

Eternal Security of the Believer 2

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This is our second week looking at the wonderful teaching of Scripture about the security of the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, a wonderful message and one that we need to not only look at, but study and know and make a vital part of our lives.

In the history of the Church there have been many statements about what we call the security of the believer, eternal security. Generally and in most of the traditional statements of faith it has been called the perseverance of the saints which basically means that God will enable us who know him to persevere to the end.

I am going to read this statement as it is in the Baptist Faith and Message. I have examined most of the great confessions of faith and my favorite is one that was done in London and then revised in the city of Philadelphia called The London Confession of Faith or the Philadelphia Confession of Faith. The London Confession was done in 1689, but this is almost word for word from a section of that confession and it reads like this.

All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.¹

Basically what that is saying is that God in his power is the one who keeps. And that should seem logical to us. Isn't it true that God in his power is the one who saved us? God in his power is the one who justified us. God in his power is the one who sanctifies us. God in his power is the one who will glorify us. And if God does all of that then we can be absolutely sure that God is the one who will keep us and that we are secure in Christ.

What I would like to do is just look at a few evidences of this in the Scriptures and then ask ourselves the question: How do we know that we are truly believers?

¹ Baptist Faith and Message, Article V, paragraph 2.

First of all the Word of God tells us that we who are Christians have eternal life. It is mentioned in many, many passages in the Scripture, but most of us are familiar with the statements that we find in the book of John. Probably the best known verse in all the Bible is John chapter three verse 16 where it reads, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”²

The passage does not say that this person might have life, that he could have life, that it is possible for him to have life. It says he has everlasting life. In other words it is a present possession. It is something that I have right now. It is a gift of God.

Now just to be certain we can turn to many passages, as I said, but in John, for instance, in chapter five and verse 24, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life.”³ It is something that is his present possession. I have it. I have it now. If you are a believer you have it. You have it now.

Going on in the book of John, in chapter six we read in chapter six and verse 47, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.”⁴ Over and over again it teaches us that this, in fact, is a gift of God. If we have it, it is something that is our personal, present possession.

There are many religious groups that teach that we have to strive to obtain everlasting life, that we have to live a certain kind of lifestyle if we are going to get everlasting life, that if we do good over a period of time that God in his grace will give us everlasting life. The fact of the matter is, none of these statements are true because none of us is capable to do enough to earn it. No matter how good we are, if we have committed one sin in our lives—and I dare to say that there is nobody here who will venture to say that they have not—if we commit one sin in our lives we are guilty before God and we will not have eternal life. That is why the gift is given because of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary.

Well, if we asked this question, a gift that God gives to us, what about the possibility of God taking it back? I mean I have known of people who have given a gift and then have gone and said, “You know, I didn’t mean to give that to you. Come on. I want to take it back.”

The Scripture makes it very clear that God never does that. And, in fact, in the book of John in chapter 10 he makes it abundantly clear. In John chapter 10 and verse 28 and 29 we read these words in this wonderful passage in which he is talking about his sheep and the salvation that he provides for them. And, by the way, we are the sheep of God if we know him.

² John 3:16

³ John 5:24

⁴ John 6:47

It says this. “And I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand.”⁵ In other words, there is no person who will be able to take the salvation that we have been given and snatch it from us. The picture is that we are in the hand of God. We are securely there and there is no person, either human being or God himself, who will take us out of God’s hand once we are there.

The next verse is basically the same thing. “My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”⁶

Are you feeling secure in Christ? Isn’t that wonderful that we have eternal life? It cannot be taken from us. It is a gift and we are secure in it.

When we turn to the text that was just read for us a few minutes ago in Romans chapter eight we find that all of these truths are emphasized again over and over again.

Verse 31. “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?”⁷

Think about that for a moment. Is there anyone more powerful than God? Absolutely not. And if God is for us and God is guaranteeing us eternal life, how is it possible that anyone can destroy that life or take it from us? Nobody can effectively be against us if God is for us.

We sang a wonderful hymn today. “Greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world.” Isn’t that true that the devil is—by the way the fourth most powerful person in the universe. First is God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are all equal and then the devil is the next most powerful person. But we have the Spirit of God within us and the devil cannot touch us to take away the salvation that God has given us.

Going a little further down in this passage it says this. Verse 35. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?”⁸ In other words, if all the enemies of our faith would gather together against us, if we would face the most difficult trials in life, if we would be challenged in our faith in that we would receive persecution; if because of our faith there were a famine and we could receive no food; if we had no possessions of our own; if we were, in essence, naked and had nothing; if the sword of the enemy came against us, all of those things could not separate us from the love of God. Isn’t that incredible?

You know, I am so thankful that none of those things have come upon us. You know, I am very thankful for that and I am sure you are, too. But there are Christians today who are living in lands where it is illegal to be a Christian and where they can be punished in the most horrible ways for standing up for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵ John 10:28

⁶ John 10:29

⁷ Romans 8:31

⁸ Romans 8:35

I can remember in my experience, in my two tours in Saudi Arabia, having a chance to talk to foreign nationals who had come to Saudi Arabia in order to earn a decent living. They were paid, you know, just a pittance. But to them it was a lot of money compared to what they would get in their own countries of Indonesia and, you know, in other places like that. And they were there working to earn money to give to their families back home.

And when you talked about your faith it was extremely difficult because those people, although they would be allowed to gather for worship, were not allowed to talk about their faith to anyone other than one of the people from their own country. In fact, if they would go to a Saudi citizen and share with them the gospel of Jesus Christ that would be considered a capital offense. They could be put to death for that. And a Saudi citizen who would turn to Christ would be put to death. And when I say put to death—you have heard the stories. I have never been there to see it, don't care to, never would—but I was in the place where people are put to death in Saudi Arabia, in Riyadh. It is a big open area and the method that is used is decapitation. They take a sword and chop the person's head off right in front of a crowd of people. And that is the punishment for a Saudi turning to faith in Jesus Christ.

You see, we are blessed. There are those who could face the sword. There are those who could face that punishment. But God says, "Even that won't separate us from the love of God."

If some day it would happen that the police or some authority would charge into the church to take us away because we are worshipping Christ—and I hope that will never happen in our country as it has in other places—that cannot separate us from the love of God. If we are put to death, that cannot separate us from the love of God.

Isn't that great? Isn't that marvellous?

But in this passage it tells us even more. If we go down to the last couple of verses Paul goes on with his description of the fact that we cannot, absolutely cannot be separated from God's love.

He says in verse 38 and 39:

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 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.⁹

You know, I have often wondered about one of the statements in here. It says, "I am convinced that neither death..."¹⁰ Now, I understand that. I mean God is saying that if I

⁹ Romans 8:38-39

¹⁰ Romans 8:38

die I will not be separated from the love of Christ. And that is wonderful, that when the time comes for me to leave this life I will go immediately into the presence of the Lord.

But it goes on to say that “neither death, nor life...”¹¹ He is saying to us that the things of this life cannot separate us from the love of God, that all of the temptations and difficulties and problems, all of our from time to time falling into sin and then turning back to God, all of the pressures that we experience because of our faith, none of this can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It tells us that things present cannot separate us and things to come cannot separate us. What does that mean? It means that I don't have to be afraid of any influence today. But I also don't have to be afraid of any influence tomorrow. I don't have to be afraid that a year from now things are going to change and something will separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Nothing but nothing can do that.

Do you feel secure in Christ? Isn't it wonderful?

Well, you know, there's a statement that I read and I can't even remember where I read it now, but it impressed me very, very much. It was in the writings of some theologian that I read somewhere and it goes something like this. I am probably not quoting his words exactly, but this is what he said. “The saints in heaven are happier, but they are no more secure than the believers on earth.”

I like that statement for it says that those that are already in the presence of the Lord, they may be happier than we are. They don't have any sin or any of the problems that we experience in our lives, but they are no more secure than we are. Our security is just as great here as it will be in heaven.

But we need to ask ourselves the question: Why is it that we are secure? Why is it that we can be guaranteed this eternal life? Well, first of all we can be sure that it is not because of anything we have done. Do you know if I had to hold on to my salvation I would fail, guaranteed I would fail. And you would, too, by the way. If I had to secure my salvation by living a life that is completely holy before God I can guarantee I wouldn't make it. I wouldn't make it for a week. No, I'm sorry, I wouldn't make it for a day.

Do you see what I am saying? It is not in me or in you to do that. It is totally in God. And that is part of what we read in this statement that I read to you before. It says this. And I am reading near the end of the statement.

Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; [last statement] yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.¹²

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Baptist Faith and Message, Article V, paragraph 2.

What is he saying? He says no matter what happens in our lives God will keep us. We don't keep ourselves. Oh, the Word of God says the same thing. There are two passages that mean a lot to me in this regard. One of them is in Philippians chapter one and this is one of my favorite verses in the entire Word of God. Philippians chapter one and verse six where we read this. "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus."¹³

This tells us several things. First of all we can have confidence. "I am confident of this very thing."¹⁴ I am assured. I am not worried about it. It is a matter of assurance in my life.

Well, what am I assured of? That the God who began a good work... Do you remember last week when we were looking at the chain of salvation? We discovered that God was the one who did everything, that God is the one who not only perfected our salvation, but began our salvation. Remember when we read together the passage that says, "For whom he did foreknow..."¹⁵ And we discovered that means to love ahead of time. Whom, among his elect, he loved before the foundation of the world.

Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.¹⁶

And we discovered last week that that word "glorified" is in the past tense although it hasn't even happened in our lives yet. God says it is so certain, so sure that we can look at it as something that has already occurred because it has occurred in the mind of God.

And here we read, "He who began a good work in you..."¹⁷ Jesus began a work in your life. And I will tell you something. God, not like us, God doesn't stop something that he started. If God begins a work it will be brought to completion.

I don't always do that. I try. But I can remember in my life that I have started that I haven't finished. Have you ever done that? I don't know, you know, I am not going to point anybody out, but I mean, most of us can say we have started something and we didn't finish it.

God never starts something that he doesn't finish and it is the God who began a good work in you, we are told in this passage, will perform it or perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ. That means if once you came under the influence of the gospel and by the grace of God, by his love, by that matchless grace he led you to faith in Christ and he gave you the

¹³ Philippians 1:6

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Romans 8:29

¹⁶ Romans 8:29-30

¹⁷ Philippians 1:6

blessing of the new birth, then you can be guaranteed that he will do all of the other things leading eventually to your glorification in heaven. That is what this passage tells us.

One other passage that I think teaches us pretty much the same thing. In 2 Timothy chapter four we read in the 18th verse, “The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed.”¹⁸ That doesn’t mean—and Paul wrote this—that he will never experience problems in his life. Paul was beaten. He was whipped. He was scourged. He was stoned. He was shipwrecked. He went through horrible experiences. And as far as we know—although it is not in Scripture, it is very likely—that he died by being decapitated in the prison in Rome. And yet he says, “I can be sure that he will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.”

It is Paul when writing to those in one of the churches said that he knows that when he comes to them in the book of Romans, “When I come to you, I will come in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.”¹⁹ He knew it. How did he know it? Because God promised him.

Well, how did he go to Rome? He went to Rome in chains, but he went in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.

God who began a good work will continue it and perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Well, does that mean that everybody who has once made some kind of profession of faith is a true believer? I believe the answer to that question is no. I believe that there are many false believers in this world and that there are many who have claimed that they have trusted in Christ, but really have not. And you may ask me the question, well, why do I believe that? Well, I believe it because I believe the Scripture teaches that.

The Lord Jesus himself said these words and we read them in the book of Matthew and in chapter seven. To many these are shocking words and I can remember the first time I read them. They were rather shocking to me.

In the Sermon on the Mount he said this beginning with verse 20 of chapter seven in Matthew. “So then, you will know them by their fruits.”²⁰ That is how we know believers. We know them by their fruits.

And then he goes on to say:

Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your

¹⁸ 2 Timothy 4:18

¹⁹ See Romans 15:29

²⁰ Matthew 7:20

name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.”²¹

Now, when I read that you might say, “Gosh, that sounds like a contradiction to what you said.”

It isn't really. This is not saying that we are saved on the basis of what we do. That is not what is being said here at all. What is being said is that what we do is a demonstration of the faith that we have. In other words if we do not have any works that demonstrate our love and our faith for the Lord Jesus Christ, if there had been no change in our lives whatsoever, then we can be sure that we have never really come to know Christ.

I can remember one time when I was a pastor of a local church many, many years ago and I mean many years ago. Remember 20 some years in the army came in between. But I was the pastor of a local church and we had a young couple who came out to the church for a while and I had a chance to visit with them in their home. And I walked into the house—and these were folks who came sporadically, you would see them in church just every once and a while—and I went into their house and I don't want to describe what I saw, but everything there seemed to indicate to me that these were probably not believers. And the style in which they were living was not a lifestyle that I would think would have been appropriate for a believer.

So is at down at their dinner table as we were talking and they were sharing with me some things and I asked them. I said, you know, “Tell me about your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

And they described to me the fact that many, many years ago there had been an evangelist in a church who preached a message. They came forward at an invitation and they prayed a prayer and the evangelist said to them, “Now that you have prayed this prayer never should you ever doubt your salvation. Go and just trust in the Lord.”

And they went and the next week they continued living the same way they had always lived before. There was no change in their lives, no evidence, no real interest in the things of Christ at all. And I asked them what that meant to them when they expressed their faith in that way.

They said, “Oh, I don't know. I did what I was told to do.”

And I was convinced that these were people who did not know Christ and after some time of sharing the gospel with them, they eventually came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and then began to understand that the original experience was not a real faith experience. It was one in which they had just been doing something because they were told to do it and they really had no vital faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

²¹ Matthew 7:21-23

And one of the things that scares me—and I use that word purposely—is that I believe that there are many who think they are Christians, but are not. And they are not because they have never truly trusted wholeheartedly in Jesus Christ. And there has never been a dynamic work of God in their lives.

The Word of God tells us in 2 Corinthians chapter 13, 2 Corinthians chapter 13 and verse five. “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!”²² The Word of God says that we are to look into our lives and to see whether there has been a change, whether God has done a work in us because, remember, “He who began a good work in you will perform it and will perfect it.”²³ If there is no performing and no perfecting then isn’t there a real question as to whether there was a beginning at all?

The evidences of salvation are presented to us, I think most clearly in the book of 1 John. And, by the way, if you want to have a real understanding of the evidences of salvation I would recommend you carefully read 1 John. But in 1 John chapter five and verse 13 it says, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.”²⁴

Now I have heard that passage quoted many, many times and the response usually is, “Well, you see, you can know that you have eternal life.”

I agree. You can know. But we need to ask the question: What are these things? What are the things in 1 John that he is talking about that are evidences to help you know that you have everlasting life? And I find three of them. I find three of them in the book of 1 John.

First of all in 1 John chapter two and verse three we read this. “By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.”²⁵

It says the same thing in chapter five and verse two. “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments.”²⁶

In other words—we are not going to do it perfectly—but one of the evidences of a Christian is that we have an internal desire to obey the Lord, to obey his Word and each time we find ourselves slipping away from that we find that God brings us back with his great desire to be obedient to him. One of the signs of a believer is that he will seek to keep the commandments of God.

And then in chapter two the second evidence that we read of in 1 John chapter two and verse 23, “Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the

²² 2 Corinthians 13:5

²³ See Philippians 1:6

²⁴ 1 John 5:13

²⁵ 1 John 2:3

²⁶ 1 John 5:2

Son has the Father also.”²⁷ One of the evidences is that they believe in the deity and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who deny that doctrine, they don’t know the Lord.

Thirdly, and the last evidence that we have in this passage is in chapter three of 1 John we read in the 14th verse, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.”²⁸

Do you know that is an evidence of being a believer? If we don’t love our fellow Christians, then there is evidence that we don’t know Christ. Think about that for a moment. How many people have you met who say, “I am a Christian,” and then when you turn around all you ever hear from them is backbiting, all you ever hear from them is speaking against other people who claim to be Christians. All you ever hear from them is prejudice against Christians who might be of a different racial background or might be of a different ethnic group.

The Word of God says if we are Christians we will love the brethren. We will love other people.

Now that doesn’t mean that we have to like everyone who is a believer. Now, I have met some Christians who are very hard to like. You may have met a few of those, too. That is not what we are talking about. But we have a desire to love and be part of the lives of other people who are believers in Jesus Christ.

The way I look at it is this. If I am going to spend eternity with them and love them in heaven, why shouldn’t I start right now? Why not love them right here on earth?

Well, we need to look into our own hearts and our own lives and ask the question. No, we are not going to be perfect in these and God is not saying that that is the evidence of being a Christian. But if there has never been a change in our lives, if there has never been the evidence of the work of God changing us, then we need to ask the question: Do we really know the Lord Jesus? Do we internally have a desire to keep his commandments? Do we confess the Son, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? And do we have a love of the brethren?

As I said, none of these will be done in perfection, but if they are not there we need to ask: Have we really come to know Christ?

But once we have said, “Yes we have seen this work of God, he has been doing it in our lives. I have messed it up sometimes, but, boy, I can feel the work of God in my life and I can see what he has been doing over these years,” then we can begin to say, “I have eternal life. I am assured of it.”

What a blessing.

²⁷ 1 John 2:23

²⁸ 1 John 3:14

I can say that no one can pluck me out of the Father's hand. I am there and I am secure.

And then that statement of that theologian will apply to us. "The saints in heaven may be happier than we are, but by God's grace they are no more secure."

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for the salvation that is ours in Christ. Lord, if there is anyone here who doesn't know you may your Word be a challenge in your lives and may this one or these come to know you by trusting in faith. Father, for those of us who are your children, help us to feel that sense of security and to devote ourselves to loving you and our brethren. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.