

Question #1 – Is Eternity Secure?

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

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Crossroads Ministries
301 S. 8th Street
Opelika, Alabama 36801

Website: www.fbcopelika.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers

But tonight we're going to talk about a more frequent storm, a more personal storm, and one of which is a more common storm. Tonight I've titled the message "Question #1 – Is Eternity Secure?" There are some of you who know why I titled this Question #1 because I've had the privilege over almost three decades to find myself both in public and private environments answering people's questions in regard to faith, scripture, Christianity, etc. I've told you this and no offense to this morning or this evening, Wednesday night here is my favorite hour of the week because I know what I want to teach and I know what I want to preach but down deep I want to know what you need to know and the way you find that out is with questions.

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to take some of the questions that I've been asked throughout the years and put them in a little book called "The Top 10 Questions." Now they are the top 10 by quantity, okay? They're not all the most pressing questions of the day but they are the ones that have been asked the most over the last 30 years, and in that book the number 1 question is regarding eternal security. Can a believer lose their salvation? Is our eternity in Christ Jesus secure? Now I know what some of you are thinking, "All right, how much is it number 1?" It's number 1, will stay number 1, and will never be replaced, in fact, on any given Wednesday night here on our campus, there will be a question about this issue. Every single week, in fact, a couple of months ago we went for a period of time, three weeks in a row the question came up, just asked in different forms and in different fashions. This is the storm of our lives. We struggle with the fact that we know that our faith is not based on our own doing and our own righteousness and we know that deep down inside we're not worthy of being saved. We know it, and we struggle with formally what is called post-regeneration sin, the sin after we get saved. We really don't struggle with the sin before it because we know he saves us, it's the sin afterwards and tonight in 1 John 5, we have one of the most definitive passages in all of the Bible regarding what we call the security of the believer, but it's also, according to the experts, one of the most difficult passages in all of the Bible. You'll hear in just a moment, there are certain subject matters that are alluded to, certain statements that are made that when you hear them, at first sight you're like, "Oh, wow, that causes concern." And so, again, this is one of those passages. It is one of the most definitive but yet it's also one of the most difficult.

Now let me set the stage before we get to 1 John 5:12. As you walk through 1 John, obviously this morning we talked about if we say that we have no sin, that we are a liar and that we're calling God a liar, but that Jesus Christ is our advocate, he is our propitiation. He gave himself for our sins. Beginning in chapter 2 of 1 John, it begins a discussion that goes back and forth all throughout 1 John utilizing three very interesting descriptors, it speaks about little children, young men and fathers. Now why is that important? Because one of the words we talked about this morning was sanctification, our growing in Christ, our becoming more like him, and when we're regenerated, when we're born again, though we may be seven years of age, 17 years of age, 37 years of age, we start our relationship with the Lord as a babe in Christ and we grow and we trust more, and so there's somewhat of this ebb and flow in 1 John of what it means to be a babe or a young person, what does it mean to be somewhat of an adolescent in Christ, and what does it mean to be a mature believer. By the time we get to the end of chapter 2 and somewhat into chapter 3, it uses a word in 1 John that is not found anywhere else in your Bible: antichrist. Oh, we know about that "antichrist" but yet the term is only used in 1 John and it says that, oh, there will be one that comes but there are many antichrists among us, what's interesting is it says they departed from us – listen – because they were never a part of us, and 1 John begins to make this distinction that those who abandon the faith, those that abdicate the faith, those that walk away were actually never believers in the first place. Then it begins to talk about false teaching and false prophets who get into our lives and began to somewhat on a small level and then it grows bigger, they teach us these heretical teachings, these false teachings that by the time they begin to germinate in our lives, we've got a full-blown storm on our hands.

So you have these individuals at different stages of faith struggling with those who have "departed from the faith," those who are coming into the faith, teaching erroneous matters of faith, and so at the very conclusion of 1 John 5, beginning in verse 12, we have this definitive passage of eternal security with some difficulty in the middle that hopefully by the end of the night will make it very crystal clear. Beginning in verse 12, he says,

12 He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. 13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. 14 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: 15 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. 16 If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. 17 All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death. 18 We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not. 19 And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. 20 And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true

God, and eternal life. 21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols.
Amen.

Now at the beginning and the end of that passage it is very clear, can we all agree the middle part got a little tough, did it not? And so in this passage regarding eternal security, our relationship with the Lord, I want to begin with the parameters, both the, I guess, the beginning and the end. Let's begin with the simplicity.

Verse 12. Lest you think salvation through Jesus Christ is a difficult endeavor, notice that every single one of these words is one syllable. These are not complex ideas. In fact, the church at Corinth, this incredible church in great size and in an affluent, very educated area, the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 11 says, "I am bothered, I struggle with you because you've removed yourself from the simplicity which is in Christ Jesus." One of the things that you may hear me say on a regular basis at the end of any one of our public worship services, particularly on Sunday morning, is that our relationship with the Lord does not involve taking tests, passing courses, getting a certain grade, it says that he that has the Son has life, he that has not the Son has not life. Let me remind you, it was the little children of the world that Jesus used to illustrate his relationship with us and it wasn't those who had multiple post-graduate degrees. In fact, one of the biggest issues that we have particularly as adults is we over-complicate it, not the reverse. Why is it that the overwhelming majority of people statistically come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior at a young age is because they've yet to fall into the trap of making everything so overly complicated. It's a very simple message, he that has the Son has life, he that has not the Son has not life.

But then there are these passages about security, about this idea that we secure in him, and I love verse 13. If I have the privilege of sharing the gospel with a person individually and that person in my presence is saved, I always, always share with them verse 13 of 1 John 5 when somebody is struggling with their salvation. I'll always go to this verse. I want to read this verse out loud and I want you to pay attention. "These things have I written unto you that you kinda, might, sorta hope in the name of the Son of God; that you might, kinda, sorta hope that you have eternal life." Is that what it says? No. It says, "I written these things that you who believe on the name of the Son of God; that you may know that you have eternal life." Not think. Not hope. Not wish for. He makes it very clear. "He who has the Son has life, he that has not the Son has not life. I've written these things so you may know." Without question, without waver, it is a done sealed deal.

Now I want you to fast forward to verse 18. Verse 18 is also another passage that gives us great security but at the forefront it's going to appear as if it does not. "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not." Now when you read that verse, the first thought of your mind is not security, is it? In fact, allow me to take this verse and kind of divide it into its natural two sections.

Let's begin with the first one. "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not." Now I want to address this in a very simplistic way and then we're going to get to the second part and then come full circle. There are some of your Bibles that you're reading right now that will make this statement, that whoever is born of God does not continue to sin. There's a very difficult problem with that means of translation, that means that none of us get there because last time I checked, the Apostle Paul in Romans 7 says he continued to sin, he struggled with sin, and allow me to advocate for what many people nowadays call the archaic. You may recognize not only tonight but quite regularly when I'm reading, teaching, and preaching from scripture, that I use what we commonly refer to as the old King James. Notice what it says, "sinneth not." Now I know what you're thinking. We don't talk like that anymore and you're right, we don't, but one of the things that I think most of us fail to consider is that the English language is not nearly as particular as the language of which the apostles originally spoke and wrote in, we typically refer to it as "Greek." In fact, English has three cases: there is the past, there is the present, and there is the future. Simple, right? But you know that Greek had six cases and communicated things much more specifically than we can. We have to use a lot of words to say what they were saying. Now you say, "What does that mean?"

Now if you look back and your Bible says "sinneth," that eth, can I communicate what that really means and quote the old Greek syntax? If you see a word that ends in eth, it means that grammatically always has been, is, and always will be. That's what it means. So let's read that in its proper grammatical context. We know that whosoever is born of God never has, never does, and never will sin. Well, that's not us.

Read the next statement, "but he that is begotten of God." You see, there's another one of those words that a lot of times we say, "Oh, that's archaic, that's old." But did you know that the word "begotten" as in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world he gave his only begotten Son," it literally means "one gene." Now all my children have a mix of genes but Jesus was of one gene. He was God in flesh.

"But he that is begotten of God keep himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not." Why am I putting so much emphasis on the grammar? Why am I putting so much emphasis on this one verse? Because a lot of times we read verse 18 and we go, "Oh no, I've messed up since I got saved. I've struggled with sin. I've fallen into temptation. It says if I continue to sin, I'm in trouble." Let me tell you what verse 18 is about, it's about Jesus, it's not about you, because read verse 19, "And we know that we are of God." Do you notice the difference in verse 18 and 19? Whosoever, verse 18, we, us, verse 19, "the whole world lieth in wickedness." And verse 20, "we know that the Son of God is come, and has given us understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life." In other words, I think one of the verses that we oftentimes go to show that we are insecure actually demonstrates our greatest security, that he is the one who has never sinned, he is the one that has never touched sin, he is the one who is begotten, and if you'll notice in verse 20 how many times it says we are in him, in him, we are there in him, our security is not in our performance, our security is not in "our faithfulness," our security is in who he is and then who we are in him. So verse 13 and verse 18 actually are incredible

passages about our security in Christ Jesus, that sin was not a part of his "pre-incarnation," his incarnation, or his resurrected state, and now that we are in him, that our relationship is secure.

Now those are kind of the parameters but we've got some problems in addition to verse 18 because when you get down into verse 15 and particularly verse 16, there's this whole idea about praying for those who have committed a sin unto death or a sin that is not unto death. Should we pray for them, should we not pray for them? What are we dealing with here? Well, I think the first thing we have to address are definitions. Most of us, and sometimes even myself included, are very guilty of, shall we say, drawing to one specific, very important and oftentimes majority used definition and using it all of the time. For example, the Bible says in Romans 6, "The wages of sin is death." We know that in the context there it means eternal death, right? It means literally what the Bible calls hell. We get that because in the context, "The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life." So there's this, I guess, this opposition of death versus eternal life, however, you do know that the word "death" does not mean hell every time it's used. The word "death" can be a spiritual death or it can simply be a physical death. In fact, back in Genesis 2:16 when the Lord told Adam, "In the day that you eat the fruit thereof, you will surely die." I don't do this oftentimes because most of you, and myself included, English is our primary language but if we were to go back and we were to go to Israel today and we were to hear the Jewish rabbis read that scripture, do you know how it reads? "In the day that you eat, you will die die." It literally says you'll die twice. Now do you understand in Revelation 20 why it's called the second death? Why? Because there is a death that is spiritual, there's also a death that's physical and sometimes we're not always speaking of eternal death, we're not always speaking of hell, sometimes when the Bible speaks of something that dies or is dead, it's just an ending, a ceasing, a stopping of that which was at one time continuous.

Well, the same could be said for life. In Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." You know, sometimes life is eternal heaven and sometimes it just talks about that which is alive here on earth. In fact, I can show you in this passage, look in verse 13. It says, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that you may know," in other words, you can be sure, "that you have eternal life." Now go down to verse 20, last statement, "This is true of God and eternal life." But go to verse 16, "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it." Do you notice that none of those words, life and death, none of them are qualified by "eternal." In other words, death can be what we commonly refer to as an eternity in hell, or it can simply mean that which ceases, that which stops. Life can mean what you and I know as heaven, or it can mean that which is technically alive, breathing and continuous.

So not only do we have definitions of both of those words that can mean eternal or can mean temporal, but we have descriptions all throughout the Bible of them in use and listen, most of the time when the words are used, they're actually used for the temporal, not the eternal. Have you not read the genealogies in the Old Testament? So-and-so lived

so many years and he died. He physically, his life came to an end. You do realize there are a lot of people that Genesis says died but Hebrews 11 says they're in heaven. So that death that is spoken of in Genesis is a physical earthly death and had nothing to do, it's not qualifying what we might refer to as their eternal state. That is why in John 3:16 it speaks about those of us who believe will have everlasting life. It describes it. That's why in this passage it says we will have eternal life.

Finally, let me give you some precedence here, and those of you who were in Bible drill or sword drill growing up, you're going to love the next few moments. We're going to go back over the Bible. If you are able and have the availability, I want to encourage you to turn to some of these passages. I'm going to refer to them and quote them but sometimes it's good to just see them with your own eyes.

Let's start with the Old Testament. Let's talk about a guy by the name of Pharaoh. Pharaoh is found back in the book of Exodus. By the time you find yourself in Exodus 8, Pharaoh is struggling. Now remember what the Lord is doing. He has called Moses and his brother Aaron to go unto Pharaoh with a very simple instruction, "Let my people go." In Exodus 8:15, those of you who have turned to it, what does it say? It says that Pharaoh hardened his heart. Pharaoh said, "Nope, I'm not gonna do it." Pharaoh said, "I have drawn a line in the sand. I know what I've seen. I know what's coming but I'm not going to change." Fast forward to verse 32 of Exodus 8 and what does it say? It says Pharaoh hardened his heart. But now go to chapter 9, verse 12. Does Pharaoh harden his heart in that passage? He doesn't, God does. You see, back in 1 John 5, it says if somebody has sinned a sin which is not unto death, pray for them, but if they've sinned a sin unto death, don't even bother. Don't even waste your time. You see, Pharaoh hardened his heart time after time but there came a point, this is where it's critical, that God wipes sins and says, "I'm done with you. This is over, the last straw."

Now let me push pause for a moment and give you the Meyersism here. I call what we're talking about here as far as the precedence is concerned, I call these exit ramps. I know it's a simplistic illustration but I'm a simple-minded person. If you're driving down the road and let's just say for the example of illustration that you're driving south on interstate 85 and you want to go to the city of Montgomery, there's quite a bit of exits, correct? I mean, there's exits on the north side, there's exits on the south side, there are a whole lot of exits that you can take to get to the city of Montgomery. Let's just say as a hypothetical that you decide, "You know what? I'm gonna take my chance that there's one more exit." Even though the map says there are not, even though your friends have told you, even though GPS on your phone has said you just passed the last one, you find yourself mightily disappointed when you end up in the middle of nowhere with no exit. I know what you're thinking, you just turn the car around. You do know you can't turn around life, right?

Pharaoh could not go back and go, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, time out. Let's go back to the flies, please." No, he was already past that. He had hardened his heart. He had hardened his heart time after time and eventually God said, "Done with this." There now is, if you'll allow me to use the word, death has come to this situation. Was Pharaoh alive

and breathing? Oh, absolutely. Were the plagues abundant? Yes. Were there people roaming around? You've got it. But as far as the opportunity to let the people of God go into the wilderness, and by the way, it was only for three days in worship and come back home, the opportunity to "be right with God," death took place. What does God say in 1 John 5? If somebody sinned a sin unto death, don't even bother praying for it, it's done.

You want another Old Testament precedent? How about our good friend Samson? Samson is found in the book of Judges. I think, unfortunately, we picture him somewhat biblically erroneous. We always picture, have you noticed we always picture Samson as somebody with muscles in his earlobes? I mean, this big massive man but yet nobody can figure out why he's strong. I don't know about you but if a guy walks in with 24 inch biceps, I know why he's strong. I got it. But if a guy walks in and he's about 5'10", 110 pounds, got hair down to his ankles, I'm like, "What?" You do know that's probably what he really looked like. By the way, you know he never cut his hair and human hair can grow up to about seven feet in length. We know that he wasn't that tall, can you imagine how nappy he might have looked? Because nobody, they're like, "How is this guy whipping us? We don't get it." Why is that important? Because in Judges 13:4-5, the Lord comes to his parents and says, "That which is in your womb is going to be of a Nazarite vow." Now not Nazarene as in Jesus the Nazarene but Nazarite. By the way, as you study the Nazarites not just in Judges but particularly in Numbers, it was available to both men and women and they could be a Nazarite for a period of time and then they could revoke their vows of being a Nazarite. You could be one one day and decide not to be one the next.

Nonetheless, there were three things that were to take place in his life as a Nazarite. 1. He was not to consume anything of an alcoholic nature. 2. He was not to eat anything from a deceased carcass of an animal or an animal. 3. He was not to cut that nappy hair of his. Those are the three rules, right? By the time you get to Judges 16, we discover that he has violated all of these things with the exception of the hair. Now I just kind of get the idea Samson is getting a little confident in himself, don't you? I mean, he violates the issue with the alcohol, he violates the issue with the animal, and he's thinking, "Ah, not that big a deal." But then what happens? Oh, I'll tell you what happens, Delilah happens. Delilah enters his life. It's another message for another day but it's one of my favorite lines in the Bible where it says she nagged him to the point of death. I don't know, there's just something about that line that's visual. But nonetheless, she says, "Oh, Samson, if you really loved me, if you really loved me, you'd tell me the source of your strength." Obviously he didn't have big biceps.

So what does he do? He says, "If you cut my hair off it will be gone." Chapter 16, verses 19 and 20, I think are some of the saddest verses in all of the Bible. It says the next morning Samson woke up, his hair had been cut, the Philistines came upon him and he went out and he did not know that the power of God had departed from him. Man, that's sad. He had gotten so confident in rebelling against God he didn't realize that he had just passed the last exit ramp. There was no more going back. You see, God gave him three ramps and he passed all three.

There are numerous examples in the Old Testament so let's make our way to the New Testament. Pharaoh, by the way, his heart is hardened on the sixth plague. Samson is on the third breaking of the vow. In Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira, one shot. Do you remember the story where they sell the piece of property and they bring it to the apostles and lie about what it was sold for? One time and guess what? They're dead. Does the Bible say that they went to hell? No, it just says they died on the spot and the men carried their bodies out.

But the other example I want to give you is found in the New Testament, in fact, it's found in the book of Hebrews 12. Hebrews 12 is the story of Esau. Now I know what you may be thinking, "I thought Esau was in the Old Testament?" Oh, he's in the Old Testament but I want you to see what the New Testament says about him. Now I want you to remember his story. Esau had a brother by the name of Jacob, twin brother. In Genesis 25, the Lord promised that the older would serve the younger. Jacob would be renamed whom we know Israel, the famous 12 tribes. He received the birthright over a simple bowl of soup that Esau sold for his birthright to Jacob, or he bought from Jacob for his birthright. I want you if you have your Bible open to Hebrews 12, I want you to see what verses 16 and 17 says. Fascinating passage. It says, "Lest there be any fornicator or profane person as Esau who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For you know how that afterward when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected," listen to this, "for he found no place of repentance though he sought it carefully with tears." Basically Esau goes to the Lord and says, "I'm sorry. Can I go back to dinner or supper and get the bowl back?" And God says, "I'm sorry. You passed the last exit ramp."

Now one of the things I want you to notice in all these stories is there is not a quantifiable numerical value that you and I can put for our own lives. It's not like we have the ability to say, "You know what? When it comes to rebelling against God, when God calls you to do something, you get seven chances to say no, but you'd better say yes on the eighth one." We don't have that privilege and, in fact, sometimes we only get one chance, sometimes we get three, sometimes we get 30. There are some of you here tonight saying on this certain issue in your life, God has given you 3,200 chances and you're still determined to pass another exit ramp.

You see, the passage in 1 John is surrounded by language of eternal security but there in the middle it talks about our fellowship with the Lord, our walking with the Lord, how we navigate life, and one of the things that I've learned in life is there's a lot of things that can die in life that have nothing to do with eternity. Hopes can die. Dreams can die. Opportunities can die. There's a lot of things in our life that are offered to us that no longer become available to us. How many times have you had a conversation with somebody and you say, "Well, back at a certain point in life, if I had just made a different decision." Do you know what you're really saying? "God gave me an exit ramp and I didn't take it. God gave me an opportunity to be on a different path and I didn't take it." But a lot of us tonight are a whole lot like Esau, that God gave us an opportunity for something and we passed the exit ramp, we can't get it back, and what has it caused us to do? We're questioning eternity, we're questioning salvation. Hey, I've got news for you, this has nothing to do with eternity, it has everything to do with here and now. And it

says if there is somebody who has sinned a sin that is not unto death, pray for them. Can I put the Meyersism on top of that? If somebody has passed the exit ramp and God shows them another one's coming, pray they take it. But if God gives them the exit ramp and they fly by it and there's not another one, sorry. Just like Esau, just like Pharaoh, just like Samson, there's no reason to even pray.

I know it may be a "tough" message but really it's wrapped up in security, and more importantly in how I want to close tonight is really asking you a very rhetorical question: what is an area or maybe a series of areas in your life that God is convicting you about? Maybe it's things that you need to be about, in other words, you need to get on a different road because that's where he's called you or that's what he's asked you to do. Maybe it's the opposite of that, maybe you're on a road you don't need to be on and God has said, "You need to exit off of that road." And tonight whether in person or online, you would testify that on that subject matter, on those subject matters, you've passed your fair share of exit ramps, haven't you? In fact, for some of you, every time you open the Bible, every time you go to church, every time you're in a Bible study God brings it up, doesn't he? And every time you leave you say, "Well, maybe next week, maybe next month, maybe this, maybe that," because one of the problems is for some of you for the last years of your life, you've had untold exit ramps and you fall into the trap of thinking you're always going to have another one.

Well, he says there is a sin that's unto death, don't even both praying for it. Esau begged God, "Can I go back to supper?" Samson was in prison tied to the pillars and he cried out to God, "How did I get in this place?" I think 1 John 5 is one of the most secure passages that we've got when it comes to our eternal security but it is one of the most convicting passages we've got about how we walk in fellowship with the Lord. If tonight there is a difficulty, a struggle, a path that you know the Lord has called you to get off, would you take the ramp tonight? If there's that which the Lord has called you to and you've neglected or if you've denied it for who knows how long, would tonight be the night you say, "I'm going to get on that road that the Lord has called me to." The biggest issue is that most of us will say, "You know what? I'll just deal with it another time." You're not guaranteed the next exit.