the Warning Passages” (266c, Hebrews)
 - “Views on Eternal Security and Perseverance” (266d, Hebrews)
 - “Romans vs. James on Justification” (272, James)
 - “Views on Lordship Salvation” (274b-c, James)
 - “What is the Gospel?” (317a-b, Jude)
 - “Does Major Sin Prove a Person is Unsaved (Rev. 21:8)?” (350-51, Revelation)

IV. Discussion Questions:

- A. Why do you think most people have difficulty accepting the doctrine of the believer's eternal security?
- B. “If Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost, and yet we can somehow become unsaved—and therefore undo what Christ came to do—would it not be wise for God to take us on to heaven the moment we are saved to ensure we make it? Isn't it unnecessarily risky to force us to stay here?” (Charles Stanley, *Eternal Security*, 10) Do you agree? Why or why not?
- C. “If our salvation hinges on the consistency of our faith, by what standard are we to judge our consistency? Can we have any doubts at all? How long can we doubt? To what degree can we doubt? Is there a divine quota we dare not exceed?” (Stanley, 95) Agreed?
- D. Do you think believing in the “once saved, always saved” view causes Christians to neglect their salvation? Why or why not?