

ETERNAL SECURITY: ARE BELIEVERS SAVED FOR ETERNITY? Part 1

This lesson is an introductory lesson on eternal security. It will be an examination of the theological foundation of eternal security examining some history background concerning the issue of eternal security, but the next time I assume the pulpit we will spend more time exegeting the Scriptures that reveal and validate the doctrine of eternal security.

One of the tragic results of the poor Bible teaching in so many churches today is that people lack a sense of justification salvation that is a present, eternal reality which cannot be lost. Many are kept ignorant of the doctrine by means of doctrinally deficient Bible teaching and theological impositions into the text. Perhaps worse is the fact that many theological systems deny the truth of eternal security and teach the adherents of their system to deny it as well. There are still other systems of theology that claim to believe in eternal security, but teach other doctrines in ways that contradict the doctrine of eternal security which leads to massive confusion about whether or not people are really eternally secure. You may know the doctrine of eternal security as "once saved, always saved." I have heard teachers who do not believe in eternal security refer to the doctrine as a "damnable heresy." Their reasoning for holding that doctrinal position is that they think it encourages unfaithful Christian living at the least, allows for and excuses rampant sin in the life of the believer, and, at worst, allows for apostasy which is a repudiation of and departure from the faith. After all, they reason, if one is eternally secure, then one may live an unfaithful, rebellious, and sinful life apart from God and still be saved, right? That may be true in terms of what eternal security guarantees, but it certainly is not that simple, and it is not what the doctrine, and the people understanding the doctrine, teach.

Before we dig into the doctrine of eternal security, we need to define the doctrine of the assurance of salvation; they are not the same thing. "Assurance is the realization that one possesses eternal life" [Charles C. Ryrie, "Chapter 57: The Security of the Believer," *Basic Theology*, 380]. A person can be saved, but at the same time have doubts about whether or not they are truly saved. The irony is that if they are saved, they possess eternal life, which is a life that is eternally secure whether they are internally assured of that truth or not. They are still saved and eternally secure whether they possess the assurance of that fact or not. Assurance is only and simply based on whether or not we have placed our faith in Christ Jesus apart from anything we do before, during, or after the moment we believe. The only requirement for the assurance of salvation is that one believes the Gospel: Salvation from death in sin to eternal life in Him is by God's grace alone through saving faith/belief alone in Jesus the Christ alone as He is revealed in the Scriptures alone to the glory of God alone.

Because so many people do not understand the simplicity of the Gospel and because they have been ill informed of the biblical truth concerning assurance, they live their lives in uncertainty and fear that they are not saved.

One of the primary reasons that people lack the assurance of salvation is that they have been exposed to a faith plus works false gospel that at least partially makes people think they are responsible for their own salvation. There are serious problems with this thinking. If they think works are necessary to be saved, how much works must be done to be saved? What works must be done to be

saved? What must the quality of works be that effectively contribute to one's justification salvation? Or, if they think works keeps one saved or proves one's faith, the same questions apply, but other issues come to the fore. What if I stop doing works? What if I fall into an egregious sin pattern? What if I stop believing and reject God altogether? In other words, when people think they must contribute something, anything, no matter how large or how small, doubt has to creep in concerning whether or not they have done enough to be saved and whether or not they remain saved. That is the antithesis of assurance. Assurance of salvation rests solely on the biblically revealed knowledge that one has believed the Gospel and thereby placed their faith in the Savior, Christ Jesus, to save them from their sin and who grants them eternal life. That is the only place assurance is to be found. When we start looking at what we do or what we do not do, only doubt can result, because we can't do anything that is good enough or sinless enough for long enough to assure ourselves that we are saved. Our assurance is found in belief in Him—in who He is and in what He did on our behalf on the cross—and in no other place. The foundation for assurance is faith in the only object of faith, Christ Jesus, who saves completely apart from our works and/or our behavior.

What is eternal security? "Eternal security is the work of God that guarantees that the gift of [justification] salvation, once received, is forever and cannot be lost" [Charles C. Ryrie, "Chapter 57: The Security of the Believer," *Basic Theology*, 379]. I would say it like this:

Whoever believes in the Person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ to save them from their sin problem and to grant them eternal life is saved for eternity from the

moment of belief. Nothing a person has done, is doing, or will ever do can keep them from obtaining eternal life, which is a permanent reality based on their faith in Christ Jesus. Furthermore, they remain eternally saved regardless of the amount or lack of faithfulness, good works, or personal sins that are present in their sanctification walk. Eternal life is based only on the promises of God and not on anything, other than faith in Jesus, any human being can or cannot do.

That is why we can be assured of our justification salvation and of our eternal security. These issues do not depend on us; they depend only the promises of God to grant justification salvation and eternal life, which cannot be lost, to anyone who believes in Christ Jesus for those things.

Please note that we are referring to justification salvation here and not to sanctification salvation. Most people mix the two, but they are distinct phases of our salvation experience (glorification is the third tense or stage of salvation). Justification salvation happens at a moment in time whereby the person who believes in Christ Jesus for eternal life is instantly moved from spiritual death to spiritual life forever. Eternal means eternal. If we receive eternal life based on belief in Christ Jesus, we cannot lose it, because if we could lose it, it was never eternal in the first place. Once one believes, then the believer's walk commences which is the state, or tense, of our salvation we refer to as sanctification. Works and/or behavior have no bearing on whether or not we are justified, but our sanctification is characterized by our walk. We may or may not have a faithful walk, but that has no bearing on whether or not we are justified. Once we are justified, we are eternally secure whether or not we walk faithfully. There are ramifications for an unfaithful walk, and we will discuss that situation later.

When sanctification salvation truth, our walk, is used as the basis for justification salvation, what we would call our born-again experience, then works are introduced into the justification salvation definition turning it into a faith plus works false gospel which can save no one.

Eternal security is the work of God, not of man. God's promise is believe and live. His promise is NOT believe and make Me (God) Lord and get baptized and do good works and no longer commit personal sins and live. Do you see the difference? His promise is believe and live; His promise is not to believe plus something, plus something else, plus something else, and live. The promise is believe plus nothing. Eternal security is therefore founded on the grace, the mercy, the veracity of God, and on faith in the person and the work of Christ Jesus and not on anything man does or does not do other than faith.

Many people claim that faith is a work; therefore, man cannot even believe without God giving a person the faith to believe in the first place. Calvinism, based on the foundation of their five points of theology, must insist that God causes faith in the unbeliever so that he will believe and then be saved. The Bible never teaches this erroneous doctrine; it is a product of theology and not of textual examination and exegesis. The Apostle Paul specifically revealed that faith is not a work, and any assertion to the contrary is an unbiblical, rebellious denial of the Word of God.

Romans 4:4–5⁴Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. ⁵But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,

FAITH IS NOT A WORK!

Among Protestant churches, there are two primary systems of theology: Arminian and Calvinist. Both of them misunderstand the doctrine of eternal security and both are riddled with inconsistencies that leave people wondering whether or not they are actually saved. These systems think they are the only systems of Protestant theology, but there is a third Protestant theological system that does accurately understand the doctrine of eternal security, which I call biblicism. That is the primary theological position of the adherents of dispensational, Free Grace Soteriology.

The position held by Arminian theologians is that a truly born-again person can lose justification salvation by means of sin and/or apostasy. This is a denial of eternal security. This represents a faith plus works system whereby the believer is responsible for maintaining his own justification salvation, and, if he fails to do so, he loses eternal life, which implies that he must experience justification salvation all over again in order to be saved. That is entirely preposterous; you can only be born again once. That also obviously means that the eternal life he was granted by God at the moment of belief was not eternal after all which makes our Lord out to be a liar.

John 3:14–15 ¹⁴“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; ¹⁵so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.

John 5:24 ²⁴“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

John 6:47 ⁴⁷“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.

If these statements, from the mouth of our Lord, are not sufficient to prove that the born-again person possesses eternal life from the very moment of the new birth, then what is sufficient?

Calvinists also deny eternal security by means of their doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. They do this based on their other doctrines of election and predestination which state that God chose, in eternity past, those who would be saved and therefore predestined to obtain eternal life. Because God chose who would be saved, those people must be saved, and they must be saved to the end in order to enter into eternal life.

“The elect are not only redeemed by Christ and renewed by the Spirit, but also kept in faith by the almighty power of God. All those who are spiritually united to Christ through regeneration are eternally secure in Him. Nothing can separate them from the eternal and unchangeable love of God. They have been predestined to eternal glory and are therefore assured of heaven” [Steele, Thomas, and Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented*, 2nd ed., 64].

What then, do Calvinists do with people who say they are born-again but do not live lives that people think Christians should live? Well, they say that person was only professing to be a believer and never had true faith because a true believer cannot fall into an egregious, long-lasting sin pattern or apostatize and fall away from the faith.

“The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints does not maintain that all who profess the Christian faith are certain of heaven. It is *saints*—those who are set apart by the Spirit—who *persevere* to the end. It is *believers*—those who are given true, living faith in Christ—who are *secure* and safe in Him. Many who profess to believe fall away, but they do not fall from grace, for they were never in grace” [Steele, Thomas, and Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented*, 2nd ed., 64-65].

Notice that Calvinists do not believe that a person can believe of their own volition. They maintain that a person must be given faith by God in order to then believe and be saved. I call this the “you must be born-again to be born-again” doctrine, which is obviously a very faulty doctrine. They base this on the constraints of their theological system encompassing election, predestination, and total depravity, and on Ephesians 2:8-9 where they maintain that faith is the gift from God rather than justification salvation being the gift from God.

Calvinists do admit that believers fall into temptation and commit grievous sins, but they cannot lose their salvation because, if they are truly among the elect, they will, they must, return to the faith. If they do not, then they have proven they were never elect in the first place and therefore unsaved. They also have the same position regarding those who commit apostasy and fall away from the faith; they were never saved in the first place.

Calvinists and Arminians basically don't like each other much. However, I hope you can see they both teach the same thing; they just approach the problem from the opposite side of the issue. In both systems, if you don't act right or don't remain an active participant in the faith, then you either forfeit eternal life or you prove that you never had true faith in the first place. Either way, in both systems, the walk, faithful or unfaithful, of the professing Christian is the standard by which one's possession of eternal life is evaluated. That makes justification salvation in both systems dependent on the believer's works in order to either stay saved or prove that one is saved in the first place. Neither position is biblical.

“In some respects, these two theologies are similar. Both assume that salvation and good works are tied together. In the one case salvation requires good works; in the other salvation inexorably and irresistibly produces good works. In both theologies salvation and good works stand and fall together” [Michael Eaton, *No Condemnation: A New Theology of Assurance*, 38].

When any system of Soteriology, which is the theological nomenclature used to identify the doctrine of salvation, combines justification salvation and good works, a false gospel is being propagated.

Interestingly, the Calvinist authors I quoted above cite thirty-one Scriptures that they say prove eternal security—and those Scriptures do that. The problem is one of theological presuppositions and exegetical method. Calvinists interpret these Scriptures according to the five points of Calvinism; therefore, within the parameters of their theological understanding, the Scriptures they quote only prove eternal life in terms of limited atonement, that is, only the predestined elect can have eternal security. Those who are non-elect only think they are believers, but they are not and therefore they cannot be eternally secure—they cannot even be saved even if they think they have believed and been saved.

“The following verses show that God’s people are given *eternal life* the moment they believe. They are *kept by God’s power* through faith and *nothing can separate them from His love*. They have been *sealed with the Holy Spirit*, who has been given as the *guarantee* of their salvation, and they are thus assured of an eternal inheritance” [Steele, Thomas, and Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented*, 2nd ed., 65].

That Calvinist position sounds quite biblically accurate, and it is, if those Scriptures are literally interpreted; however, when the Scriptures must be interpreted through the grid of the theological system before understanding the meaning of the text, the plain meaning of the text is lost and the theology

becomes the primary presuppositional basis for exegeting the Scripture. That is not how the Scriptures must be literally interpreted to understand the God intended meaning of the text.

Salvation is a three-part process. Justification salvation is that initial phase of salvation whereby a person places their faith in Christ Jesus for the resolution of their sin problem and for the bestowal of eternal life. In this tense of salvation, we are saved from the penalty of sin. This phase happens at the exact moment in time when one believes, and the promise of God is that at that very moment eternal life is granted to the one who believes. Eternal life is, by definition, obviously eternal and anything that is eternal cannot revert back to temporal, especially when it is based on the promise of God and not in any way on human effort.

Sanctification salvation is the outworking of our Christian life AFTER we have been granted eternal life. We may refer to it as our walk and in this phase, we are saved from the power of sin. We may do it well, or not, but either way, it has no impact on the moment when justification salvation occurred. Sanctification cannot prove whether or not one was justified before God by faith in the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Glorification salvation is the final phase of our salvation experience when we receive glorified bodies, either by means of Resurrection or Rapture, that no longer have a sin nature, are removed from the presence of sin, and are forever in the presence of God.

One of the problems these systems face is their failure to separate the distinctions between justification salvation and sanctification salvation. By making sanctification, which characterizes our Christian life, part of justification, they confuse the free grace offer of the gospel with conditions that only apply to the Christian life post justification salvation. It is interesting to note that they recognize that glorification salvation is completely distinct from the other two tenses of salvation, but they mix the first two tenses together which produces a faith plus works gospel. If they know the third tense of salvation is separate and distinct from the first two, why do they have such a problem recognizing that the first two tenses of salvation are distinct one from the other as well?

The reason they cannot understand the difference between justification and sanctification is because they want to believe that all those who are truly saved are living lives that comport with what they think a Christian life should look like. Anyone who does not conform with their view of the Christian life cannot therefore be a true believer. In other words, they make their own personal belief system concerning what the Christian life should look like to be the standard for evaluating the faith of other people.

Both of these systems lead to introspection, that is, they encourage people to examine their lives and their works in order to reassure themselves that they are truly saved. Calvinists particularly live in fear that they may fail at some point during their sanctification salvation walk and be lost. That brings into play all the questions we asked at the beginning of this lesson. The problem is that fallible, sinful

human beings can never know until they are dead and facing judgment whether or not they did enough good works or lived righteous enough lives to be saved.

This kind of introspection is spiritually damaging and creates doubt.

“Another odd pitfall that characterizes some Calvinists is chronic introspection.... False introspection leads to more introspection, and actually less faith. It produces more doubt, not faith. For example, some worry that they might not be among the elect” [Steele, Thomas, and Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented*, 195].

The Arminian theological system also ensures that no one may be certain of their salvation before death. In other words, justification salvation can be lost.

“Arminius asserted that a believer could have a *present assurance of present salvation* but not a *present assurance of final salvation*” [Christopher D. Bass, *That You May Know: Assurance of Salvation in 1 John*, 18-19 quoting Bangs, *Arminius*, 347-48].

Here is an example of the tragic uncertainty that those who trust a faith plus works gospel experience throughout their lifetime; they are never assured their faith is genuine. This is a quote from Asahel Nettleton who was “a powerful evangelical preacher in 19th century America.” As you hear this quote, ask yourself how much you would like to have a guy like this as your pastor? He didn’t even know whether or not he was saved—and he probably was not saved since he was believing in a faith plus works gospel.

“‘The most that I have ventured to say respecting myself is, that I think it possible I may get to heaven.’ ... As a ‘Calvinist’ Nettleton believed that he was saved totally by the grace of God, ‘justified’ through faith in Jesus. He believed that the salvation of every Christian cannot possibly be lost because the grace of God is sure to keep him safe. Nettleton however had a problem. He was sure that salvation could not be lost but not so sure that he personally was ‘saved’. If he was genuinely saved he could be sure he was permanently saved, but he was not sure he was genuinely saved” [Michael Eaton, *No Condemnation: A New Theology of Assurance*, 3].

Other pastors who propagate faith plus works gospels overtly tell people that they cannot be saved without doing good works.

“He [John Fletcher, pastor friend of John Wesley] thought it was quite wrong to think that ‘faith alone turns the scale of justifying evidence at the bar of God’ and spoke of ‘evangelical legality’. Despite his background of the Protestant doctrine of grace, Fletcher often presented his teaching in a way that by making ‘good works’ so integral a part of salvation, he was virtually urging that the Christian has to work for his salvation. In 1770 Fletcher argued that the Christian was ‘working for life’; ‘every believer, till he comes to glory, works for, as well as from life’. We have received it as a maxim that ‘A man is to do nothing, in order to justification. Nothing can be more false.’ Every person, taught Fletcher, must perform good works ‘in order to find favour with God’. In consequence, Fletcher spoke of ‘conditional perseverance’ in salvation.... If the Christian did not pursue holiness, then, Fletcher believed, loss of salvation would follow” [Michael Eaton, *No Condemnation: A New Theology of Assurance*, 3].

I want you to understand that these pastors, one Arminian and one Calvinist, considered to be mighty men of God in their time, were propagating a false gospel of faith plus works. No one in the flocks they were supposed to be shepherding could be saved by believing the teaching of these men. However, the people under their care could get saved if they got into the Scriptures for themselves and figured out the free grace gift of eternal life, but they certainly were not going to get it from men who were telling them that they had to do something besides exercising faith in Christ Jesus in order to be saved. The problem was there before these men entered the ministry, and it is here now; pastors are still propagating the same faith plus works false gospel today.

Many of the faith plus works false gospel preachers will claim to believe that people are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ Jesus alone, only to add qualifications to their gospel presentation. Watch for qualifying words that

turn a free grace gospel into a false gospel. For example, “Yes, you are saved by grace alone, but you must do xyz to be saved.” Or, “Yes, you are saved by grace if you prove it by doing xyz.” They may also present a false if/then statement. “If you are really saved, then you will do xyz.” Eaton, himself a Calvinist, addressed this issue.

“[Teachers of a faith plus works false gospel] seemed to offer freedom with one hand, only to take it back with the other. Having liberated the believer with wonderful expositions of grace, they then took everything back again with dark mutterings about temporary faith and works confirming salvation and talk about self-examination. The bottom line always seemed to be that after the law had been dismissed through one door it came back through another, and in the end stayed with dark threats and heavy frown” [Michael Eaton, *No Condemnation: A New Theology of Assurance*, 7].

The pastors and teachers who confuse justification with sanctification often counsel people to examine themselves to see whether or not they are of the faith and eternally secure, but would it not be better to ask, “What saith the Scriptures?” People are unreliable and prone to error; the Scriptures are totally accurate and have no error. They actually claim they are attempting to be faithful to the Word of God, but they misinterpret those Scriptures to do it. For example, many of them fail to realize the book of 1 John is a book regarding fellowship with God which pertains to those who have already entered into a relationship with God by means of faith. Instead, they make 1 John a test of whether or not one is justified which is an issue the book is not addressing. I have at least five books in my library that use 1 John as a test for understanding whether or not one has truly experienced the new birth.

One such author very clearly stated what he considered to be the faith plus works nature of 1 John.

“[T]he thesis of this study is that the letter of 1 John teaches that assurance of eternal life is *fundamentally grounded* in the work of Christ and supported in a *vital yet subsidiary* way by the lifestyle of the believer. One’s lifestyle is ‘vital’ in that if a person fails to keep the commands, love the brethren, and have a right confession of Jesus, he demonstrates that he was never a child of God and should have any false assurance eradicated” [Christopher D. Bass, *That You May Know: Assurance of Salvation in 1 John*, 4].

It is true that the Bible does set standards for living the Christian life, but these standards are not part of justification; they are part of sanctification which only follows justification. People do not know how to live the Christian life before they become a believer, and once they do come to faith, they need to be taught a biblical worldview and what the Bible teaches about Christian life. How then can so many people insert things into the Gospel such as turn from your sins and do not sin any longer as requirements to be saved? Lost people may not understand what they need to leave behind to become a Christian. This is confusing to people. How can people who still have a sin nature completely turn from their sins after coming to faith? They intrinsically know that if that kind of thing is requirement to become a Christian, they have a problem. However, if they understand they can be saved just as they are, the issues of faithful living can be worked out during the sanctification salvation phase of life. If they never turn from all their sins (and who can do that?), they are still saved.

The question is are there consequences for living a less than faithful Christian life? The answer is “yes,” and that is where the concept of rewards becomes part of the discussion.

Rewards will be awarded the believer for faithful service that glorifies the Lord. Unfaithful believers will not receive rewards, but they will not forfeit their justification salvation. Paul made that very clear in his first letter to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 3:10–15¹⁰According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. ¹¹For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹²Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

The answer to carnal, unfaithful sanctification is not to make sanctification salvation part of justification salvation. It is to understand that carnal Christians are a reality, and they will be dealt with at the Judgment Seat of Christ where they will forfeit rewards they otherwise could have earned. This is not punishment for personal sins; Christ already suffered the punishment due for sins. When Christians live in carnality, they have broken fellowship with God and, until they are restored to fellowship, can do nothing to glorify the Lord and earn rewards.

Calvinist and Arminian systems of theology cannot account for carnal Christianity, but the reality is that born-again people can be carnal and fail to mature as Christians. Two Greek words are used to indicate carnality.

Σαρκικός (*sarkikos*) means fleshly, carnal, pertaining to the flesh or body. It carries an ethical sense referring to the propensity of the flesh to sin. In this context, it

implies weakness, frailty, imperfection and describes people who are being carnal and worldly. It refers to the tendency to satisfy the flesh implying sinfulness, the propensity to sin, and carnality. It represents being under the influence of carnal desires. Σάρξ (*sarx*) in this context, implies weakness, frailty, imperfection, both physical and moral. It is the opposite of being spiritual, and it may refer to opposition to the Holy Spirit.

The Bible confirms the reality of carnal Christians. Paul referred to the brethren, meaning believers, in Corinth as carnal. Denying the existence of truly born-again, yet carnal, Christians is contrary to biblical revelation.

1 Corinthians 3:1, 3 ¹And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh [σαρκικός], as to infants in Christ.... ³for you are still fleshly [σαρκικός]. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly [σαρκικός], and are you not walking like mere men?

"All of us must be careful here. The easiest thing in the world is to dismiss a particular person as 'not saved' if he is not theologically sharp or if his perseverance in sainthood is doubtful. The tendency for some is, as it were, to 'raise the standard' of entrance into the faith which unchristianizes those who do not come up to 'standard'. The 'standard' is always the equivalent of the burden we are bearing! But to resent the disobedient one who may be 'saved so as by fire' may betray that we too will be saved so as by fire. For our self-righteousness and jealousy is as obnoxious in God's sight as another's lack of responsibility may be in ours" [R. T. Kendall, *Once Saved, Always Saved*, 116].

Does the failure to understand eternal security have real world consequences? Of course, it does. Earlier, I quoted a pastor named Christopher Bass who teaches that 1 John presents a series of tests that believers should use to evaluate themselves in order to determine whether or not they are truly saved. Checking the doctrinal statement of his current church indicates that his false understanding of faith plus works has seriously impacted the doctrinal tenets taught to the people in his church. Under the heading "The Perseverance of the Saints" we find this:

“We believe that all true believers persevere to the end and that their enduring attachment to Christ is the grand mark which distinguishes them from superficial professors. A special providence watches over their welfare and they are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation” [Christ Redeemer Church, McKinney, TX: <https://www.crcmckinney.com/beliefs>, accessed 5 Nov. 2020].

Under the heading “How Can I Be Saved?”, the idea of repentance as a work is introduced into the gospel. This church is supposed to be talking about justification salvation, but notice how their doctrine is really about sanctification salvation.

You must repent. This means a complete change regarding sin. There must be a change of mind. You must admit that you are a sinner, a rebel against a holy and loving God. There must be a change of heart — genuine sorrow and shame at the vileness: and filthiness of your sin. Then you must be willing to forsake it and change the direction of your life. God challenges people to prove their repentance by their deeds (Acts 26:20). You must do this. God will not forgive any sin you are not willing to forsake. To repent is to go in a new direction, seeking wholeheartedly to live in a way that pleases God. [Christ Redeemer Church, McKinney, TX: <https://www.crcmckinney.com/what-is-the-gospel>, accessed 5 Nov. 2020].

To repent, *μετάνοια* (metanoia) simply means to change one’s mind about something, in the case of salvation, to agree with God that a change in one’s relationship to and with God resulting in a change in one’s eternal status is needed. Regarding justification salvation, most pastors, evangelists, and theologians have changed the definition of repentance to mean that one must be sorry for personal sins and to promise not to commit personal sins after coming to faith—which is an impossibility. They make this a requirement for justification salvation. The change of mind involved in coming to faith means far more than being sorry for the personal sins one has committed. Among other things, it involves changing your mind about who you are as a fallen human being in relation to God,

changing your mind about who God is, particularly God the Son, changing your mind about who and what you believe in by changing your allegiance from Satan and his world system to the Creator God, and so on. You can change your mind about your involvement in personal sins, that is certainly a good thing to do, but that is not a requirement for becoming justified. Note that Bass' church claims that you cannot be forgiven for the commission of any personal sin pattern you refuse to forsake. Where is that written? Didn't Jesus Christ die for the sins of the world—past, present, and future? Of course, He did.

1 John 2:2 ²and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of the whole world*.

In terms of justification salvation, personal sins are really not the issue; they are a sanctification salvation issue. The sin nature is the real issue with which the cross dealt; personal sins are symptoms of the real issue.

Perhaps a more well-known example, John MacArthur, will reveal how far reaching the detrimental effects of mixing justification with sanctification has impacted the church. He is a very well-known pastor/teacher and his teaching reaches around the world. MacArthur once understood and adhered to the free grace proclamation of the Gospel. Once he became a pastor, his pastoral feelings were hurt when people he led to the Lord fell into grievous sin and/or walked away from the church. He then questioned whether or not those people could possibly have been saved. At that point in time, He began studying Puritan Theology which is notoriously introspective to the point that many Puritan pastors were tormented by the idea that they may not be saved for reasons we have already

discussed in this lesson. Unfortunately, that paranoia was passed on to their congregations. At any rate, after MacArthur studied Puritan Theology, he was enamored of it and he came up with the concept that has come to be known as Lordship salvation which involves a massive mixture of sanctification salvation into justification salvation. Here are just a few of the positions he holds in terms of His Lordship salvation gospel which mixes sanctification with justification.

He criticizes those who hold the view “that Scripture promises salvation to anyone who simply believes the facts about Christ and claims eternal life. There need be no turning from sin, no resulting change in lifestyle, no commitment—not even a *willingness* to yield to Christ's lordship.... The fallout of such thinking is a deficient doctrine of salvation. It is justification without sanctification ... The Bible teaches clearly that the evidence of God's work in a life is the inevitable fruit of transformed behavior. Faith that does not result in righteous living is dead and cannot save. Professing Christians utterly lacking the fruit of true righteousness will find no biblical basis for assurance of salvation.... Prior to this century, no serious theologian would have entertained the notion that it is possible to be saved yet see nothing of the outworking of regeneration in one's lifestyle or behavior.... Those who teach that obedience and submission are extraneous to saving faith are forced to make a firm but unbiblical distinction between salvation and discipleship. This dichotomy, like that of the carnal/spiritual Christian sets up two classes of Christians: believers only and true disciples” [John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Does Jesus Mean When He says, “Follow Me”?* rev. ed., 28-36].

Notice that believing the Gospel, justification salvation, is not enough, according to MacArthur, to guarantee eternal life; one must also turn from sin, make Jesus Lord of one's life, commit, and produce fruit among other things. I am not arguing that the believer should not do those things, of course we should “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called” (Eph. 4:1); I am arguing that believing and being granted eternal life at that moment is a separate issue from sanctification salvation, which may or may not be present and

apparent in any individual believer's life. Due to the worldwide reach that MacArthur and his Master's Seminary wields, this is very dangerous teaching—it is a false gospel of faith plus works. It is a dangerous mixture of things which should not be mixed: sanctification salvation into and with justification salvation. Forcing sanctification into justification makes the pure free grace gospel of justification salvation null and void and turns it into a faith plus works salvation experience which cannot justify anyone. This situation creates doubt in the mind of believers concerning the state of their salvation; eternal security is impossible to know when works are made part of justification salvation.

Pastors and theologians who misunderstand the purpose of 1 John devise tests based on John's letter for people to use to determine whether or not they are true believers. Here is MacArthur's list [John MacArthur, Jr., *Saved Without a Doubt: How to be Sure of Your Salvation*, 67-91]:

1. Have you enjoyed fellowship with Christ and with the Father?
2. Are you sensitive to sin?
3. Do you obey God's word?
4. Do you reject this evil world?
5. Do you eagerly await Christ's return?
6. Do you see a decreasing pattern of sin in your life?
7. Do you love other Christians?
8. Do you experience answered prayer?
9. Do you experience the ministry of the Holy Spirit?
10. Do you discern between spiritual truth and error?
11. Have you suffered rejection because of your faith?

Did you notice what is missing from this list? There is not one word in this list about faith! The standard for determining whether or not one is saved is not behavior, it is faith alone. It is not up to MacArthur or anyone else to decide whether

or not someone else is a believer based on their works, their spiritual experiences, or the subjective opinions of others. Yet, that is exactly what pastors like MacArthur continually encourage people to do.

The opponents of our view of eternal security are not above being untruthful when presenting our position. MacArthur represents this sad fact. “Eternal security is a great scriptural truth, but it should never be presented as merely a matter of being once saved, always saved—with no regard for what you believe or do” [John MacArthur, Jr., *Saved Without a Doubt: How to be Sure of Your Salvation*, 150-151]. Once saved, always saved is completely dependent on what a person believes; that is the whole point! Faith alone leads to eternal security. We never disregard what a person believes whether it involves justification or sanctification. We simply understand the differences between the two. One is based on faith, and the other is based on how the Christian life is lived which is the “do” part of MacArthur’s statement. It is MacArthur and those who hold to his doctrinal position of Lordship salvation who invalidate eternal security based on what a person does or does not do.

Those who believe in a distinction between justification and sanctification are often accused of being antinomian, that is, without law. That is a mischaracterization of our position. We simply believe that obedience to any sort of standard is no indicator of whether or not any person has actually been born-again. We equally believe that there are biblical truths revealed to us that guide us into developing a biblically informed worldview and into living an appropriate

Christian life. We see those as two distinct phases of our salvation experience in the same way that glorification salvation will be a distinct third phase of our salvation. Disobedience and unfaithfulness will be dealt with at the Judgment Seat of Christ during the believer's evaluation for the award of rewards.

Justification is based solely on the promises of God to grant eternal life to all who believe at the moment of belief regardless of what they do or do not do after that point in time. It is the most amazing expression of God's grace that I think we can possibly imagine. The fact that a person does not live a biblically informed, sanctified life does not invalidate their justification salvation experience.

In the next lesson, we will examine the biblical basis that informs our once saved, always saved view of justification salvation that results in our eternal security.