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John 10:27-29 “The Eternal Security of the Believer”

Intro. Christian psychologists tell us that one of the most important psychological needs that we have is love. We need to know that we are loved, and that we are secure in the love of family & friends. We fear rejection, especially from those who are supposed to be close to us. People will do all kinds of things to avoid rejection, and cope with the pain of rejection when it comes. On the other hand, people will flourish in the security of love and acceptance. A child needs to have the security of knowing that mom and dad will always love them, even when they disobey, and do things that they should not do. A wife needs the security of knowing that her husband will always love and accept her, including when she grows older. And yes, husbands need the same sense of security. I am losing my hair and what little I have has turned grey. But I believe that I am secure in the love of my wife, and she will still love me even if I lose *all* my hair!

God created us with a need for love and security. And do you think for a moment that our *God* will fail to meet this need? Are we not secure in His unconditional love? Should we fear the possibility that God will ultimately reject us, even after He has accepted us into His family? We are going to see this morning that true believers are indeed secure in God’s love and God’s power. And we can grow and prosper spiritually in the security that God will always love and accept us, even when we sin and mess up. God will never reject us or cast us out once we truly become His children. Jesus said in John 6:37, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out,” not initially or years later. So instead of worrying about losing our salvation, we can focus on serving the Lord, and becoming more Christ-like day by day.

Our text today is one of the strongest and clearest Scripture passages in the entire Bible concerning the eternal security of the believer. Christ promises in v.28, “And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.” So let’s examine this text together, and I want to begin by asking and answering the following question:

I. WHO HAS ETERNAL SECURITY?

Now when I am talking about the security of the believer, I’m not saying that a *church member* can never be lost. I am talking about someone who has been saved, someone who has been born again, somebody who has become a partaker of the divine nature. When it comes to the subject of eternal security, and the possibility of losing one’s salvation, we have to realize the fact that not all who *profess* to be Christians *are* Christians. Jesus made this clear in Mt. 7:21, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven....” You probably know of someone who professed Christ as Savior and was baptized, but sometime later they turned away from their profession and started living an even more sinful life than before. Some would say that they lost their salvation. No, it’s more likely that they never were saved to begin with. As Peter said, the dog will return to its vomit, and the pig will go back into the mire (2 Peter 2:20-22). I John 2:19 says, “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.” They didn’t lose their salvation. They never really had it!

So as Jesus talks about our security in this text of Scripture, notice in v.27 who this promise

applies to, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” Jesus is giving this promise to “My sheep.” If you are described in v.27, then what He says in the last of v.28 will apply to you, “they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.” Jesus did not promise security to anyone but His true sheep. I believe in once saved always saved, but I like to say it like this, “Once *saved*, always saved.” Once you are truly saved; once you are truly born again by the Spirit of God, you have eternal security. I believe in the eternal security of the believer and in the insecurity of the make-believer.

So who are the ones who have eternal security? Notice how Jesus describes them, and see if v.27 applies to you:

A. Those Who Belong to Christ - Jesus describes His people with the words, “My sheep.” Only those who belong to Jesus have such security. We are His personal possession according to 1 Peter 1:9.¹ 1 Cor. 6:20 says, “you were bought at a price....” And what was that price? He has purchased us at the tremendous price of His own blood according to Acts 20:28. Do you think Christ will lose what He has gained at such a great sacrifice?

B. Those Who Hear the Voice of Christ – He said in v.27, “My sheep hear My voice.” Three other times in chapter 10 Jesus speaks of the sheep hearing and recognizing the voice of their shepherd (vv.3, 4, 16). For example, Jesus says in the last of v.4, “the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.” Christ is not talking about an audible voice. I believe He talking about an inner sense that Christ is speaking to you, and you recognize the voice of God in your soul. Now this voice of Christ to us has a starting point. Those who belong to Christ are the ones who have heard the gospel of Christ, and have responded to His call to salvation through the Holy Spirit. Then, God’s people continue to make an effort to hear His voice throughout their Christian lives. “Hear” is a present, ongoing tense. They *want* to hear the Word of Christ preached and taught. I John 4:6 says of God-called preachers like himself, “We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us.”

I cannot help but wonder about those professing Christ, but who seem to have no desire to come and hear the Word of God preached and taught. They haven’t lost their salvation. They are just demonstrating that they probably were not saved to begin with.

Do you desire to hear the voice of Christ through the Word of God? A true child of God does.

C. Those Who Are Known by Christ – Jesus went on to say, “I know them.” This refers to a special, personal knowledge (*ginosko*) by Christ for His people. In Mt. 7:23 Jesus said to some, “Depart from Me, I never knew you.” Jesus mentally knew who they were. But here in v.27 Jesus speaks of a personal knowledge.

I know who the President is, and I have learned some things about him, but I have no personal relationship with him, nor he with me. I have no personal knowledge of him, and He certainly does not know me from Adam.

But Christ has enabled us to have a personal relationship with Him. He knows each believer by name according to v.3. He knows all about us. He knows the secrets of our hearts, our burdens, and our longings. A Christian is one who has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. He knows

¹ There Peter uses *peripoiesis* to describe us, here meaning “possession, one’s own property.” God’s ownership of us is also indicated in Ephesians 1:13, where it says, “we are sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise” (cf. 4:30; 2 Corinthians 1:22).

you and you know Him. Out of 7 billion people on earth does Jesus know your name? Does He have a personal relationship with you? If so, Jesus promises you “shall never perish....”

Then the last of v.27 indicates that true believers are:

D. Those Who Follow Christ - Do you want to know if you are eternally secure? Here is a good test. True believers follow Christ.

We see this truth illustrated in the context, in vv.4-5. If the shepherd called his sheep one morning from the sheepfold, and out of 500 sheep in the sheepfold, 100 came out and followed him, then I would conclude that those 100 were his sheep. And I would also conclude that the other 400 were not his sheep. That’s because sheep only follow their own shepherd. Likewise, I have a dog that knows my voice and follows me. All I have to do is make a sound or speak her name and she will quickly get up and come with me, and go with me.

Even so the sheep of Christ “follow” Christ. They follow His leading, they follow His example; they follow in obedience to His commandments; they follow from a heart of love.

Do you follow Jesus in your daily life? Do you obey Him? 1 John 2:4 says, “He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” So again, only those who are described in v.27 are the ones that are promised eternal security in v.28. Do you see yourself in v.27? If not, you need to enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Make Him your Savior, your Shepherd, and you will have eternal life that you will never lose or have taken from you!

We have seen from our text who has eternal security. Now let us see from our text:

II. WHY WE HAVE ETERNAL SECURITY

If you are a true believer, I want you to know of the eternal security that you have in Christ. And if you are thinking about becoming a believer, I want to show you that in Jesus, you will indeed have eternal security. So how can you be assured that you will never lose your salvation once you receive it? There are 3 main reasons given by Jesus in our text:

A. Because of the Nature of Eternal Life – In v.28 Jesus said, “And I give them eternal life....” There are two aspects of that statement that tells us the true nature of eternal life. First of all:

1. It is a Gift Received, not a Reward Earned – Notice that Jesus said, “I give them eternal life....” Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This life is given, not sold or bartered. Eternal life is neither earned as a wage, merited as a prize, nor won as a crown. It is a gift. Eternal life is “given”; we can do nothing to merit it. The basis of man’s salvation rests forever in God, not in man!

All evangelical Christians agree that salvation is initially received as a gift from God, but some believe that we hold on to the gift of salvation only on the condition of regular obedience. They say that if we turn from Christ and enter into sin without confession and repentance, we will lose our salvation. So in essence they say that salvation is received as a gift, but retained by our works. Yet if you can lose salvation, then ultimately salvation is not of grace, but of works! Rom. 11:6 says, “And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace.” Yet I believe that salvation is of grace from start to finish. Eph. 2:8-9 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” If we keep our salvation by our works, then we could boast of our works.

If we keep our salvation by our works and obedience, can you imagine what it could be like when we get to heaven? Suppose I meet up with another believer from our church, and I say, “Well, I see you made it. You held out to the end. Aren’t you proud of yourself?” And if we are indeed responsible for keeping our salvation, then he could brag about what he did to retain his salvation.

2. It Is Eternal in Duration - To speak of eternal life ending by a loss of salvation is a contradiction in terms. Now I want to ask you a question. If I have everlasting life, when can it end? Suppose I had it 10 years and it ended. Did I have everlasting life? No. I had 10 years of life in Jesus. Suppose I kept it 50 years and then I lost it. Did I have everlasting life? No. I had 50 years of life in Jesus. Friend whatever you have, if you ever lose it, whatever it was, it wasn’t everlasting!

Also, it may be significant that “give” is a present tense. Eternal life is a present possession for every born-again child of God, but it is also a continuing possession. It is not being held out as a conditional gift we receive upon death, only if we do not fall from grace. We are not hoping to receive eternal life at the end of life’s journey; we have it now and forever! We have eternal life now. Jesus gives good gifts.

B. Because of the Promise of Christ – Jesus promised in the middle of v.28, “...they shall never perish.” Now here’s the point. If a person can lose their salvation, then they *may* perish, and this statement would not be true.

Now let’s look more closely at this wonderful promise of Christ, “they shall never perish.” “Never” renders a strong, emphatic double negative (*ou me*). In English two negatives make a positive. But in Greek two negatives make a stronger negative. Thus, we could translated it, “they shall *never, ever* perish.” A believer may backslide for a while, but never perish. The man who declares that it is possible for a child of God to go to Hell makes God a liar.

Now why is this promise true? You see, the believer is secure as long as the Shepherd lives. Our security is as good as our Shepherd. To teach that a believer, one of God’s sheep, can lose their salvation & perish is to bring dishonor upon Christ. But I believe that the doctrine of the eternal security of the believer honors Christ.

Let me illustrate: If I owned a flock of sheep, and I hired someone to tend my sheep, what would I expect of that shepherd? I would expect him to feed and watch over the sheep, and protect the sheep. But what would I think of a shepherd who was careless, or who slept on the job, and who allowed a number of sheep to fall prey to a wolf or some other danger? I would say that he was not a very good shepherd, and I would fire him! After all, sheep cannot keep themselves safe. That’s the shepherd’s job. Even so, we cannot keep ourselves saved, but I know who can! Jesus, the Good Shepherd can!

You see, in this same chapter Jesus claims to be the good shepherd, and one reason He is the good shepherd is because He has never lost one of His sheep! If one strays, He goes and finds them, and brings them back into the fold. If one stumbles and gets hurt, He tends to the wound and carries the sheep upon His shoulders. Haven’t you experienced the conviction of His Holy Spirit, who brings you back? If you fall into sin, and God doesn’t convict you, and chasten you, then you are not saved according to Heb. 12:5-8! And if one is threatened by that old roaring lion the devil, He defends His sheep, and none is able to take a sheep out of the hand of Christ.

Don’t dishonor Christ by saying that some of His sheep have lost their salvation! He is the Good Shepherd. Three other times in John’s Gospel Jesus affirms that He has not lost one of His true followers. For example, He prayed in the middle of John 17:12, “Those whom You gave Me I

have kept; and none of them is lost....”² Hebrews 7:25 says, “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” Philippians 1:6 says, “Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.” Jude 1:24 says, “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.” He is able! What a Shepherd!

So the teaching of eternal security ought not to excuse sin and rebellion; it ought to cause us to praise Christ and love Him more! After all, He is our good and strong shepherd who never loses even one of His sheep!

Now notice the next reason we are secure in Christ:

C. Because of the Power of God – Christ has the power to protect us from the many enemies of the Christian. There is the world, which seeks to influence us to follow the path of sin and unbelief. We can be led astray by our own sin nature, the flesh. And then there’s that old devil and all his demons. Some may wonder how a Christian can survive the attacks of such enemies. Christ gives great assurance here. Notice we are:

1. Secure in the Hand of Christ – Jesus says in the last of v.28, “neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.” In the context Jesus uses the word “snatch” to refer to the image of a wolf or lion attacking the sheep, and snatching one from the flock. Yet Jesus, the Good Shepherd, will not allow this to happen.

Why is that? It is because we are in His “hand.” Our security is not due to our ability to hold on to the Shepherd; the hand of the Shepherd holds and protects the sheep. Instead of the believer trying to “hold on” or “hold out,” we need to realize that we are in the Shepherd’s hand, and the fact that His mighty hand holds us is the secret of the Christian’s victory.

Years ago when our sons were young Cheryl and I were in Atlanta, GA. Cheryl’s parents were also with us. We were in downtown, which can be a dangerous place for young children. A child could run out in front of a car or truck. Someone could snatch our child from us. Let me ask you a question. Did their safety depend upon them? Not on your life. Cheryl was holding on to one child and I was holding on to the other. Grandparents were keeping an eye on them as well. Their security depended on others who loved them and were much stronger and wiser than they. Even so, our eternal salvation does not depend upon our ability to hold on to Christ; it depends on His strong arm that always holds on to His true sheep.

Notice Jesus says “neither shall anyone snatch them....” Likewise, Jesus said in v.29 that “no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand.” It can be translated “not one” (*oudeis*). Neither Satan, nor the clever false prophet, nor the powerful persecutor, nor anyone else shall ever be able to snatch any sheep out of the hand of Jesus. The devil may tempt us, and even tease us, but he can never seize us and destroy us. Though the sheep of God are weak and helpless, they are secure in the hand of the shepherd! The apostle Paul said in Rom. 8:38-39, “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor ...principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” What security!

Ah, but it gets even better. Jesus also tells us that we are:

2. Secure in the Hand of the Father –Jesus says in v.29, “My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand.” Not

² Jesus also said in John 6:39, “This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing....” Likewise, He said in the last of John 18:9, “Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none.”

only is Jesus holding on to us, but so is the Heavenly Father. Here we have double security! Thus we are secure between the clasped hands of Omnipotence! Our God is Almighty, and nothing or no one can snatch us out of the Father's hand.

Some admit that we cannot lose our salvation by Satan seizing us and taking us away from our Savior. But they still maintain that as a free moral agent, any believer can jump out of the hand of Christ, turn from Him, and thus lose their salvation. But Philippians 2:13 says, "for it is God who works in you both *to will* and to do for His good pleasure." He works to change our will, to conform to His will.

I am in Christ and in the Father just like Noah was in the ark. It did not matter how strong the winds blew, or how much the rain fell, as long as Noah was in the ark, he was secure. He was just as secure as the ark, which no doubt was designed by God to withstand the wind and waves of the flood. Now if Noah went down, it would be because the ark went down. Now that ark was a picture of Jesus. And when Noah went into that ark God shut the door. Not only did God shut the water out, God shut Noah in. Now listen friend, Noah was in that ark. He may have fallen down a lot of times in that ark as the winds and waves beat against the boat, but he never fell out of it. Amen? Noah was not outside that ark, hanging onto a peg; he was inside that ark, and he was as secure as the ark itself. [Illus.#C-2719]

Even so, the true believer is as secure as Jesus and God the Father are secure on their thrones in heaven.

Conclusion: How do you respond to a salvation like this? When you realize how great our salvation is, and how great our Savior is, we should want to serve and please Him even more out of gratitude for God's unconditional love. A true, born-again Christian will not misuse this teaching as an excuse to sin. Rather, this security is one basis for becoming stronger in the Lord.

Do you have this salvation? Do you *know* that you are one of His sheep? If not, why not receive eternal life through Jesus Christ today. One of our hymns begins with the words, "A wonderful Savior is Jesus my Lord, a wonderful Savior to me...." Will you trust in Him today?

Sources: Oliver B. Greene, *The Gospel According to John, Vol. 2* (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, 1966); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955); Herschel H. Hobbs *John: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible, Vol. 4* (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1982); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:23] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2012); Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures, Vol. IV* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931, accessed through *Online Bible*); Dr. Adrian Rogers (a few notes from his sermon entitled, *Seven Reasons Why A Saved Person Cannot Be Lost*); Warren W. Wiersbe, "*Be*" Series: *New Testament Volumes 1 & 2, John* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). Nothing available from Maclaren.

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