

ETERNAL SECURITY (6)

QUESTION #4 – What is the real theological controversy that surrounds this doctrine of eternal security?

Although, as we shall observe later, this particular doctrinal issue has wound up being a battle between two groups of people, theologically named Calvinists and Arminians, the precise and real theological controversy is **whether or not Jesus Christ accomplished enough by His death on Calvary to completely take away the sins of those who believe in Him to the extent that He can give them and guarantee them everlasting life.**

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer observed: “Either Christ did enough by His death concerning the believer’s sins that it can be said ‘there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus’ ... or He did not” (Vol. 3, p. 274).

Either Jesus Christ finished all necessary work to save a soul from sin, or He did not finish all of the work but left some of it to the individual. Either Christ’s final words on the cross, “It is finished” (**John 19:30**) means He has finished all necessary work in order to save sinners and give them eternal life, or He hasn’t finished the work and cannot give them eternal life unless the sinner helps out His work or adds something to it by living a good life or by promising to be good.

What most people fail to realize is that those who deny the doctrine of eternal life or eternal security are really tampering with the finished work of Jesus Christ. These people not only deny the word “eternal” but they deny the very words of our Lord who said, “It is finished.”

QUESTION #5 – Why does the theological controversy exist concerning the doctrine of eternal security?

When all has been studied and analyzed on this subject, it will be clearly seen that the root cause of this controversy is an ignorance of and a misinterpretation of the Bible. To state the point a little more specifically, the real reason for the controversy is due to a failure to “accurately handle” or rightly divide” the Word of God (**II Timothy 2:15**). This is true when it comes to passages that do deal with the subject of eternal salvation and passages that don’t deal with the subject of eternal salvation.

The issue of accepting or rejecting the doctrine of eternal security is not an issue of tossing a coin to determine whether or not one is a Calvinist or Arminian, it is a serious matter of tampering with the Word of God.

One such example will suffice for the present time. I. Howard Marshall is considered to be an eminent New Testament scholar. In 1963 he wrote a thesis on this subject of eternal security, which was later published in a book called *Kept By the Power of God*. Marshall’s objective was to try and prove that it was possible for a believer to backslide to the point where the believer could lose his salvation. As we shall see, one of the central problems with this belief system is that the N.T. clearly teaches “salvation is of the Lord.” God elects people to salvation, which naturally means if one can lose his salvation, one can tamper with the elective work of God. Marshall was forced to deal with passages that taught on this important theme.

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One such text was **Acts 13:48** in which it is clearly stated that “as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.” Dr. Stanley Toussaint gives the plain meaning of this text: “The Gentiles rejoiced in this turn of events and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. It is difficult to miss the doctrine of God’s election here; the words “were appointed” come from the verb *tasso*, a military word meaning “to arrange” or “to assign.” Luke used it here to show that God’s elective decree included Gentiles” (*Bible Knowledge Commentary*, pp. 390-391). Dr. Homer Kent adds, “All who responded were, in fact, those who were appointed for eternal life. Once again human responsibility of believing is shown to coincide exactly with what God in his sovereignty had planned” (*From Jerusalem to Rome*, p. 114). Dr. Richard Longenecker writes: “All who were appointed for eternal life believed: suggests that belief in Christ is not just a matter of one’s faith but primarily involves divine appointment” (*Expositors Bible Commentary*, p. 430).

Naturally when one concludes that salvation is an elective decree of God, one will not be able to defend the position that one may lose his salvation; because if salvation is of God, it is impossible for God to lie and go back on His elective decree. The only way one could hold to a position which says one may lose his electively, decreed salvation is to somehow tamper with passages that teach on the subject of election. That is precisely what I. Howard Marshall does. Here is what Marshall writes concerning **Acts 13:48**: “It would seem unlikely that predestination to salvation is merely predestination to a temporary salvation. ... This language sounds strongly predestinarian, but it is unlikely that we should press it to mean that the people in question believed and received eternal life because they had been individually predestined to do so. ... Luke’s statement, therefore, is not concerned to delimit a particular group of Gentiles who, in distinction from other people, were specifically ordained to believe, but to demonstrate that when God took the initiative and offered salvation to the Gentiles ... they responded with faith” (Marshall, pp. 93-94).

We would simply respond to Marshall’s final statement by honestly asking, “Who of the Gentiles truly did believe?” “Why didn’t all of the Gentiles believe?” The honest answer to these questions is those who did believe “had been appointed” by God to eternal life. Marshall does everything possible to avoid what is clearly stated in this text.

This theological controversy exists because of a blind refusal to honestly deal with texts and contexts. It will become evident that one system attempts to carefully study all Scriptures and all subjects that pertain to it. Also there is a consistent attempt to twist and, at times, even avoid key subjects and Scriptures that truly pertain to this doctrine.

When it comes to the doctrine of eternal security, either it is Biblically right that one cannot ever lose his salvation or it is Biblically wrong. It is a careful study of the Bible that must determine what is true. If one carefully does study the Bible, one will conclude that it does teach that if a person believes on Jesus Christ, one does have **eternal** life.

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QUESTION #6 – What are some key clarifications that need to be made concerning the doctrine of eternal security?

There are many who have a great misunderstanding of the doctrine of eternal security or they actually reject this doctrine because of certain faulty concepts or conclusions which have been formed because some very important facts have been overlooked or neglected. Therefore, certain clarifications need to be made as one begins to study this doctrine:

Clarification #1 - There is a major difference between the assurance of eternal life and the fact of eternal life.

The assurance of one's salvation has to do with personal certainty. The fact of one's salvation has to do with positional reality. Assurance of salvation has to do with personal, temporal realization. The fact of salvation has to do with positional, eternal reality.

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson gives a good distinction between assurance and the fact of salvation when he writes: "The doctrine of assurance has to do with our certainty of the possession of salvation now. The doctrine of perseverance, or of eternal life, has to do with our certainty of the possession of salvation now and forever" (S. Lewis Johnson, *Once Saved Always Saved, Or The Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints*, Message 1, p. 2).

A text such as **Hebrews 6:1-3** makes it very clear that it is possible for one to actually possess eternal life but be at such an immature level that he doesn't know it. We know from **I John 5:13** and **2:3** that those who do not systematically study the Bible and purpose to obey the Scriptures will have a very difficult time "knowing" they have eternal life. However, it must always be remembered that **a lack of certainty does not in any way negate positional reality**. If one has trusted in the finished work of Jesus Christ and has received Him as Savior, that one does have eternal life even if he/she doesn't know it.

I heard a story of a man who once made a small investment in some stock. He stuck his certificated in some drawer and forgot all about his investment. Years passed and as the man grew old, he was rummaging through some boxes which he had stored and he found the stock certificates. After making an inquiry with a stockbroker, it was discovered that this man was worth a small fortune. That onetime decision to buy those stocks made him very wealthy, even though for most of his life he did not know it.

So it is with one's salvation. A onetime decision to believe on Jesus Christ factually gives him eternal life. One may not know it or feel it, but that does not change the reality of it. There is a big difference between the assurance of eternal life and the fact of eternal life.

In view of this factual clarification, one might ask, "How is it that some people lack assurance of their salvation?" There are six reasons why some who have actually and factually believed on Jesus Christ lack assurance of salvation: